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OLYMPIAN

JAMES OPPENHEIM

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“NOW, WHAT IS THERE FOR ME TO DO?”

THE OLYMPIAN

A STORY OF THE CITY

BY
JAMES OPPENHEIM
AUTHOR OF
"THE NINE-TENTHS"



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TO
L. S. G. AND A. H. G.

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I

ADVENTURE

FINALLY at ten-thirty of the cool October night Kirby and the New York traveling salesman were left alone in the smoking-compartment. Kirby was not pleased at this; it seemed to necessitate either talking or going to bed, whereas, all he wanted was to sink back in the leather cushions and let the rhythm of the car-wheels blend with the rhythm of Mrs. Hadden's voice as he had heard it the day before—the strange and thrilling woman voice speaking to the man in him:

“Kirby, you are going to be a great man. I expect you to rise to the top—capture the city. And I give you ten years. Even then you'll only be thirty-four.”

Mirrors over the nickeled wash-basins threw back myriad electric lights, and the air was blue with tobacco-smoke; in the smoke he wanted to visualize the liquid blue eyes, the full lips, the light golden hair of this woman who had awakened him, who had chained on his armor and set lance in his hand to send him forth on youth's great modern adventure, the City. Her voice on summer nights was remembered; the pressure of her hand had gone into his brain and made him powerful. And the fact that she was Professor Hadden's wife and all of twenty-eight years old made no difference: she was woman—and he was twenty-four.

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However, the salesman had that essential humanness that finds it intolerable to be alone with another and not speak.

"Say," he exclaimed, pressing his nose against the dark mirror-like window, "don't miss this—quick."

Kirby, flushed with vexation, leaned over the perfumed fellow, and looked. A vision shone and passed, swallowed in night; the sublime spectacle of window-lit mills at the riverside girdling with darkness the fierce flaming of the Bessemer converter, whose several swelling tongues of fire licked at the flaring clouds and crumbled in showers of golden snow. Against that burning a lone-some one-armed telegraph-post was silhouetted, a voice in the darkness, passing. Then heaven and earth grew black again; and Kirby saw merely himself and the salesman gazing back from the night.

"You know what mills those are?"

"No," murmured Kirby.

"Steel—steel, man!"

Kirby felt a wave of excitement pass over him.

"Not the American Steel Company?"

"The same—sure!"

"You mean Jordan Watts's mills—those?"

"Goodness, they're all his, except the piker independents."

It was a dramatic moment for Kirby, expected yet unlooked for. He had known, of course, that the train would pass the mills; had he been more alert he should have watched after leaving Pittsburgh. Now he was shocked out of his reverie, and sat back thrilling. For in his pocket he carried a letter from Mrs. Hadden addressed to the great captain of industry, Jordan Watts. Every phrase in it came clear:

"You may remember me; at least your daughter Mary will. For she and I worked together at Halsey Street Settlement, and you gave me valuable advice concerning boys' clubs. But that seems long ago. Since then I

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have married Professor Hadden, of Trent Academy, Trent, Iowa. . . . I am writing this to introduce to you Kirby Trask, a young man of twenty-four, the most promising young man in this Middle Western town. Indeed, he is most remarkable!" Then followed glowing praise that made Kirby's cheeks burn when he thought of it; and then, finally: "He will be quite alone in the city and must make his own way. Therefore I am taking the great liberty of asking Mr. Trask to send this letter to you with his address, for I know that you will understand his difficult undertaking. Most faithfully, JANICE WOODS HADDEN."

It was an admirably tactful letter; not a request or direct suggestion in it, merely a hint of possibilities. In fact, Mrs. Hadden cleverly put the responsibility on the shoulders of the steel magnate.

The salesman was still talking.

"Wonderful, ain't it, how those fellows rose to the top: messenger-boy to millionaire." He chuckled, and blew out smoke. "But them days are over. It takes pull now—*pull!* All the push in the world won't help a fellow."

That was it. Kirby nodded assent. But what if *he*, lucky mortal, had this "pull" because the woman he worshiped was fond of him? Those mills might yet flame for him, a night advertisement in the skies of America, and travelers would say:

"Sure! Kirby Trask—*he* owns 'em all."

Kirby felt a little drunk; he pulsed all over with the young man's dream, and he ached for the morrow. Four hundred miles down the shining tracks stood New York with its aspiring millions: what if he, a fresh-blooded Westerner, attacked the metropolis and took it by storm? He had exactly a hundred dollars in his pocket; but he had youth, untried power, soaring ambition—and he had been sent out by a woman. No medieval youth lusted for battle more than he did, and he believed that the day of great deeds had not yet passed over. Mrs. Hadden knew—

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"I give you ten years. Kirby, you are going to be a great man."

The steady talk of the salesman broke in again:

"Now, just take fellows like you and me. If we rise to five thousand a year at forty we're lucky. Ain't it so? Say, it's your first time in New York, ain't it?"

Kirby paled. Was it written all over him that he was a provincial? What was it? Perhaps his clothes, his best, most uncomfortable and looking stiffly new. Perhaps his shyness and diffidence that made him stammer and stumble. Perhaps the atmosphere of rawness and failure that enveloped him. For this man beside him was different; there was about him an air of success, a suavity and ease of manner, a flow of talk, a well-fed, well-kept exterior, all of which seemed to belong distinctly to a city of theaters, restaurants, and hotels. Yes, and a city of many women easily conquered.

Kirby felt a choke in his throat.

"Yes," he began, and found to his horror that a profound emotion welled through his voice, something uncanny contrasted with the glib ease of the traveling man. "Yes—I'm just starting out—"

"Middle West?" The other eyed him mercilessly and, as Kirby thought, with amused scorn.

"Yes, Iowa."

The traveler laughed easily.

"Lord, New York has every kind except New-Yorkers. No one was ever born in that little old town. But all the kids of creation come there—think they're goin' to set the Hudson on fire. Like as not," he chuckled, "they'll be glad to clerk at ten per. New York's the frozen beauty, all right, and has the cold-shoulder game down to a science."

Kirby tried hard to maintain his twenty-four years, but every word made him more of a boy. Tears of shame sprang to his eyes; he felt that speech was impossible; he had a twinge of homesickness; and, above all, he

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wanted to get away and hide himself. His dreams seemed to come crashing down about him, and he knew then that he was a lonely lad going to a place of strangers. And home, with every turn of the wheels, was fading in the remote West.

He arose, almost falling with the motion of the car. His voice was trembling.

"It's late—guess I'll turn in."

The mirror gave him a flash of himself—a thin, middle-sized young man with a stocky head; . . . the heavy hair was black, the lips sharp, the chin strong, and the eyes were a powerful gray. It seemed absurd that that imaged youth, that five-foot-nine of human flesh, should deem himself a coming master of America. Well, he didn't. He bolted out of the door.

And coming out he stepped into the narrow precincts of that modern mystery, the "sleeper." For the green curtains were drawn over the two layers of berths, and he passed through the hush of sleep, the consciousness of stretched and sleeping forms on either side. Here an arm projected through the curtain-slit, hanging idly; up on the racks were hats, on the floor were shoes, ready to meet half-way in the morning on a human being, but now oddly far apart; a snoring came from the distance, and the weird, smothered speech of some dreamer, babbling from subliminal depths; and withal, the car swayed, the wheels thumped, bearing the sleeping and the waking through the perils of dark space. Kirby was overwhelmed by the approach of the negro porter, who stepped like the master of these mysteries, the wand-waving genie of this passing realm.

"Good night, suh," he whispered under the lowered gas-light. "Pants pressed, suh?"

Kirby was miserable. He didn't want his trousers pressed, of course; but what would the porter think of him? He spoke tragically.

"All right—yes—press 'em."

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Above all things he must show his American equality, which meant doing what proper and prosperous people did. And not knowing the formula, he had to follow the porter's lead.

Kirby had a lower berth. He doubled up to get in; then he felt blindly and unavailingly for the push-button that releases an electric light, and in his misery did not dare call the formidable porter. Instead, he undressed in a darkness occasionally flash-lit with some passing lamp, stuffing his clothes in a corner and fearfully secreting his money under his pillow.

Now, under soft covers, plunging head first through space, he felt crudely alone. He was nested in peril, the next swing of a curve might shoot the car over an embankment or bring a telescoping crash. Momently he might be utterly annihilated or caught in burning wreckage. Or a hand might search under his pillow for his fortune. Was that keen-eyed salesman reliable? Why was he staying up? The young man felt penned in a dangerous kennel, where even sitting up straight bumped his head.

He was tired, however, and the wheel-rhythm was soothing. Strangely, then, he felt the full miracle of railroading: the red-hearted seventy-ton engine panting on ahead, releasing its hoarse whistle at bridge and crossing and curve, and now and then beating its melancholy bell; and he, softly on his back under covers, borne wingedly over a third of a continent. The woodwork creaked, the wheels sang their clanking monotone, and right under his ear he could hear space flow. He felt then as if he were a soul going all alone on its journey through the infinite, passing from mystery to mystery.

For a long time, through a night of strange romance, he merely dozed, woke, and dozed again. Once the grinding of brakes aroused him, and he pulled up the shade; and, gazing out, he saw cobblestones beneath a blue-rayed arc-lamp, and on the corner a saloon and three men standing

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before it. It seemed to him that life was very fantastic—those three awake out there and he gliding past on a bed, all ignorant of the other's destinies. Again he awoke to gaze out on flowing blankness, and then sharply a lonely lighted shanty clinging to the hillside—something warm and human stowed away in the night. And then again he saw a lonesome trolley-car that fled up the mountain-side like a startled animal. Kirby was creedless; he came, however, of pious stock, hardy John Browns of the wilderness, almost fanatical in their prayer and ritual. Kirby had been brought up in no belief; save that he was alive and young and here was life to be lived at top-notch American speed. Nevertheless, the religious streak persisted, and he felt keenly the mystery of being borne living through the human-dotted night.

His dozing kept shuffling his impressions: now it was the flaring sight of a train hand passing the stopped train with searching torch, now the photographed illusion of the New York sky-line, now a scene of boyhood. But one sharp feeling persisted—namely, that he was breaking with his entire past and merely by this ride plunging into a revolutionary future. This night was the vague link between the two. And that past, of course, was all that was familiar, homely, tried; it had its pains and miseries, but they were enfolded in something luminous. His had been a slow boyhood, with long delays of sickness and poverty. His father, a high-school teacher, had died when Kirby was ten, and the three thousand dollars of insurance had been dropped by his mother in the American lottery, the get-rich-quick scheme. It was Florida land, "The land," according to the prospectus, "that will make old age happy." Instead, it made young Kirby miserable, for the boy was compelled to bear the double shame of doing menial work and of seeing his mother do washing in the kitchen-tub. Later his two sisters became teachers, somewhat relieving him, but even during the high-school course at Trent Academy he had kept a cow and peddled

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milk to the neighbors. Besides, he was twenty-two when he graduated, at least four years older than the average, and he felt the difference keenly.

Trent had always been puzzled about Kirby. His eyes, and sometimes his temper, aroused expectations; his actions denoted listlessness and sloth. He was awkward and shy and seemingly indifferent. But later they learned his secret—that only a big, overwhelming job could bring out his power. At the call he suddenly developed a huge, crushing strength, a bull-headedness that broke its way blindly. There was in the last year of high school a State debate. Kirby got into it, worked like a demon, and nearly crushed his audience with his sledgehammer logic. This seemed to vitalize his whole nature, so that he made a brilliant academic finish and elicited from Professor Hadden the remark "His is the finest mind I have ever dealt with."

The town was prepared for miracles. Instead, there was a relapse. Kirby became a reporter on the *Trent Blade*, and did only fairly. The work was petty and did not grip him. It did, however, bring him in contact with commercial travelers and the occasional public men who passed through Trent from city to city. And from these, and from the Associated Press despatches and the Sunday specials, he began to get a vision of that magnet of American youth, New York. Out there was something as big as his desire, as huge as his latent strength; there was the seat of power. Trent grew too small for him—a chrysalis that hemmed in his wings. But two years passed over, and he did nothing.

And then came Professor Hadden's new bride, late in the spring. The strange, shy young man stirred her idle mind; his powerful head, his amazing gray eyes suggested possibilities when contrasted with his thin awkwardness. She ensnared him, drew him close, and "discovered" him. His fresh and unspoiled emotions delighted her; his passionate speechlessness was thrilling. She knew there was

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a great man hidden in him, hidden deep, indeed, by the pettiness of Trent. So she revealed New York to him: Forty-second Street and Broadway flaming by night; the diamond-sparkling horse-shoe of the opera; the brilliant tides in and out the midnight restaurants. Her spirit seemed to have partaken of the ambition of the skyscrapers and the conquest-courage of the Wall Street pit; she told him of young men who had come out of the West and seized on power. New York, to her, through the meeting of a thousand streams of humanity, had become a mad human tornado that might suck any one to the top. There Kirby belonged—there in the embattled center of civilization.

He worshiped Janice Hadden, dreamed of her, loved her. He was roughly tender with her, whimsically obedient. She had come down like a flaming star into his night, and she whispered the way up to those inaccessible regions. She evoked his full power and gave him the daring self-reliance of youth. Plunging now head first through darkness, his hand under his pillow, he recalled bit by bit their last night together—the walk in the campus under the elms and the maples. Wind blew leaves over them, and the rapid clouds let through rushes of moonlight; they walked close, whispering with sad tenderness. At the gate came the inevitable good-by. They stood for some time, face to face, lingering, and then the sudden moonlight revealed Janice, her face startlingly beautiful with pendant tears. It was too much for Kirby; he put his hands on her shoulders and kissed her forehead. In the swift darkness the woman laughed softly, pressed his hand, and fled. But he was sure then that he knew what life is. The last secret had been revealed. A woman had knighted him and sent him forth.

This memory was exquisite and submerged all others. And so he fell asleep and dreamed. He was in a palace, clanking from chamber to chamber in full armor, the plates of mail clattering like wheels turning. Somehow

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he was flushed with some stupendous victory. He opened door after door, but in each room there were spangled women lying asleep on couches, and he sought further. At last his heart swelled with poignant ardor, for at the end of a long hall were two great doors of green bronze. He strode up and pulled at the handles. He sweated and toiled and groaned, yet thrilling more and more. Unexpectedly, then, the doors gave inward, and he was dazzled with white light. He entered. Janice was seated on a throne, a crown on her head, her robes glorious with the beating glare of the room. He saw tears in her eyes; she rose, stepped down, held out her arms. He was enfolded close, as if his armor were gone, and he felt faint. She was whispering: "You are the conqueror of the world." And he replied: "I conquered all to come to you." Their lips met; he heard her breathe something of love, undying love. But then there was a shaking of the door and something crawling in sudden darkness. Kirby's heart stood still.

"What do you want, Professor Hadden?" he asked.

"I want my daddy," came the reply.

Kirby rubbed his eyes, rose on his elbow, and blinked. Something was crawling into the berth. It was quite horrible, with all his hundred dollars under his pillow. He watched, unable to move. And then he smiled with divine amazement.

A tiny boy of three, in a nightgown, was settling down at the window and peering out. The blur of brown dawn was in the berth, and he could see the sleepy little face and the large round eyes gazing on the misty speeding scenery. The beauty of a shy, wet flower in a rock cranny was in the graceful pose and the fresh face. Kirby felt his feverishness leave him; coolness, rather, and untroubled beauty were in his heart. Smiling tenderly, he watched the cherubic visitant. But the child was lost in the queer accidents of the mist—the brown crosses of fences leering out, the green blur of trees, the little farmhouses hugged in arms of vapor.

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Slowly then to Kirby came a noise in the corridor, a hurry, an agitation, the mix of startled voices.

"Oh no, ma'am; no, ma'am," said the porter, huskily, "no one could fall off de train. Dis is a vestibule-car. De little person's done climbed into de wrong pew." The porter was unsuccessfully smothering his laughter.

A woman's voice came, sharp with terror:

"John, I know he's been killed, I know it!"

Then a man's voice, exasperated:

"Don't lose your head, Dorothy. He was running right after me when I climbed in."

Mirth rose excitedly in Kirby's breast. He poked head out and called:

"There's a boy in here."

He was confronted by a disheveled young woman in a nightgown, and her face dismayed him with its fright.

"Let me see."

She rudely tore the curtains apart, carelessly disclosing Kirby, leaned over, and, with a cry of relief, seized up the boy:

"Freddy!"

The boy was amazed.

"I want to stay with my father" was the last Kirby heard him say.

"I told you not to lose your head," said the man.

The porter leaned in, chuckling, and addressed Kirby as if Kirby were really a man worth confiding in.

"Yo' see, his dad had him in de wash-room and come back before him, and de little person done got lost. So he picked you for a daddy. All berths look alike to him."

He roared with laughter. Kirby felt flattered. Life, after all, was rather pleasing. He settled himself against the window and looked out. The landscape of New Jersey revolved outside, incredibly fast near the window, exceedingly slow at the horizon; and on the turning land farms came and went; and now a mill-town with lighted

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kitchen windows, and now a desolate wood full of the wraiths of the mist, and now a clanking bridge over the patient level of a river. Mills were at work, with shadowy forms in the gas-light; smoke began to curl heavily from isolated shanties. Dawn, welling voluminously through the atmosphere, touched earth with the sweet joy of expectation. On this day a young knight was to mount horse, set lance, and plunge into the first *mêlée*. It was inevitable now; there was no escape, no drawing back. The train was plunging heavily through the morning straight to its roaring terminal.

“Yes, suh,” Kirby heard the porter say to some awakened sleeper down the corridor, “we’ll be in New York in jes’ two hours.”

II

THE SEA-CITY

“WELL,” said the traveling salesman, “here we are! What do you think of that?” He pointed over the gray river at the New York sky-line. “Ain’t she the big girl? Gee! I’m stuck on her.”

Thus, like a master of ceremonies, he introduced New York to Kirby. They were standing at the front gates of the ferry, which punctually at seven-ten was moving out of the Jersey slip. Again Kirby wished himself rid of this glib mouthpiece; yet, in a way, he would have hated to be alone.

Several emotions clashed in him: there was the sheer physical relief of being out of the train, of breathing fresh air and seeing distance all around his head; there was the sharp exhilaration of the inlander smelling the sea for the first time, with a dawning realization of the flowing vastness of the earth; there was the sky-hung beauty of New York. But, insisently breaking its way through all, there was a feeling of growing panic, the raw recruit marching inevitably into the first dread perils of war. Kirby’s thought was: “Now I’m up against it.” He might have been catching the first whiff of the anæsthetic as he lay inescapably on the operating-table.

“Where you going first?” asked the salesman.

Kirby’s face flushed.

“I don’t know,” he stammered.

“Breakfast?”

“Yes—yes.”

Again the salesman took his measure with amused

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tolerance. All he saw was a yokel who was woefully ignorant.

"Well, you want to cut across to Broadway," he said, pleasantly, "and try Childs'. Can't miss it—white front, lots of plate-glass, right near the head of Cortlandt. I'd be with you, but I've got a wife up in Harlem, so I'll beat it up the elevated line and let her scramble some eggs for me. Gee! I'm like a fish dropped in water again."

These words went through Kirby as through a sieve. His emotions were overwhelming. Salt water washed breakingly against the prow of the boat, and with the cool sea-wind there was a gray, slow-moving heaven, spilling between cloud-gaps shafts of luminous sunlight that traveled slowly, lighting up one scene after another—a passing tug with shining brass railings, a group of red roofs, a far-seen deep-cut street, the smokes about a red gas-works, even, a moment, rare sight! flashing the windowed heights of the World Building and tipping the top with molten gold. Like shifting scenes the city came and went, yet ever the gray block of towering buildings, piled one on another, the pyramidal city of the sea; and at its base the black wharves and the masts, funnels of the sea-going liners, low, squalid streets of red, all risen from the busy gray river-waters. The weave of harbor craft around the swimming ferry spoke of immense humanity in motion; and the sky-hung city under its gray clouds stood like the very House of Civilization.

It was not what Kirby expected; it was too real, sharp, and varied. One could not lay hands on it. It seemed to mean that there were big brains in the world; huge, powerful dreamers who had projected this immensity and ruled it from the tower-tops. Kirby's vision of a golden metropolis of cloud melted away. He felt like a burglar about to break into a guarded mansion.

The boat nosed into the slip and bumped still; the gates parted.

"Hustle!" cried the salesman. "Hustle!"

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Unconsciously he sounded the keynote of New York; unconsciously he took up the New York pace and tore over the cobblestones and up Cortlandt Street as if time was being cornered by a broker, with the price soaring. Kirby flew after him through the dingy, sleeping street until they paused under the Sixth Avenue elevated road.

"Good luck," cried the New-Yorker. "Remember—Childs', white front, right near the head of the street. Be spry, look where you're going, and beware the 'con' men." He laughed at his early-morning wit. "You're all right; just keep a-shoving and a-pushing. S'long!"

And he sprinted breathless into the ghostly limbo of New York, like foam melting back into the sea. Once vanished, when does a New-Yorker ever reappear?

Lugging his heavy suit-case past the closed shops, Kirby was lonelier than ever before in his life. He stopped at the corner of Broadway to get his bearings: half-empty cable-cars were passing him up and down the long, gray cañon, skyscrapers towered above his five-foot-nine of man, the early-morning shadows were dark and long, and he seemed to stand in the deep pit of a deserted city. The morning rush had not yet begun. This was the mere shell of the city, like clothes over a chair-back waiting the wearer.

Kirby felt as if he had been ensnared by some uncanny power; he could not cease staring, he could not stop the throb of fear in his heart. His loneliness was terrific, not a soul he knew, not even a path he knew out of this labyrinth. The city was too big; it seemed to extend to immense distances, infinite spaces. He could not believe that it was his old familiar self set down in this stone fastness.

Then he saw Childs', and almost laughed. It was a friendly haven; he could go in there and hide. The mere action brought relief. He purchased a morning paper and stepped into the shining imitation-marble, glassy, porcelain-tiled restaurant and sat down at a glistening

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table. A tired waitress hovered over him, soothing him vaguely with her femininity.

He spoke with effort.

"A cup of coffee—two four-minute boiled eggs—toast."

While he waited he glanced at the newspaper. The head-lines meant nothing to him, and yet seemed to shelter him from the ruthless city: "Big Fire in Forty-second Street," "The President's Message," "Girl Found Dead in East River," "Danby Wins Divorce." Then he awoke and turned to the advertising section. "Boarders Wanted." Evidently there were plenty of places.

64th St., 115 West.—Large, pleasant room, suitable for 1 or 2; excellent table; moderate.

72d St., 152 West.—Cultured surroundings for girls studying music, art, opera, concerts; references; moderate.

And so it ran for over a column. It was fascinating. It gave visions of comfort, sunniness, security, somewhere in the stone wilderness. Somewhere he could find warmth. Mrs. Hadden had suggested the neighborhood of Twenty-third Street West as being central and cheap. Kirby marked a couple of advertisements and ate his breakfast.

He had no desire to leave his haven, but when he ventured out he had the amazing experience of stepping into a different city, as if the sea-city changed like the sea itself. For now the morning rush was under way; from Brooklyn, Jersey, Staten Island, and Harlem the population was coming, coming, jamming the clanging cars, pouring up side streets, clanking down Broadway, as if some great hand had opened all the flood-gates. Sunlight traveled over the bobbing heads; the air was full of bustle and awakened energy; great deeds were afoot; world labor was under way; humanity was going to its day's work.

Kirby's loneliness sharpened; he longed to be one of these. They were all *inside* the machine, they all had a

THE SEA-CITY

share in the glorious action of the metropolis; but he was *outside*, a stranger, without foothold, without even foothold. He wedged his way through against the downward-striving stream; he could have taken a car had he not been enchanted by this drive of the multitude; he merely wanted to go on and on, breaking deeper and deeper into this tumultuous city. That he could ever find connections in this rush and bigness, become a part of it, and be recognized in it, seemed quite hopeless.

He passed City Hall Park, saw the flags flapping on towers, the bend of trees in the breeze, beheld faces at windows, passed endless plate-glass of sparkling shops, then followed Broadway into the wholesale district. Huge building operations were under way, great blotches of the earth torn out, swarming with men and carts, drills and engines; half-built skyscrapers showed their steel skeletons against the gray clouds. Despite its largeness, Kirby could feel that it was a city in process, unfinished, full of pioneering, with a dream-world before it.

And the peril of it was evident—the peril of crossing the street, of the high buildings, the hollow cellarage. So that the pride, the stride of these perishable inhabitants was astounding. They took it all for granted: newsboys shouted, young girls flaunted ribbons and with poised heads met the world; men swaggered, smoking, ogling; drivers swore; policemen breasted the stream of traffic in mid-gutter.

Out of the heavens like a spider dropping on its own unraveling thread a man astride a beam, clutching a derrick-rope, was lowered from the fifteenth story of a skeleton skyscraper to the street. People paused, looked up. Kirby stopped, holding himself together, a little dizzied. Down came the spider, grew into a man, stepped off on the pavement—huge, overalled, grimly smiling—swore gently, and went into the building. His non-chalance, careless courage, familiarity with death, amazed the young Westerner.

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Then, as he stepped on, a feeling of unreality possessed him. All, all was unreal. It was as if, like Alice, he had stepped through the looking-glass and was wandering in the depths of a reflected world; or as if he were a pilgrim elbowing a proud remote people; or as if he were in a city hung in the skies with mammoth shadow-depths. It was hardly real enough to hate; but he knew that it was cruel and bitter, and he knew his own atomic insignificance. That he should have dreamed of conquering the illimitable!

His heart ached as he turned in at dirty Twenty-sixth Street. There were three-story red-brick dwellings, there were faded brown-stone houses. All was dingy respectability. Suddenly he had a sense of revolt. He felt that he could not live in this dirty stone honeycomb.

Many labels were over door-bells: "Room and Board," "Gentlemen Boarders Wanted," "Rooms for Rent." But the houses seemed repulsive; all save one, English basement with brass railings, immaculately neat and curtained, and touched with a healing repose that its excited dirty neighbors lacked. There was no label over the bell, but there was a flaunting, mysterious red sign in the window—a sign supplementing the label in the other houses.

"Of course it will be too expensive." Kirby smiled grimly as he pulled the bell-handle.

To his astonishment a stout, suspicious-eyed butler opened the door and glared at Kirby's clothes.

"Well!" he snapped.

Kirby quailed.

"I came"—he hesitated—"to see about renting a room."

The butler looked as if his ears belied him. The insult made him tingle.

"Do you take this for a lodging-house?" he cried.

Kirby began to grow angry; his temper gave him courage.

"You have a sign in your window," he said, hotly.

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It was the butler's turn to tremble.

"A—*sign?*"

"Yes, a red sign."

The butler stared at Kirby and snorted a "Huh!" of relief. Then he spoke tartly to the point.

"That, young fellow, is a garbage sign; it's a sign for the passing garbage man. Now clear out of here! The *idea!*"

And the door slammed in Kirby's face. The amazing insolence of this New York lackey was a death-blow to Kirby's American equality. He knew now that a superior breed of men existed. And yet he was joyous. Lightly he swung along the street, stopping to glance at the paper again for the "ads" he had marked.

He tried the first house. It was a four-story faded brownstone with a high stoop. The fat, unkempt landlady opened the door half-way and stood guarding it.

"Yes." Her face was flabby, but her red-rimmed eyes were keen.

"Everybody in this city," thought Kirby, "is suspicious."

"I'm looking for a room," he said.

"With *board?*"

"Well—perhaps."

"It's the only kind we take. How much do you want to pay?"

She, too, was measuring him from head to foot, a disconcerting process. He felt his cheeks getting hot.

"Oh—about seven." He was ashamed of his poverty. "Later," he added, but without conviction, "I'll pay more."

"Eight's our lowest. The skylight room's taken."

He was abashed; she spoke as if eight were the lowest level of poverty.

"It 'll be all right," he muttered.

"Alone? Just you?"

"Yes."

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"You're lucky to come this morning. I've only one room left. And the demand grows."

She led the way up the faded carpet of the stairs, and Kirby could see her slippers almost flapping off with each step. The house smelled damp and dusty, as if there were no ventilation. It was depressing.

On the top floor, in the larger luminousness of a skylight, she unlocked and opened a front door and disclosed a tiny hall-bedroom, with narrow, white-covered iron bed, washstand, and chair. The walls had a dirty green-patterned paper; the window was curtained with tawdry imitation lace. There was not space for a trunk; hardly space for a shelf with hooks and cotton curtains for the hanging of clothes.

Kirby thought of his spacious, clean, sweet room at home, the ample bed, the elm branches swaying outside the open windows, the spaciousness and peace. A lump rose in his throat; his eyes dimmed. He had indeed broken with his past. And was it worth the while?

"This is the room," said the independent woman. "Eight dollars a week—which includes breakfast and supper on week-days and three meals on Sundays. It's dirt cheap at that, with the cost of living rising every day. What are your references?"

Kirby could only say, humbly:

"I'm a stranger here. I come from Iowa."

Something in his voice made the woman examine his face again. She saw the gray eyes. She spoke more softly.

"That's all right, Mister. Pay me four dollars deposit and I'll take you as you are."

He was grateful for the sympathetic tone. He paid, and she shuffled off, leaving him the room key and a house key. Then he shut the door and stood in a dream of the past and present. Hucksters shouted on the street, the voices of children rose in the air, somewhere a street-organ was grinding out a melancholy tune, bells of the rag-man

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jangled, and in the distance rose and fell the thunder of the elevated train. Beneath all was the persistent undertone of a great city, the muffled clamor, in all directions life palpitating, and Kirby enmeshed in the heart of it.

But this was a refuge, this room. He washed the soot out of his ears and nose and mouth and stretched himself on the cotton-smelling bed. It was lunch-time, but he was too tired to go out, and yet he could not sleep. The streets, the crowds, the sky-line, the swaying sleeper with its visions of the night, kept beating through his brain like the endless tramp of a procession. The hours passed, the afternoon waned.

At last, stiff and cold, he aroused himself, cleared off the washstand, and used it as a desk. He wrote briefly to Jordan Watts; he wrote wearily, feeling impotent and worn, and that very little help could come from any man in this immensity:

DEAR SIR,—I am taking the liberty of sending you the inclosed note from Mrs. Hadden. She requested me to do so as soon as I reached the city, and to give my address. It is given above.

Sincerely,

KIRBY TRASK.

Then he drew from his pocket Janice Hadden's letter, and gazed at the handwriting. It meant little to him now. He was too feverish and weary to care.

A little later darkness came, and he glanced from the window at the gas-lit street and the passing people. Evidently they were hurrying home after the day's work. He watched them listlessly, lost in himself.

The supper-bell sounded; he took coat and hat and descended to the basement. But supper was a blur to him; merely knife-clanking, tongue-clacking strangers about the long white table, under flaming gas, and a powerful lard-and-cabbage smell from the kitchen. He

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bolted his meal, arose, put on hat and coat, and escaped to the cool street.

Again a change had come to the city. Something subtly beautiful was abroad, something mysterious, hinting of romance. It was the call of the women. Now the population was freed of its toil, and the woman's time had come. Kirby was twenty-four again, a young man. He heard the primitive call and began to glow, to feel his blood quicken and life surge through him. The work-a-day world was left down-town, and now the women ruled the splendors of the night. Kirby, looking to the east, saw Broadway flaring across the mouth of the street; and, like a fragile insect driven mysteriously, inevitably, without thought, without hesitancy, he hurried toward the lights.

Swiftly he turned the corner and hastened along Broadway. A few blocks brought him into the heart of the theater district, the white-light district. Glowing globes suspended before theater entrances, sparkling shop windows, brilliant restaurants, and on the housetops a blaze of advertisements, made the thoroughfare a cañon of fire; gold and orange and blue beat upon the pavements, and through the radiance the laughter-smitten crowd was flowing up and down. The cars were lit; cabs and carriages rolled past with glimpse of lace and shining eyes; in the restaurants Kirby saw bare shoulders and scintillant beauty; and all about him, pressing close, brushing his elbows, glancing daringly into his daring eyes, were the faces of women and girls.

The display of wealth in garments and buildings was dazzling; he saw now what the toil down-town meant. It was all for the women, said his young man's heart. And here they were, secretly giving him their laughing eyes. He wandered aimlessly, feeding his starved heart on these faces; through him and them the night drifted with mysterious beauty; they were combed by some uniting miracle. He heard the strange laughter that

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seemed about to reveal the secret of existence; he saw golden hair and blue eyes, dark hair and black eyes, warm-tinted cheeks and shadowy foreheads. His spirit seemed to wake and laugh; he felt young, handsome, masculine; he throbbed with pride, a young man tasting life.

This, then, was the real New York—the New York revealed to him by Janice Hadden—and the phantasmagoria of the day was merely an unrolling dream that awoke into this splendor of the night. This was the magic city he had come to conquer, the cloud-metropolis of the Arabian Nights that was his empire.

The theaters swallowed this crowd, and at once another filled the streets. The underworld was awake, flooding the empty streets with its strange inhabitants. Vice stalked the stone pavement, in spangles and crass attire, with painted cheeks and bold eyes. Again and again Kirby was accosted by some woman of the dark. Not now the dart and swift passing, but the slow glide and slow swerve of the head.

It was late when he groped for his room and unlocked the door. But, lying in the hard bed, he was only aware of his youth, his untried power, his boundless dreams. He imaged Janice Hadden again, all in white light, her arms drawing him tenderly close. And he heard her whisper

“I give you ten years. Kirby, you are going to be a great man.”

Her soft laughter evoked his own. He thought:

“Wait till I see old Watts.”

And again he resolved to go forth and attack the strange metropolis and take it by storm.

III

THE OUTSIDER

AT five-thirty the next morning Kirby was up, writing letters. First he got the letter to his mother and sisters out of the way—a tedious chronicle of food, shelter, and health, with an American prospectus of New York as The Young Man's Friend, The Chance of a Lifetime. It was necessary to reassure a doubting family. That done, he drew forth a fresh sheet and smiled. How should he address her? He wanted to write "Dear Janice," but he didn't dare. "Mrs. Hadden" was too formal, "Aunt Janice" made her impossibly old. Finally he wrote "Dear Friend," but even then he wondered what the professor might say.

Janice, when she received the letter, thought it was very "young" and destroyed it before her husband knew of its existence. The reason was very simple. Kirby felt not the least bit romantic, yet deemed it necessary to preserve the King Arthur atmosphere of the kiss on the campus. To do this he had to press the loud pedal of his emotions; he had to pump.

As, for instance:

"You cannot know what your least glance means to me; I am kept brave in these strange surroundings. I feel I am a man and can conquer anything. Brave the stings and scorns of time. I had a dream about you in the sleeping-car. But I cannot write it out. It was the most beautiful dream I have ever had. You were on a throne, and I had just conquered the world—"

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Surely Kirby was an odd mixture of arrested adolescence and precocious manhood. For a male of twenty-four he was at times strangely boyish, unformed, yet at other times he seemed almost overdeveloped. But this had always been the contradiction in his character; it accounted for his spells of listlessness, his occasional blushing shyness, his four years over the average age in high school; and then again the emotion he had stirred in Janice Hadden, the daring of his dreams, the power he occasionally flashed, the ambition that paused at no limit.

This morning Kirby was in a jolly mood. Opening his eyes at five he had become at once wide awake, with the acute sensation of life having become intensified. Tugs on the river were bellowing against the mist, stray cars awoke echoes in the unfooted streets, the milkman drew up and rattled his tin dipper in the can; but otherwise the roaring tides of the city were still merged and lost in the level seas of sleep. All that bright life was peacefully unconscious, as though the stars had not yet been called into the skies. Yet now at five Kirby could feel the turning of the tides—the inevitable resurgence and flood—and it seemed as if the awakening of millions of people added life to life, till there was a welling of energy that intoxicated, a telepathic impact that excited each nerve; a call to action and to work. It was like the adding of rain-drops to rain-drops into a heaven of cloud until the currents of the morning electrified the mass. Kirby was one of these drops, and the lightning played in and out of him.

The result was that all his bull-headedness was fully aroused. He was alert, decisive, clear-eyed. Thought came easily; courage was natural. He was thoroughly himself—that is, his self had broken through two or three layers of shyness and fear. He even looked different; taller, head erect, gray eyes sparkling.

He felt now that he knew the spread of the city; hence, that he knew how to attack it. Why wait for a remote

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Jordan Watts? He was an American young man, used to standing on his own feet, fighting his own way. Jordan Watts had done this himself. Surely the world would never get too old for the hero, the man who carved his destiny out of fate and circumstance.

There were a hundred possibilities; notably, there was reporting. He must build on his experience; make reporting for the Trent *Blade* the first step toward reporting for the New York *Sun*. And he would take the bull by the horns—go straight to the city editor and ask work. That was the American way. His pluck would be obvious to the seasoned and sere New-Yorker, the effete Easterner.

“Grit,” he told himself, repeating the current slogans of American youth. “Nerve. Stick-to-it-iveness. Push. Get-there. Smile.”

Of course, all else failing, there yet might descend from the skies the giant mailed hand of the steel magnate.

At six-forty he had outgrown his room; he yearned for more kingdoms to conquer. So he descended light-footedly through the musty, slumbering house and entered the dining-room. Sparkling sunlight was in the street, driving from east to west, and the low room was luminous with side-light. Only one boarder was at the table; Kirby sat opposite him.

This boarder was a bright-eyed youth, cheaply but smartly attired. A quarter stick-pin was in his scarlet tie; his collar kept his head high; his blue eyes bristled and snapped; his tilted nose had an air of delightful impudence; and the cupid's bow of his mouth had scornful curling ends. Over his low forehead was a thatch of yellow hair. Besides, he had freckles.

Kirby was for the moment a hearty Westerner.

“Good morning,” he said, cheerily, and held out his hand, which the other took with rather dampening suspiciousness. “My name is Kirby Trask.”

“They call me Si,” murmured the youth, as if he were bored, “but I am also known by the name of Kelly.”

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"Fresh morning, isn't it?" Kirby rubbed his hands and smiled.

Si Kelly nodded, but without much assurance.

Silence fell, while Kirby revolved in his mind the odd fact that New-Yorkers were icicles. Why was it? Why could they not be open, warm, democratic? A waitress with a pudgy, weary face now brought in Si's breakfast.

The latter glanced at her with charming impudence.

"Well, Gert, how was the racket?"

"I was up till three," she answered, wearily.

"Hot time?"

"Oh, fair to middlin'."

He winked at her, and evoked a tired smile.

"You want to go out with me some night. Say"—he waved his hand flatly—"I know a swell joint over to Ninth Avenue where the dames do a regular joy dance. You and me for that! How about it? Are you on?"

"Oh you," she laughed, joyously, "I wouldn't let my grandmother go with you."

And out she went. Si leaned toward Kirby with sudden intimacy.

"Gert's all right," he said, "only they're working her good looks off of her. Chee! this is a burg for work, though. Now jes' think of me, a bloke gettin' a measly dozen bones a week for hittin' stuffed packing-cases on the ground floor of a Jew's dry-goods store. I'm losing my youth. Huh! a shipping-clerk! Wait a week. You'll lose me."

This amazing revelation, and also the implied threat, so perplexed Kirby that he could only say:

"Where you going?"

Si screwed up his eyes and wiggled fingers over his left ear.

"An inside tip—keep it under the lid. *Spot lights.*"

"The stage?"

"Sure. I met a feller doin' a coon act; said he needs a buffer. Me for the buffer. Believe me, there's nothin'

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in the shipping-clerk spiel. S'long. Do you hear the morning whistles all a-blowin'? Exit."

With one last mouthful, a whisk of the napkin, a "Ta-ta" and hand-wave, he vanished. And Kirby ate his breakfast joyously. He felt he had a new clue to New York. These folk were frozen because they suspected others of being suspicious, but once break the crust and they were familiar spirits.

Well, Kirby was young, after all. Stepping out into the buoyant morning, he released a smothered laugh of joy. People were hurrying through the vitalized air; he hurried with them. A Russian news vender at the corner sold him a paper and gave him directions; and he stood quite a handsome young man in derby and long overcoat at the busy street-crossing.

Beyond him the trees of Madison Square Park glistened freshly, and four-walling the Square rose brownstone houses and business buildings into the brilliant blue of the morning. Blue and white twistings of smoke faintly aspired toward the heavens, and one great wash of sun went sparkling over every little object on the ground, throwing tiny cool shadows. The air was fresh, cleansing the lungs and the mouth.

A car stopped, and Kirby got on, and with the action he seemed to catch the very spirit of New York. For the car was black with people, most of them reading papers—the clerks, mechanics, and girls who were the advance-guard of the morning. And Kirby, holding his paper under one arm and hanging nimbly on a strap, seemed to merge with this routine of the cars, giving himself up to the irresistible suction that drew large populations into the red struggle of the metropolis. He was of a city that went to work. By the gods, he would get some work himself; know the joy of creating one good thing in the world production!

Broadway shifted by, crowded scene by scene, and at City Hall, cutting toward the east, he burrowed through

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the human torrent that Brooklyn was gushing over the Bridge. Tall buildings looked down on the marchers, waving their tower-held flags as guidons to the host.

Life stirred around and in Kirby. He breathed faster, felt adventurous, smiled happily. Yes, this was Newspaper Row; to these buildings the snapped-up news of the world flowed through wire-nerves, and the vast drama of man in the very act was bunched on the clanking presses and then sown through the sleeping city. He held it under his arms—the miracle; he held the last twelve hours of the tragi-comedy of the human race. How wonderful, then, to become a cell in the nerve-center. That was his place. Glowingly he entered the shabby red-brick building of the *Sun*.

Two flights up steep, boxed stairs he came on the large, dirty room, with its flat desks beyond the entrance railing, all lit dingily by the dull windows. At once he was back on the *Trent Blade*—the same lovely odor of printers' ink, damp paper fresh from the press, and stale tobacco smoke. He stood looking. The place was quite empty, save for a boy sprawling under a green-shaded light over an opened newspaper.

The boy, interrupted, was of course annoyed.

"Who yer lookin' for?"

"The city editor."

"He's out."

Kirby felt unreasonably angry.

"When will he be in?"

"Oh—couple of hours or so."

And the boy read on. Kirby turned swiftly and sought the street. He might have known, of course. Yet he was dreaming; he was a reporter sitting deep in the night scribbling in a flood of golden light, or plunging down perilous midnight streets to look critically on the lurid gas-lit murder. Yes, he was a soul plunging alone into the cavernous underworld of sin and death and sleep.

The morning was yet young and glad; so adventurously

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he turned down eastern side streets and wandered deep into a huge new region. And as he walked he was amazed. The narrow streets zigzagged into each other; the squalid five-floor tenements had their fire-escapes loaded with household furnishings and refuse; the dirty shop-fronts had street displays of red blankets, strings of shoes, glass cases of brassware. Mud was in the gutter, and resting in it were lines of push-carts laden with food and cheap knickknacks and hardware and haberdashery. All was like a little old city out of the wreckage of ancient Europe. But most amazing were the people—a slow, turgid, intermelting mass, outrageously un-American; men in filthy clothes, with flowing luminous beards and greasy faces; fat women in shawls, a baby slung over the shoulder; children in red darting between the crowded legs; beautiful black-eyed girls, well-dressed, pushing through on the way to work. And there were cries in an alien tongue, shrill-voiced bargainings, bristling gossip.

Again Kirby had a sense of unreality. The congestion and poverty were monstrous. How could people live this way? His notion of poverty was owning a little house, having many children, and just scraping along. That was American poverty. This surely was imported. Yet here a whole world was going on, a mere pocket of New York. The vastness of the city overwhelmed him. It was the House of All Comers, and into it poured America and Europe.

He feared to go on lest again he lose his pride and abase himself before the startling immensity of life. He regained City Hall at ten-thirty.

A dozen men now sprawled, feet up, papers spread, at the desks of the *Sun* office, passing affectionate blasphemy to each other. Reporters, surely. And at once their warm comradeship made Kirby feel bitterly outside again.

“He’s in now,” said the boy. “What’s your name?”

“Mr. Trask.”

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"Business?"

"Personal."

"Oh, all right."

As Kirby waited, his heart started to thump against his ribs. The right word and bearing might land his future; he must be wary. Then he was motioned in to the roll-top corner desk of the city editor, and confronted a solid individual whose eye bored through him.

Yet his reception was flattering.

"Be seated, Mr. Trask. Now, what can I do for you?"

Kirby's voice sounded queer to himself.

"I'm looking for work as a reporter."

"Experienced?"

"Yes—out on my home-town paper, the *Trent Blade*, Trent, Iowa."

"Oh, indeed!" The words seemed to pat his back, and hope swelled in him.

"I'm willing to begin—" Kirby was ready to clean spittoons, but the city editor cut him off pleasantly.

"Just give me your name and address, Mr. Trask."

He drew out a slip of paper and a pencil and jotted down the facts. Then he spoke with a finality that terminated the interview:

"Of course, as you know, we're crowded just at present. You might drop in again in about three months. Glad to have met you, Mr. Trask."

Kirby wanted to launch his crushing logic, but somehow he rose like an automaton, smiled good morning, walked with cruel self-consciousness past the office-boy, and sped miserably to the street. Something big and beautiful was cracking and breaking within him.

So he rushed to the next place, a dark wood-partitioned interior, creaking crazily to the thump and thunder of presses and a hurry of men in and out. A red-headed boy played with him as if he were a top.

"What 'll yer have, anyway?"

Kirby gulped a lump.

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"I'd like to see the city editor."

"After a job? What?"

"Yes."

The boy rubbed his head and spoke reassuringly:

"Oh, you'll get it—in the neck," disappearing on the last word.

Tears came into Kirby's eyes, and the fear in his heart went stabbing through his self-confidence. Then an abrupt, busy man dashed through the swing-doors and confronted him sharply. The editor seemed to give one probing glance that showed that Kirby was the lesser man, and hence beaten, and he did not again look at the applicant.

"You want a reporting job?"

"Yes."

"It's no use. Don't waste your time—and mine. We're choked."

He started to go, but Kirby strained forth one desperate sentence:

"But I've been a reporter before."

The other wheeled around.

"Where?"

"On the *Trent Blade*."

"The *Trent BLADE!*" the editor cried in amazement.

"Yes, Trent, Iowa."

"If such a place exists," said the other, sententiously, "you'd better go back there."

And he left Kirby hanging, as it were, in mid-air.

Three other papers whisked him out just as rapidly and effectively, and, standing buffeted by the swift crowd of Park Row, he felt like lying down and weeping. He got the first twinge of the misery of the unemployed—that feeling of being cast out, exiled, and then hunted down to his death. He was not wanted in the tremendous industry of the city; he was a lonely stranger in town. Suddenly the romance of the city was shattered for him, and he felt that he was in a huge, dirty, noisy pit of stone, where greedy animals fought each other.

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He was too sick at heart to look further that day. His self-respect was breaking down, and the disillusionment was annihilating. After swallowing a tasteless cup of coffee and a portion of ham and beans in a cellar lunch-room he went back to his room and flung himself on the bed. A terrible homesickness filled him with self-pity. It was too hard, too bitter cruel. By contrast the friendliness of the known people of Trent, the open skies, the sheltering trees, the sweet routine and amplitude of his home, the worrying care of his mother, and the eager praise of Janice Hadden, seemed like the glory of the world that he had thoughtlessly cast away, the pearl he had flung to the hog-pen. He had ruined his bright life; he was a failure. Just outside, bells jangled, children shouted, wheels hit the cobblestones, horses clanked. His spirit grew deathly sick.

He did not want to face the strangers at supper; nevertheless he took his place, and the plates, the cutlery, the food, the faces, passed around him like a remote phantasm. Si's "Hello" went unheeded. He sat and ate of bitter bread.

Next to him a smooth-faced man tried hard to be friendly:

"My name is Marston, Freddy Marston. I'm a floor-walker at Marshall's. Say, do you play pinochle, Mr. ——?"

"Trask. No," was all Kirby could utter.

After a little while the unabashed floor-walker came back at him, whispering:

"You'll want to meet the girl opposite some time. She's a model in Wall & Hansel's suit department. Cissie Clay."

Kirby glanced up and saw a shapely woman with a crass exterior beauty directly across the table. She looked at him familiarly. He took a last spoonful of bread-pudding and excused himself.

Cissie watched him go, and spoke to Marston:

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“The kid’s homesick. My! he’s almost suicidal.”

No Broadway for Kirby that night. He wanted to hide his head. He walked himself tired through lamp-lit side streets, and was indifferent to the love-making in the shadows. And, back in bed, every nerve was jarred by the ceaseless night noises, the voices, car-thunder, and rattle. He felt feverish, as a man does in the initial stages of some devastating disease.

In the morning he came down with a cold in the head, snuffling, so homesick that he looked self-conscious.

Si’s wit was spun to the empty air, and finally in disgust he leaned forward and snapped:

“Say, you, you look like a stuffed monkey.”

Kirby smiled miserably and sought the boundless refuge of the streets. At least in the crowds he could hide himself; at least here a perfect secrecy, and no one prying into his heart. This was the home of all the unfriended and the ruined; he traveled with them through the cruel splendors of success.

That morning he tried the monthly magazines, but though the assistant editors were kindly they held out no hope to him, and he was confronted with that insoluble problem of the homeless—how to spend his idle time. There were as yet no nickel theaters, where an afternoon could be sat out swiftly; there were only the streets and the hall-bedroom, preferably the streets. So he wandered the friendless thoroughfares till he was sick in body and mind and ready to drop with fatigue. And that evening he ate in a cheap restaurant, for he could not abide facing the curiosity of the boarders.

IV

GLIMPSES OF THE DARK

IT was the next morning that Kirby thought of looking through the "help wanted" column of the newspaper. He ran through the alphabet—accountants, bookkeepers, canvassers, clerks, managers, salesmen, stenographers, sales-managers—but in almost each case previous experience was one of the conditions. He was practically inexperienced. It was a bitter thing that experience was demanded, and yet no chance of securing experience granted. One had to start somewhere.

Only one "ad" looked promising. It ran:

CITY SALESMEN wanted by a large typewriting concern. Experience desirable, but not absolutely necessary. Apply at 10.00 A.M. to MR. CASTLETON, Hadley Typewriter Co., 315 Broadway.

Kirby plucked up desperate courage and applied. At least thirty other young men were there ahead of him, jamming the anteroom. And they looked so well-dressed, smirky, and successful that he felt like a vagrant in the throng. In and out the front office they went, one by one. It was after eleven when the office-boy motioned to Kirby.

Mr. Castleton was a stout, brisk, mustached man with dark eyes ringed with signs of dissipation. He was much too affable, much too obsequious. Kirby felt that salesmen must be hard to get.

Mr. Castleton drew a long, black cigar from his mouth and waved the hand that held it.

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"Have a seat, Mr. ——"

"Trask."

"Glad to know you. Castleton's my name. Well, sir, I've got an A1 proposition to lay before you."

Kirby became suspicious at once, showing the first genuine traces of New-Yorkism. He listened in stolid silence.

"You see, our machine's new to the market. But already it's selling like hot cakes. Ever seen it? Only machine with back-stop, tabulator-key, reversible ribbon, and ball-bearing joints." Suddenly he seized on his desk, pulled, and a lid rose, bringing with it a hidden type-writing-machine. "Ain't she a beauty? Easy action, durable—a quick seller. Never ran a machine, did you?"

"No—I didn't."

"Oh, that's all right. We want talkers, not typers." He laughed briskly, then he turned sharply and laid a hand on Kirby's shoulder. "You can make big money in this. Twelve a week salary, ten per cent. on each machine, and they sell for a hundred. I've seen men make sixty, a hundred, two hundred a week. Just takes nerve and a taking way. How about it?"

All at once that excitation of American business—something of the circus, something of the gambling-table—began to invade Kirby. Anything seemed possible.

"What would I have to do—exactly?" he asked.

"Just this. We give you a territory—say five square blocks—and you go from office to office and ask for the boss. Of course, you've got to have a knack—it takes manners, insistence, and you've got to make people interested. Want to dress well, of course; be a top-notch; joke with the stenographers, take 'em out; worm your way. How about it?"

That "How about it?" settled the case. Through it leaked the distressing eagerness of Mr. Castleton, and in a flash Kirby knew that the work was impossible for him. He saw himself going into offices, overcome with shyness

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and rudely ejected. He saw himself changing into an oily, glib lackey. "By God!" he thought, "I'd rather break stone. That's honest, at least."

A moment of his concealed decisiveness came to him. He rose and looked Mr. Castleton in the eye; and when Kirby really looked, the looker usually crumpled a little.

"No. I can't take it. Thanks." And out he went.

"The son-of-a-gun," thought Mr. Castleton.

Nevertheless, when Kirby reached the street he was quite desperate. The cold in his head was worse, making him feel detached from his body, floating in space; and the misery of his outcast state became a bitter taste in his mouth. After a futile afternoon he went home, meditating on suicide. He could end all, after all. He could drop the city under him, the city with its insane gesticulations.

However, he would try once more, and he would take anything. Anything to tide him over, to restore his self-confidence, to give him time to turn about. Even manual work, which at least was healthy and honest. So the next morning he answered an "ad" for a shipping-clerk with the Curley Manufacturing Company of Green Street. But when he got there he saw standing in the gray drizzle of the gray street lined with loft-buildings at least a hundred men fighting about the entrance and several policemen trying to preserve order. The sight amazed him. He drew his coat-collar higher and turned away like a dog that is beaten.

For now he understood. He belonged to the army of the unemployed; the vast disorganized army that slinks through the cold and wet outside the warm, immense, busy machinery of our industrialism, trying to beat its way in to get merely bread and a bed—the hunted hunters, sinking, many of them, down into the easeful slime of vagrancy and criminality. This, then, was the cellarage of the beautiful heaven-kissed city, the foul foundations flowing with bobbing heads and beseeching hands and hoarse cries for mercy. Monstrous poverty! Monstrous in-

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justice! Kirby could understand now why the papers were full of suicide, murder, rape, and burglary. It was the struggle for existence laid bare; yes, thought young Kirby, it was human nature laid bare; the claws and fangs, the animal ancestry revealed.

And he felt now that to succeed one had to be pitiless, hard, selfish. As for himself, if he ever got *in* he would stay in, hook or crook. Necessity made this the only way. It was the first emergence of ruthlessness in Kirby's character, the first definite result of the impact of New York.

Yet he had the grace at that moment to prefer suicide. What else could he do? To go on much longer would destroy the best in him—the human spirit—until he was a mere whining beggar. Better to die, and an end of it.

It was five that afternoon when he turned in at Twenty-sixth Street. The rain had ceased, the heavens cleared; but the pavement was still wet, and all the westward street glowed with a divine rosiness. Still beauty was in the evening skies; exquisite light bathed the happy walkers. But, for all that, Kirby felt the tears of despair; the soft beauty of the street-lamp, a bit of luminous gold lost in the last of the day, made him yearn for arms about his tired head and the kiss of woman's love. Yes, he must end it all. His heart could endure no more.

He climbed the steps, unlocked the door. Blinking through the shadows, he saw the fat landlady waddling toward him, cutting off escape.

"Letters for you, Mr. Trask." She held out two envelopes.

He took them, glanced. One was an unfamiliar handwriting, the other that of Janice. At once his heart bounded; blood rushed to his head.

"Thanks," he cried, and fled up the stairs.

The note from Janice was brief:

DEAR KIRBY,—I was delighted to get such a hopeful letter. By now you must be on your way up. And even if you aren't,

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dear boy, remember that you and I know what is possible, and that it is a mere matter of time. Months even oughtn't to discourage you. If they do, write me—write me candidly—for I want you to know that I am your best backer, and that nothing shall shake my faith in you. All goes well here, though I envy you the great city.

Your friend,

JANICE WOODS HADDEN.

He laughed out loud, he kissed the signature, and a gust of joy swept him.

"Oh," he murmured, "you came in time, Janice, and I love you!"

Then eagerly he tore open the other letter. And he read his fortune in it.

MY DEAR MR. TRASK,—My daughter remembers Mrs. Hadden very well. Can't you come up and dine with us at seven on Friday night?

Yours sincerely,

JORDAN WATTS.

The letter was in one handwriting, the signature in another. Well, the mailed hand had descended from heaven to scoop up an unfortunate from the muck of the city. It was unbelievable. Kirby got up, tore off his coat, slapped his knees, cried "Hell! hell! hell!" and danced kickingly up and down. Now he was himself—radiant, powerful, the man of destiny. The cellarage of the city was forgotten; he was to ascend at one leap to the high places. Such an invitation could mean nothing else. One of the masters of America, a man who could make and unmake human beings by a nod of his head had asked him to dinner. What a wonderful woman was Janice.

The cold in Kirby's head seemed to depart, and he came down to supper with flashing eyes and superb poise

"Good evening," he called to Si, gaily. "How are you?" to the floor-walker.

"It's cleared up fine!" he announced, to the whole table.

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In fact, he was sharing his joy with these good people, these excellent housemates.

"Must have struck oil," whispered Cissie to Si.

"Or a dead uncle," quoth Si.

The floor-walker was thrilled to find another Ear in the world. He now pointed out the other boarders. That girl there worked in a box factory, poor thing! Had the skylight-room on Kirby's floor. Next her sat a stone-mason; then the stone-mason's helper—skinny, but good-natured; the middle-aged lady there was a Southerner, Mrs. Waverley, taught in a school for girls; that fellow was a carpenter; and the elderly sorry-looking old lady at the top of the table was a translator.

"Used to do books, made loads of money. Now she gets five a column translating for the *Weekly Digest*. Knows personally a big gun named Howells, feller who writes books or something."

Kirby was delighted. Under the gas-flames they sat there so palpably human. It was charming to be breaking bread with them.

After supper he met Si in the hall.

"Say, Si," he remarked, brilliantly, "come to a show with me."

"Oil," thought Si, "or uncle." What he said was: "I'm on. Joy for us."

They became part of brilliant Broadway, and sat through a comic opera, a thing of tights, kicks, horse-play, rose-lit singing, and vulgar jokes. Gazing down from the balcony, Kirby watched the apparition of a girl singing and dancing before a black curtain, the spot-light daubing her eyes and mouth with gold and the footlights splashing light up to the fringes of her short ballet-skirt. And he was a youth gazing on the beauty of woman, the mystery of that loveliness of ardor and joy and agility that flares in beating light and vanishes. He felt subtly intoxicated.

Emerging on Broadway, with heads in the swim of lamp-light and the far darkness up and down and a

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large October moon looking out of the loneliness of space on the golden crowding of the street, he was bewitched by the unreality of life, the bulk of beings pushing this way and that into mystery and oblivion.

"Let's go somewhere." He pressed Si's arm.

"Say," burst out Si, "I'll show you *life!*"

That was what Kirby wanted. They stepped over to Sixth Avenue and down marble steps into a cellar. Smoke and lights swallowed them, warmth and noise, the smell of beer and tobacco. At long tables alcoved by leather-cushioned seats along the wall sat men and women. The women were a spangled lot, with flaring cheeks and brilliant eyes. Kirby and Si sat down.

"What 'll yer have?" asked Si.

Now Kirby never drank; but, looking about him, he saw that every one else did.

"Oh, anything."

"Two Fast Freight cocktails and a box of Natchi cigarettes," said Si to the waiter.

Kirby admired the dash and worldliness of that order. Soon he was sipping the flaming stuff and trying to smoke.

"Gee!" said Si, "but you're a hot sport. Hold it like this, for God's sake, before any one spots you."

The cocktail gave him a slight sensation of convulsions around the chest, but he sipped on.

"Oh, hell, take a gulp," cried Si, "don't play with it."

He took a gulp; and in a few moments his skull began to feel too tight, and his spirit floated in space. He looked about him and was aware that all along he had been a boy. Life was here—life! Now he was a man. He was profoundly amazed by this spectacle of women; it was devilish dashing to be here, devilish damned dashing!

Cocktail the second followed cocktail the first. Kirby began to hug Si affectionately.

"Say, Si, I'm glad—I'm glad—I'm glad t' meet you."

Si arose.

"Holy smokes," he muttered. "Just as I'm gettin'

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ready to show him de real t'ing he goes back on me and gets drunk. Gee! I'm glad I hit the spot-light to-morrer. Trask, you come home!"

He got Kirby into the street with difficulty; the moon lurched with them over the housetops, as, linked, they ambled down Twenty-sixth Street.

Kirby was solemn.

"You don't want to think I'm drunk," he whispered.

"You *are* drunk!" said Si.

"Ah, now, Si, don't think I'm drunk. Just a little—just a little—just a little happy. Ta-ha-ha!"

"Quit your laughing."

"What 'd Janice say," said Kirby, chucking Si under the chin, "if she saw me now. Happy? Well—yes. But don't think I'm drunk. Ta-ha-ha!"

"Want to shut up now. We're goin' in the house."

Kirby climbed infinite stairs. At the second landing a door was open, and he saw the Southern woman glancing out. Her gray eyes steadied him, and when he fell on his bed he thought: "Is it so, after all? I, drunk?" and fell into a heavy sleep.

V

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WHEN Kirby awoke uncannily in all his clothes, with a binding headache and a bitter taste, he remembered the gray glance of Mrs. Waverley and was horrified.

"I *did* get drunk—I, Kirby Trask. And *she* knows it."

His headache was bad; he almost shed tears. But he arose stiffly, flung cold water over his head, undressed, crept into bed, and slept till noon. Then amazingly he opened eyes with the singular sensation of having become more of a man. A profound self-satisfaction filled him—a buoyant and braggart spirit. He stretched himself luxuriously and laughed softly. No search for work this day; no humiliations; he was stepping at last into his natural sphere.

There was nothing to do but wait for the splendid evening; then he should ascend into the Fifth Avenue mansion and commune with familiar spirits. What could be simpler than an American meeting an American? There was no reason for feeling nervous. Watts and he were merely two Americans—equals. The only difference was that Watts had many million dollars. Otherwise he was a human being. He would go to him as an equal; doubtless he would be received as an American.

He leaped out of bed and went to the window. The houses opposite were nearly lost in mist, and the strange change in the world affected him deeply. Yes, he thought, but the power of Watts! For four days Kirby had been swept cruelly around in the drifting chaos of the city;

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and here was a man of the tower-tops with unbelievable power over that chaos, employing thousands of human beings, going his way over the world like a king, whose glance of approval could make a young man. Any mis-step might lose all; but the right word would act as a charm. Then easily he should realize his big ambitions, himself seize on huge power, get his hand on the lever, fulfil his American youth's destiny. He would have luxury, fame, and his whole nature flowing in stupendous pulsations. Yes, his empire waited for him; a magic circle opening at a word.

He was mentally intoxicated again, a young god of power. He laughed, dressed, went gaily out. But looking skyward he saw the sun a tiny yellow ball with an aura of faintest gold infinitely far away in the mist, and a burst of nervousness drenched him. He kept reassuring himself:

"But he's only a human being."

Thus, pumping up gaiety and courage, he took lunch, loitered about, bought a new necktie and collar, and finally went into a barber-shop. This worked his undoing.

He could not resist that heart-reading barber: "Manicure your nails?" "All right." "Shoes shined?" "Sure." It was most embarrassing, and Kirby felt the coarse emotions welling from his heart. He was painfully self-conscious.

Then came a last blow to his tottering pride.

"Say," cried the amazed barber, "don't you ever get a hair-cut?"

The insult rankled, yet Kirby feared to offend a bandit whose razor rested lightly but ominously on his distended throat.

"I haven't time," he said, weakly.

"It'll only take ten minutes."

"No—next time." His cheeks grew hot, for shame was in his voice.

The barber spoke threateningly:

"Then you'll have a shampoo. You need it."

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He compressed his lips, shook his head. He could not trust himself to speak. Whereupon the Spaniard sighed, and Kirby nerved himself for the slash. He was singularly helpless. He had delivered himself as if tied and bound into the hands of three strangers. The barber had his head, the bootblack his feet, and a manicure with a mountain of yellow hair, partly her own, possessed his fingers. It was like a three-ring circus—a delicious agony.

But the barber only sighed again, his professional pride in danger of breaking, suddenly sat Kirby up, and desperately compromised by soaking Kirby's head with bay-rum and violet water and plastering the heavy hair down tight on either side a startling part. When Kirby emerged, with coat and hat brushed, he looked like an advertisement of linen collars, and he smelt . . .

The experience had been crushing; he hurried home in a state of collapse and tried vainly to wash out the perfume and to get his hair wavy. Then he lay down and awaited the dreaded hour.

As the long minutes passed he began trying on manners as if they were clothes. At the least, he now concluded, he must expect something stern and business-like, something coldly magnificent, coolly keen. He must meet proud power with callous reserve—that is, if old Watts didn't see how he shook. A cold sweat broke out on him, his heart began to hop. And everything he did made him feel worse. Looking in the glass revealed his agitation, lying still gave him time to count his heart-beats, whistling was evidence that his courage needed keeping up.

Six came; six ten; six twenty; half past. Then he was sure he was late, and sprinted out, hurrying blindly and with thumping heart through the vaporous mystery of Fifth Avenue. The swift action gave a delighted relief; he began to feel that he could rush Watts before the old man had a chance to thumb him down. The streets sped, and here was the corner, the big brownstone house

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with the glass-and-iron doors. An excited joy inundated him, and he gave a last look at his watch. It registered ten minutes to seven.

Kirby lost his nerve completely. Ten minutes more to wait! He went trembling up and down Fifth Avenue, eying the house with sickly terror every time he passed. His breath steamed; he was aware now that the wet pavement was flecking his shiny shoes and the dampness wilting his tie; overhead the double-globed electrics were pouring through the mist, light flowing like a waterfall through its own vapor; lamps of cabs came staring past; and the city seemed to sink deeper and deeper into submerged depths of mystery. Kirby kept trying to nerve himself, to key himself up, and, when some hidden church bell mournfully tolled seven, thrice he approached the doorsteps and retreated.

He tried to smile, to make his eyes flash. He said out loud:

"He's only a human being."

And up he went and pushed the bell-button. Now the deed was done; he was trapped.

Slowly the door opened, and an unexpected butler barred the way. He had not thought of a butler.

"Mr. Watts in?" he heard his voice rasping.

The butler saw the face and was naturally suspicious.

"Did you desire to see him poisonally?"

"Yes."

"On what business?"

"He's expecting me." Kirby's voice shook.

"What's your name, may I arsk?"

"Mr. Trask."

"Oh." It was an oh that punctured the young man's breast. "Step in the hall, and I'll see."

Kirby sank into a hall-seat, helpless and unnerved. As the murderer, strapped in the electric chair, knows that struggle is useless and that in a moment there will be a shock and that the sooner over the better, so Kirby sat

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ready. The butler stepped into a dark room, emerged again, climbed the curving stairs, and Kirby's hair stood on end when he found a pair of eyes in that darkness watching him. If his lips had only been pliable he would have smiled to think that he was regarded as a burglar until he could prove his innocence.

Down came the butler and murmured:

"You will step this way, sir, if you please."

He arose, took long, deliberate steps, and climbed. He was ushered into a large reception-room, glowing in corners with soft electroliers and center-lit by a glassy chandelier; a rug stretched on the highly polished floor; the furniture was covered with light-pink satin, and heavy curtains hung over the immense windows. This room gave off into a music-room that was softly lighted.

The easy luxury of it, after Kirby's hall-room, was overwhelming, but Kirby dashed in. At once the rug slipped under him and he almost took a header. He was unused to polished floors, but he gained a sudden respect for them and trod gingerly. Then he sat down, sure that the butler had seen the slip that had given him away—yes, that had laid bare his vulgar poverty. If he could have felt worse, he would have; but he simply couldn't.

He had seen pictures of Jordan Watts that suggested massive proportions. Instead of that, suddenly, a little fellow in a dress-suit came shambling in, momentarily wiping drops of blood from his underlip with a stained handkerchief. Kirby gave a sickly grin; keyed up for something tremendous, he was disconcerted by this poor, suffering mortal.

"Mr. Trask?" The voice was worried. "Glad to see you."

He offered a hand, his left, and Kirby tried to rise and take it. It was limp and felt fishy.

"You must pardon me," said Jordan Watts. "I had a tooth pulled this afternoon and my mouth's bloody."

Then Kirby saw a tear in the magnate's eye. This was

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wonderful—that a tear should be in one of the wealthiest eyes in the United States. That it sprang, as it were, from the yearning abyss that had held a tooth made no difference. It was just a human tear, the same as drop from you and me. Kirby felt like dropping one himself. This was the worst disillusionment of all. Toothache, tooth pulled, bloody lip, a tear. And it was for this that he had come to New York and spent a tortured day of keying up. It should have made him feel easy and equal; it only added confusion to his unnerved condition. He pitied himself now out of the depths of his heart.

“We all come to it sooner or later,” Jordan Watts was saying.

Then Kirby was aware that some one else had entered the room, a young woman who stepped lightly up. Kirby could not tell whether she was short or tall; that she was slender, that she was young, was patent. He was aware of dark eyes, and thought she was plain-faced. Her dark hair escaped him.

“Mary,” said old Watts, “this is Mr. Trask.”

She nodded slightly. Like Janice, she was affected by the visible emotionalism in his quivering lips, flashing eyes, and flushed cheeks, and by his passionate speechlessness.

Then quiet reigned. Whereupon Mary said:

“I think we could go down.”

And Jordan Watts muttered:

“Yes, let’s go down.”

They started; Kirby forgot, and the rug slipped; he balanced himself wildly, loosed an uncanny laugh, and passed down in a dream. He was desperate now, and didn’t care what happened.

But hardly had they seated themselves at the flashing table when two others entered, a keen-eyed, smooth-shaven young man in a dress-suit and a young woman in an evening gown with only bunches of lace dividing bare arms from bare bosom. Kirby had nerved himself for a

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tête-à-tête with Watts; remotely he figured on Mary; he was quite unprepared for a tableful.

He shuffled to his feet, nodding, as old Watts murmured: "My daughter Alice and her intended, Mr. Cutler. Mr. Trask."

Their eyes seemed to use him as if he were an opera-glass and they were looking through at some interesting spectacle on the wall. And suddenly he blushed to the roots of his hair, for he was aware for the first time that he had on a business suit.

"Why in God's world," he cried to himself, "did I let myself get into this?"

An invisible lord of food shot a plate of oysters down before him, and he began grinning at an outlay of forks, knives, and spoons that presented the great puzzle—which for which? Slyly he watched the others, and matched them. This was followed by his first cold consommé, and it tasted villainous. Yet eat it he had to.

After that he lost all consciousness of eating, merely lunging, lifting, chewing. The young couple kept up a lively talk as if he were absent—some vague stuff about a Mrs. Payson and the dreadful trouble she was enduring in arranging a cotillion—and like a fascinated creature he kept his eyes on the nakedness of the young lady.

Mary tried to be good to him. She took the first break in the conversation.

"And how is Mrs. Hadden?"

Kirby almost dropped a knife.

"Oh," he grinned, "she's all right."

A pause. Then sudden cotillion again.

All at once, then, the atmosphere sharpened. It seemed like a new voice speaking. It was Jordan Watts asking:

"Where did you say you came from, Mr. Trask?"

He turned and confronted a new face. The eyes were sharp, probing to the secret recesses of his brain, and he noticed now the big, bulky forehead and the grim mouth only half hidden in the little graying beard. There was a

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terrific drive of power in the face, something big and appalling, like a force of nature.

Kirby came to himself. Yes, this was the steel magnate.

"Trent, Iowa," he answered, like a schoolboy, straightening up stiffly.

"Large place?" Watts snapped.

"It's—yes—well, ten thousand."

"A village," said Watts. "What do you manufacture there?"

Kirby racked his brain. What in the world *did* they manufacture there?

"Oh—well—it's"—sweat bathed his forehead—"why, furniture."

He felt that the young couple were enjoying this hugely, for they were listening attentively. He would have given his right hand to escape.

"And the crops this year—how are they?"

The eyes ransacked him.

"I"—he laughed uneasily—"I don't know."

"Why, of course they were good," cried Jordan Watts; "this has been a banner year for crops in the Middle West."

Kirby knew he was giving himself away, that he looked ignorant and little before this trained power. But the questions came crashing.

"What have you been doing?" As if to say, how in thunder have you, an American youth, been dawdling around when you should have been mastering your environment?

"I—I've been a reporter since I left the academy."

"Reporter? In Trent?"

"The Trent *Blade*."

"Republican or Democrat?"

"Independent."

"Didn't stand for anything, you mean. How long were you there?"

"Nearly two years."

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"Large staff?"

"Three of us."

"I see. And that academy; what did it stand for in training—vocational, or cheap, vague radicalism?"

Kirby looked at him appealingly.

"I really couldn't say."

Jordan Watts gave him a keen glance, relaxed into misery, said, worriedly, to Mary: "I'll have to see that dentist again to-morrow," and attacked some Nesselrode pudding.

The terrible interval was short; Kirby waited in a trance, quite oblivious of the others and eating nothing. Then came the eyes again and the dynamic voice:

"Tell me this, Mr. Trask—"

But Mary was ready; she saw that Kirby was being vivisected.

"Oh," she said, lightly, "let's talk of something else, father."

He turned on her and spoke sharply.

"Please don't break in, Mary. I'm trying to find out about something." Then he resumed the assault. "What's the price of a pair of horses in the Middle West?"

Kirby swallowed a lump.

"I don't know."

"Well, when I was last there it was three hundred dollars; here it's four hundred and fifty. You don't know?"

And then the miracle came. Kirby grew red, felt hot, and all his tremendous temper went to his head. Like a bull he leaned, his face livid.

"Mr. Watts, I don't CARE what horses cost either here or in the Middle West."

He put a fist on the table, ready for battle. But all at once a delighted laughter went up from the young people and rolled into a shaking roar of mirth from the old man.

"Good!" cried Mary.

Watts leaned and patted Kirby on the shoulder.

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"You're right. Come along to the library, and we'll have a talk."

Then Kirby laughed, too. It was delicious. He felt himself again. Proudly he rose, proudly he strode after Jordan Watts into the leathery, table-lit library, and sank into a deep chair. Only Mary followed.

And, seated there in the soft twilight, he saw Mary's face transformed. He had thought her plain, but now it was as if a light had been turned on inside her. Her eyes shone with radiance, her cheeks glowed, she seemed hauntingly beautiful.

"You mustn't mind dad," she said, seating herself on the arm of her father's chair.

The old industrial captain drew her close, with startling tenderness.

"Mustn't, eh?" he said, rubbing her cheek against his. "Mustn't, Meg?"

A rhythm of warmth enfolded Kirby, and the missed loveliness of home and the old comfort and love became real again. Mary stirred him profoundly, and not as Janice had; not as a woman out of the days of knighthood, but as a lovely girl. Yet he felt that he was younger than she.

The telephone-bell rang; Mary leaned and picked up the instrument, half-seated in an exquisite posture of grace and eagerness.

"Hello. Yes. Yes, it is. Just a moment." Her voice was musical. She turned to her father and spoke easily: "Long distance—Chicago."

Kirby was thrilled. Chicago, a thousand miles away, was on the wire, and these people took it as a matter of course.

Jordan Watts spoke with a magnetic lilt in his voice:

"Hello. Yes. Hello, Jim. The Brandon Works? Wire Spielmann. Say I order no action on option till I reach Indianapolis. Get that? Good by, Jim; take care of yourself."

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That was all. Yet, had the magic carpet lifted Kirby until he saw America lying like a map beneath him, he could not have been more amazed. He was hardly an atom in one great city, but Watts seemed not only to handle New York but to reach lightly out over a third of a continent to sway another city, as if he had a universal mind darting down now here, now there, over the world. It was a dramatic act of stupendous power; and yet it was a moment of quiet, one moment in the passing night.

The butler now entered bearing a card on a tray. Watts picked it up. He was annoyed.

"It's Van Ambridge of the Manufacturers' Association. Why does he come now?" He glanced at Kirby. "But show him in."

Kirby rose.

"I'd better go," he murmured.

Watts rose, too.

"I'm sorry this happened. But come again. I'm glad to have met you."

Mary followed him to the door, helped him into his coat.

"Remember me to Mrs. Hadden," she said. "It was good of you to come. You must come some other time."

He pressed her hand, and her eyes glistened. Wonderful possibilities stirred in him. She was simple; she was radiant.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by."

She herself opened the door, and, stepping out, he knew that she waited before closing it. He was strangely thrilled as he stepped buoyantly into the mist.

Then, all at once, horror swamped him. He had not asked Jordan Watts for a job, hadn't even dreamed of asking. And a little voice told him that they would never ask him to call again, he who was so palpably ignorant and countrified, he who was merely one of the great swarm that buzzes in the light around a millionaire.

VI

BESS: A SHOP-GIRL

ALL the radiance in Kirby's nature sparkled out the next morning. Now that he got a backward glance on his experience he found it funny, a farce in which he had played the part of unconscious humorist. His nervous frenzy, his disillusionment, his clothes and his manners now seemed exquisitely amusing. But most amusing of all had been the alacrity with which he had been ushered in and then handed out without even a chance to put his problem before old Watts. And it was this that had brought him to New York with high hopes.

"Um!" he thought, sardonically, "the game is up. K. T. is done for."

And it was really so. He had not "made good"; like young Parsifal, he had not asked the one question that would have made the future for him; the great moment had come and passed, and he was left to work his way alone. That he could do this with any immediate success he now doubted; four days of job-hunting had shown him the difficulty of breaking into the magic circle of business. Even if he found work it meant drudging along for years before he could advance. Yes, he was beaten; and admitting it brought a great relief. Matters surely could get no worse.

He then decided that he would cease corresponding with Janice Hadden. She had sent him out to conquer, and he could not write back that he had failed; it would be better to go his own way without the weak pathos of showing

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himself broken. Besides, the image of Janice was fading; he could not recall her face; he felt that he had quite outgrown the ardent youth on the campus. And, more poignant reason, there was the personality of Mary Watts—a girlish loveliness that possessed him and obliterated all else. He felt that he had met a new type of woman and henceforth could not be satisfied with any dissimilar kind. He had no inkling as to wherein this newness lay; she was merely different, suggesting marvelous possibilities. It was as if his mind was amazed with the newly revealed woman in the world. That he could meet her again appeared remote; nevertheless, he fed himself on hope.

He now felt distinctly older, rich in experience, and, hence, more decisive and more callous. There remained but one thing to do, and he would do it—search for work until he found it, take any job, and peg away until his footing was firmer, until he made friends and possibly had saved a little money. With this feeling he now broke the last tie that held him to the past and ceased to care what Trent thought of him. He was a New-Yorker; he could do as he pleased, and New York would mind its own business and care not a rap for his failure or success.

So that morning at breakfast, when Freddy Marston, the floor-walker, said to him, "Say, Trask, are you looking for a job?" he replied, eagerly:

"Sure. Do you know of any?"

"Why," said Marston, raising an interrogating fork, "don't you come into the store?"

"Can I *get* in?"

"Oh, I can fix that!" Marston's cut-away seemed to expand. "Of course it's start low, and toe the mark, with your insides full of patience. But there's a future; *I* started as cash-boy." Then, just as Kirby felt elated, the floor-walker added: "Now I'm getting eighteen a week."

"How long were you at it?" asked Kirby, sharply.

"Oh—let's see—just twelve years."

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Kirby choked over a spoonful of egg and blew little bits on the table-cloth. Marston felt injured.

"I wasn't suggesting," he said, tartly, "that you start as a cash-boy. But of course—"

"What could I start at?"

"Mentioning my name to Mr. Spiegel, and speaking bright, you might start almost as anything. But of course—"

"Oh, forget it," cried Kirby, lightly. "Take me along. I'm spoiling for a job."

So they went together up Broadway until they reached the big block building of Marshall's, with its enticing window displays of women's dresses on large-eyed wax models, men's shirts and ties, books and stationery, furniture for furnishing a four-room flat, all garnished with imitation autumn leaves and backed by mirrors. A stream of shop-girls and salesmen went blackly down the side street and into the rear entrance. It was just ten minutes of eight.

There came a humiliating moment for Mr. Marston.

"I—I've got to go in the back. But you trudge around till a little after eight, go in the front, and ride to the eighth floor. Ask for Mr. Spiegel, and mention me."

That going to the back entrance marked him with something servile, and he vanished quickly.

Kirby paced lazily along Broadway. He was becoming enough of a New-Yorker to go through crowds as if they did not exist, through streets as if there were no background of stony distances; only shop windows and an occasional fresh face caught his eye. He began to take it all for granted; the spectacle of the tumultuous city had ceased to be amazing.

It was eight-thirty when Kirby stepped into the store. Shop-girls were laughing and gossiping together behind the heaped counters; floor-walkers paraded the empty aisles. A quivering expectation was in the air, a sense of preparation for exciting events. Here and there an early

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shopper was matching samples or inspecting goods. To Kirby the crowded display was extraordinarily lavish, as if all the riches of the world had been gathered together to be poured out to a moneyed city. There was something Oriental in this gathering of the products of manufactory and mill, mine and the fields of earth; like a gorgeous Eastern fair when the caravans come together. He wondered where all the money came from to make these things and to buy them, for he wanted some himself.

The elevator took him up to the eighth floor, and he entered a network of partitioned offices. A boy asked him for his card.

“Oh, just tell Mr. Spiegel Mr. Trask was sent by Mr. Marston.”

A minute passed, and he was ushered into the seated presence of a singularly tall and attractive young man, smooth-shaven and hazel-eyed. Mr. Spiegel motioned him into a chair.

“What can I do for you?” he asked, agreeably.

“Mr. Marston sent me—”

“Marston? *Which* Marston?”

There was another swift shrinkage of the floor-walker. Kirby began to feel nervous.

“He’s floor-walker, men’s furnishings.”

“Oh yes!” But such an absent-minded exclamation. “And what for?”

Kirby became painfully self-conscious; he was asking for work again.

“He thought possibly you had an opening—a place with a future in it.”

“How old are you?” asked Mr. Spiegel.

Kirby flushed.

“Twenty-four.”

Mr. Spiegel looked at him keenly.

“I don’t suppose you’d care to sell behind a counter.”

“No,” said Kirby, eagerly, “not unless I had to. I’d like a job where there’s a chance of working up.”

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"Well," said Mr. Spiegel, "it just happens that I have some such job. We need a young man in the buyers' department to meet the outside salesmen when they come in and make them feel at home; then a little clerical work for the buyers. It's not hard, and it may lead to something better. But it pays nine a week."

Kirby's heart shrank.

"I pay eight board," he said.

Mr. Spiegel smiled and spoke kindly.

"Would ten do—for a while—to tide things over?"

So Kirby got his first job. Coming down in the elevator he had a glimpse of moons of light strung along the ground-floor ceiling; and down in the mellowness the sparkle of metal and bright cloth and a fierce intermoving mass of humanity, a tumult of faces, an interior electric-lit city. A great hum arose from the multitude, a joyous clash of sounds—the women buying, buying, for the ever-hungry homes and the splendors of their nights. He was to be a part of the machinery that decked out the women of the city in jewels and fine cloth for the joy of men's love. It was not utopian, but it was a foothold, and Kirby was sane after his harsh job-hunting. He bought an alarm-clock at a loaded counter and went home with an uneasy sense of responsibility.

At six-thirty, then, on Monday morning his alarm-clock shot him out of bed; at ten minutes of eight he and Marston became part of the stream that flowed past the time-keeper in the back entrance. He now found that the rear of the store was walled off for the employees, with special lunch and rest and cloak rooms, and he took the employees' elevator to the seventh floor. A long partition made a sort of hallway along the line of the buyers' offices, and he entered this. Here a glib youth expounded his duties—that he was to meet each salesman, take his card to the proper buyer, and show him in; that he was to add up a column of figures if a buyer so requested, or get a box of matches; that he was to run er-

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rands for his many masters. Oh yes, there were at least thirty buyers.

In plain English, then, he was to be the office-boy. Kirby's heart sickened. He, an office-boy, he who had come to the city to ride it like a galloping cavalry-man.

He waited around nervously till ten-thirty. Salesmen began to arrive, sleek and unctuous individuals who used him as a door-knob on the buyers' offices—gave him a twist, and passed in. A great crowd came, elbowing him, making it impossible to select the new from the old. Thus came luncheon. He ate across the street and was back in half an hour. Then the afternoon was infinitely tedious, with sleepy offices gathering dust and nothing to do but pace up and down or sit and glance surreptitiously at a copy of the *New York Commercial* and the *Hotel Register*. Time melted into eternity; six o'clock came and went a dozen different quarter-hours; and at last when he hurried with the eager crowds down the lamp-lit streets he felt as if he had been released from a jail.

The next day was still more hateful. He rebelled against the routine; the monster that seized on him at the rear entrance at eight sharp and swallowed him into abysmal depths, disgorging him, weary and exhausted by sheer idleness, at six in the evening. He was part of a senseless clock-work, a cog. He had his place now in the toiling city, but got no joy of it. It was cruel, senseless, impersonal. It treated him as if he were mere hands without heart or brain.

One buyer sent him on an errand to a floor-walker on the first floor, and he had the curious shame of passing bareheaded through the hatted throng—a flaunting symbol of his servility and the fact that he was less than the least of these. He felt, too, the keen difference between himself and the other employees. No use to continue the fiction of equality: they were different; they had not his sensitive high-mindedness, his emotional richness.

And he had revealed to him a moral breaking-down that

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shocked his heart. Going up and down the elevators, he heard now and then mere boys and girls flinging suggestive jibes at each other, a primitive freedom of language he was unused to. Some of the girls seemed to make advances, to come three-quarters of the way. At home it was the men who did the wooing and the courting, and this reversal of relationships threatened to cheapen his natural reverence for women. So shocked was he that he spoke of it to Marston at noon in the cheap and flaring side-street restaurant.

"But are those young girls like that?" Kirby asked.

"Some are, some aren't," said Marston. "There's the straight ones, just like everywhere; but throw a lot of young folk together in factory or shop, especially a bunch of girls who ain't got nothing in the world, and Lord! what happens? Why, the older women pass on the word to the younger, and tell 'em how to have a good time safely. Can you blame 'em? Look at the life they lead. Lord, most of 'em can't marry; they've got to have fun at least once in a lifetime. Miss Wiggins, the millinery buyer, was right. At a blow-out she got up and said: 'Girls, we might as well get a little bit of every kind of a good time.' That's the stuff. Why shouldn't they?"

"And what did the girls say?" asked Kirby.

"Oh, some got red in the face; but most of 'em giggled. Gee!" he laughed, "you're the innocent child."

And he went on to tell Kirby of his relationship with some of the girls until it seemed to the young man that the sidewalks had slid back and disclosed a cavernous subterranean world of bacchantic people, a population ruining beneath the quiet homes. And New York seemed terrible again—pent civilization shattering itself on the stones, a swirling humanity sinking for lack of work into vagrancy and crime, and for lack of love into free abandon.

Kirby felt stunned; he could think of nothing else that afternoon. And then came a new experience. There was a girl employed in a clerical capacity in one

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of the buyers' offices; he had heard her called "Bess," and he had noted casually that during the idle hours she would come out and glance at him and then retire. Now, at four, she came down through the shadow and light of the open doors, and he saw that she was pitiably slender and frail, a mere girl of about seventeen. Her yellowish-brown hair was stuffed out with puffs and "rats," her face was faintly powdered; but her green dress was rather shabby, and her large dark eyes shone with a starved look. She seemed a desperate, wild little being.

She came up, trying to amble nonchalantly, in the manner of the shop-girls.

"Got any elastics?" she asked. She meant to be impudent, but failed.

Kirby felt a sharp pity acting like an astringent on his heart. He looked at her softly.

"No—but can I find some for you?"

"Oh, never mind! Say, you're new."

"Yes—my second day."

"Rotten, ain't it?"

A warmth of sympathetic comradeliness went through him.

"Yes, it's rotten."

"Ever go out at night?"

"A little."

She came nearer; her manner was distinctly caressing.

"You ain't never worked in a place like this before?"

He smiled.

"How do you know?"

"Oh, you're not our kind. You're a gentleman, Mr. Trask."

His eyes became misty.

"No, I'm not. I'm just a poor fellow who has to earn his living."

He found it curiously easy to talk to her.

"Oh no," she said, "you're a gentleman. I know what

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they're like. Lots of the girls here have gentleman friends."

He did not then understand the term, but an important fact dawned on his slow mind. Through this girl he got a clue to the starved girlhood of the city—manless, toiling through the long hours, living alone, with hearts starved for even a shabby imitation of divine love, who lean from open windows into the summer night and hear the city passing by and see the sky-line tremulous with lights and behold youth swirling in the glitter at the street end; the spirit of youth denied its undying rights; joy, laughing joy, and sparkling pleasure, and the long night of love.

He noticed the sudden mantling of her cheeks when she said "gentleman friends." She glanced away with girlish shame.

"And you haven't any?" he asked.

"I?" she laughed, strangely. "No—not exactly."

She seemed to be waiting as if for an invitation, and on a generous impulse Kirby spoke.

"You don't get out much, do you?"

"No."

"Neither do I. Let's go to a show to-night."

She laughed, giving him her eyes and their happy radiance.

"You take me to-night," she said; "I'll take you to-morrow!"

She left him then, and he stood thrilled, yet perplexed at this new entanglement. Was it possible that he would be enmeshed in a marriage that would further bind him to a life of treadmill poverty? Or what did Bess mean? But he still retained enough of the beautiful generousness of youth to feel joy in the thought of giving this girl joy. And he tingled with the romance of an evening with a strange girl in the strange city.

They met at the rear entrance and went close together through the happy, swarming streets. The evening was sharp and cold with greenish skies over the black sky-line

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and the clear gold street-lights over the black silhouettes of the crowd. A smoky red was in the west. Bess shivered in her thin coat. They went into a plushy red dining-room on Broadway and found a corner table. Then they faced each other, smiling excitedly. Looking at her face, he had the illusion then that the city's nights were gathered in her eyes, that all the tremulous beauty that drifted down Broadway through the cañon of fire was caught and made intimate, terribly personal, in this thin, flaming girl. Night had come, and had offered him a woman.

He learned then about herself; how she had come from a poor family in Albany and lived alone on West Nineteenth Street, and the struggle of it.

"There's no use, Kirby," she said. "A girl can't live on six a week. Two goes for room; and out of the four comes clothes and food and fun and doctor and dentist. I've got to walk to work; and I eat ten-cent breakfasts and lunches and spend a quarter for supper. See this hat? It meant a couple of weeks without breakfast. But eating and rent alone come to over five dollars. So I do my own washing."

"Where?"

"Oh, in my room—at night. It takes ages to save up for a pair of shoes."

And yet, thought Kirby, she worked in a very caravansary of luxury; daily she passed up and down among furs and silks, silver and gold, groceries and meats; passed through without touching, but with her heart touching, her heart reaching out and finding that it remained empty, craving hungrily. "Do you blame them?" Marston had asked. At least Kirby could not blame Bess.

They went to a variety show, seated together in the balcony, and now and then she leaned against him. And the glamor of the stage awoke in their hearts an enchantment they shared together.

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The streets were brilliant with pleasure-seekers afoot and the whirl of carriages; the restaurants asked them in, but they went by happily, two lost in an uninhabited wilderness, just two in the sharp night with the stars spangling the heights of blue-black space.

West Nineteenth Street was shoddy, dark, after the radiant avenue. He took her to the doorstep of the cheap red-brick house. Then he paused.

"But you're coming up?" she whispered. Her voice was almost frightened.

In the uncertain rays of the gas-lamp beside him he saw her tremble as she glanced down the gray flagging. Not a soul was in sight up and down the shadows of the street.

"You'll want something to drink," she added.

"All right," he said, and followed. She unlocked the door, and the hall-light flickered; they passed up the creaking stairs to the top floor, and in the darkness she laughed nervously until she found the keyhole of her room. Then she lit the gas, disclosing the shabby room, shabbier than Kirby's, with broken pane of glass and crumbling, broken walls.

"Take the chair," she murmured. "I'll sit on the bed."

He sat down awkwardly. He was unused to sitting in girls' bedrooms, and he felt shy.

Then Bess began humming, got on her knees, leaned under the bed, and drew forth a bottle. Kirby felt a chill tingle along his spine.

"What's that?" he asked. "Whisky?"

"No—it's a cocktail—ready mixed."

He almost choked.

"Oh, none for me."

"Really? Come," she coaxed, "just a little."

"No. Not a drop."

She gazed up at him, her lips parted, her eyes glistening. She was still on her knees.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't know."

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She rose, then, as if bidding him good night; and he rose, too.

“Good night,” he said, taking her hand.

Her fingers clasped his and held them. They stood close together.

“But you go with me to-morrow, Kirby?”

“Yes—yes,” he murmured.

“Good night.”

His heart ached; and then she leaned, drew him close, and kissed him.

“Good night, Bess!” he said, chokingly.

And out he went. He heard her dull sob as he went down the stairs. Out in the street he walked as if he were a somnambulist. It seemed as if the city had been a woman taking off layer after layer of her clothing until now she stood half naked.

“So this is life,” thought Kirby.

It was a sober, almost a sanctified young man who went to bed on Twenty-sixth Street that night.

And the next night he seemed to see the city entirely nude. For Bess took him to a dance-hall on Eighth Avenue—spangled, glittering Eighth Avenue, with its saloons and halls and cheap shops gleaming like an imitation Broadway, a jewel of paste, and the young girls passing in their made-up beauty like ten-dollar-a-week imitations of the pictures of society women in the papers. Here in candy-shops youth was drinking ice-cream soda, and in the shadows of the street a boy's arm went round a girl's shoulder, and the urge of the race became audible in laughter and twining speech.

The dance-hall was a flight up, and very large. Several hundred crowded it—shop and factory girls, clerks and young salesmen and factory hands. A small orchestra played the lilting street tunes of the day, and there was the sway of the two-step and the waltz. Kirby could not dance well; he did the best he could, however, for Bess.

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Liquor went about freely, served on side-tables; but Kirby kept to soft drinks, though Bess had a cocktail.

Then toward midnight a change came over the dancers: the music grew more exciting, the steps flew faster, and a new dance began.

"That's the 'Shivers,'" said Bess. "Come on, I'll show you." Her voice had changed; instead of being timid and sweet, it now was brazen and loud.

He started down the floor with her and then said he wanted to watch. Bess flew off with another man. Kirby was disgusted with the dance, which seemed vulgar, but it gave way to another called the "Nigger," and this to a third; and Kirby stood rooted to the spot, aghast, hardly believing his eyes. A riot of dancing began; the music was working on the raw nerves of these drudges, these who had drudged all day until their cravings were fierce and unquenchable and who needed burning stimulants to refresh them; and so they danced until they got "inside" the music and gave way to its frenzy. Girls fainted, others seemed in a trance, there were voices sounding unspeakable things, and then in the pandemonium scenes of naked shame. It was like the religious rites of a savage tribe, an elemental sex dance.

Kirby got a glimpse of a transformed Bess, a wild little panther, drunken and bacchantic, and he stumbled down the stairs into the clean air.

He felt a little crazed. So this was civilization, he thought, this that drove human beings into horrible savagery! And this was life! The last vestige of his innocence seemed swept away, the last remnant of his youth. Now, surely, his eyes were open; he saw the thing from top to bottom, the mad, fantastic beast-struggle that seems respectable in the busy streets.

"Now I know the real New York," he said to himself again.

Yet the real New York slept sweetly in several million rooms, and on the morrow would arise refreshed and

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swarm to work, the men to the mills and offices, the women to the kitchens and the markets, and the little children crowding at the gates of the democratic school—the children pressing against the gates of light. In their faces was the real New York. Kirby, surely, had merely seen New York of the night.

But his soul was outraged. He could have wept for the lost innocence of the world. And he knew then that his job was unendurable. Yet in a little while he, too, would sink with these submerged creatures; he, too, a victim of the long, dull day, the crushing pacing of the treadmill.

The next morning he sought Mr. Spiegel.

“Do you think,” he asked, “there is really a future for me here?”

“Do you?” asked Mr. Spiegel.

“I don’t know.”

“Well, to tell you the truth,” said the other, “for a young man of ability and ambition there’s not much ahead. I’ll be frank with you. You might in eight or nine years be a floor-walker; in fifteen or twenty a buyer. You’re quite right. I can see you’re up to something bigger.”

So Kirby resigned on the spot, got his hat and coat, went down the front elevator, and mingled with the hatted crowd, again a free American citizen. He was glowing with happiness.

“I’m jobless again, thank God!”

But he was not the same Kirby that entered Marshall’s on Monday morning.

VII

AN EVENING WITH LADIES

KIRBY now grew painfully thin; he went around with jaw set, unsmiling, and gray eyes haunted and tragic. "Gee! he's the regular magic kid," said Cissie Clay, to the elderly translator. "Now you see him, now you don't; up and down, sweet and sour, proud and humble. First I thought he was homesick; then I thought he struck oil; then I knew he was looking for a job. But now—jilted, or I'm one bad guesser. He's Mystery; and my heart is his!"

Miss Peck listened attentively. They were sitting in the brocade-covered parlor after supper—Cissie Clay shining over the whole sofa with her superb thirty-eight-inch bust and Miss Peck shrinking on a rocker, a tiny woman with large moon-face and thin, gray hair.

"You think, then," said Miss Peck, "that it's unrequited love?"

"Sure," said Cissie, who liked plain English—"the go-by, the cold shoulder, the Broadway stare, the nix-kid, the wrong number. Well, I'd black his shoes for him and wash his face and comb his hair—did you ever see such hair on a man, Miss Peck?—and get good cookery for him—all for love. Lord, those gray lights of his!"

"Unrequited love," sighed Miss Peck. "Who's that in the hall?"

It was a young man looking for his rubbers under the hat-rack. Miss Peck arose and went out.

"Are you looking for something, Mr. Trask?"

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"Rubbers," muttered Kirby.

"You're not going out in this rain?" she said, sympathetically.

"I don't know," he mumbled.

"Mr. Trask!" She leaned near. "Do come up—I want to read something to you."

He wanted desperately to say no, but he was in that critical, emotional condition where a "no" would sound like a bull blowing a bad temper through his nose; he could not trust himself to say it. So he followed her meekly up the stairs.

Kirby was beginning to be unhinged by the officious kindness of the boarders; their stupid bungling merely made him lonelier. And as for glib Marston, he and Kirby spoke not to each other. Marston was deeply offended, for Kirby had actually left the job which Marston had provided for him. So, thought Kirby, that ends Marston. It was simply unearthly the way people in New York leaped from nothingness into flesh and blood, stirred one up, and vanished—a city of ghosts. The salesman on the sleeper was no more; Si was gone; Marston was in the very act of disappearing; and Bess and Mary, where were they? These two young women, who in the space of a few days had overmastered his spirit with profound joy and grief.

Most of the night before he had lain staring at the silvery play of the street-light on his ceiling, the faint luminousness in the lost room, too aroused to sleep, too shocked to desire rest. It was as if surgery were being performed upon him, some vivisector sharply knifing youth out of his heart. His mind was full of echoes of the Old Testament—vanity, vanity, the vale of tears, a world of perdition and sin. He lay on the midnight bed breathing with pain beneath the hidden procession of the stars, earth under him passing on in the rank and file of the army of eternity. For his young man's heart had still the purity to ache in his breast with the tragedy of

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Bess—the tragedy of young, budding beauty smirched and broken, of youth with its rich possibilities wrecked in our swift industrialism.

Over that dance of Bacchantes, that dance that seemed to go footing on at the base of his brain, rose only one face of untroubled sweetness, the face of Mary Watts; and for the first time Kirby was puzzled by that ancient injustice that crushes a Bess and shelters a Mary. Thinking, he sickened of the city; he yearned with homesickness. It seemed as if he must die if he found no quiet hand to soothe him, no hushed voice to pour peace into his heart. That was it; no one here understood him.

And so the boarding-house began to seem very hateful to him. This heavy-handed kindness bruised when what he needed was healing. And his money was dwindling, and there was no hope of work. He was surely in a desperate plight.

How, then, could he face Miss Peck and say no to her without storming? What he desired was to go raging up and down the house driving the amazed boarders before him.

Miss Peck had a rear room on the third floor. She turned up the gas over a kitchen table white with manuscripts, and then confronted the miserable young man.

"Sit down," she said, softly, and then, drawing from the table a huge bundle of papers tied with a pink ribbon, she heaved a sigh of sadness. "Do you know, Mr. Trask, you're the first young man I've read this to."

Not knowing what was coming, Kirby clutched the arms of his chair and tried to smile. Miss Peck untied the bundle, straightened the papers.

"It's my epic," she said, breathlessly.

Kirby stared at her.

"On India—'Kalam of India,'" she continued. "My life-work—fifty thousand lines in blank verse."

The blood rushed to Kirby's head. What was she up to now? Somehow the pathos escaped him; at least he

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did not know that a thousand shabby New York boarding-houses served as dusty pigeon-holes for countless masterpieces—tragedies, novels, epics—writ in heart's blood by pitiable incapables. There was Miss Peck fading before him, after years of seeing India in blank verse, toiling alone at her kitchen table to add dust to dust; and all that Kirby saw was a tedious old maid suddenly become terrific.

She glanced at him knowingly, and spoke under her breath.

"It's on unrequited love, Mr. Trask." Then she rose. "This is the prologue:

Bombay, the slumberous city by the sea,
Bombay, with towers and turrets in the sun."

Kirby's mind soon grew blanker than the verse, save that he was aware of quite a bombardment of Bombays. This was impossible; his heart was breaking.

"Do you care for it?" he heard, and he grew ruthless.

"Yes, and thank you for reading it! Thank you very much!"

And he stalked out. He was simply starved for lack of some one to confide in, some human being who vibrated with him and could release the white passion of his heart.

He hurried down the dim-lit hall to the upward-curving stairway, but the front-room door was, as always, half open, and he met the gray eyes of Mrs. Waverley.

"Is that Mr. Trask?" she asked.

Her voice had the magic Southern lilt, like little waters purling over stones in sunlight. Its charm pervaded him, and in a flash he remembered how this woman had been quietly watching him.

"Yes, it's I," he said.

She laughed softly.

"Come in—do."

He entered. A folding-bed stood closed against one

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wall, covered with drapery, and to fight off the chill a little gas-stove burned cheerfully beside the unused grate. The room was exceptionally neat and cozy, charged with "atmosphere," with vital personality. The furniture, too, seemed very comfortable.

Beside a center-table on which stood a reading-lamp, Mrs. Waverley sat in a rocker, a book on her lap. The lamp-light and the little flare from the stove both played upon her, softening her. Kirby noticed for the first time that she wore glasses, but her gray eyes shone through so liquidly that they seemed mere shadows.

"You must pay me a little visit," she said. Again he was aware that her voice was gentle and low and cool, and he felt as if scales were dropping from him. "Draw up that arm-chair; it will just fit you."

His lips quivered as he sank deep in the cushions, close to her. Then he heard the rain slashing the windows and felt warm and snug.

She smiled.

"We out-of-town people ought to get to know each other. I have to read in the evening—for lack of company. And that's not easy after a day of teaching and correcting papers."

A feeling of ease began to soften him. Then she looked up at him, her clear eyes resting on his, and he knew that she read him through and that she understood. He vaguely smiled back; and for the first time in New York the unconscious intimacy of home returned to him. He could tell this woman all; she knew.

"You've been looking for work, haven't you?"

"Yes," he murmured.

"And found none?"

Tears of self-pity dimmed his eyes.

"I worked three days at Marshall's."

She laughed softly.

"That was hardly the place for you, was it?"

The idea of this stocky-headed young man cramping

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his nebulous volcanic temperament into a department store was diverting. He caught the lovely amusement of it all, and now genuinely smiled.

"I could have blown up the place!" he said.

"Indeed!" she laughed. "You're quite capable of that! But have you tried Atwood's?"

"No. Who are they?"

She arose and fetched the morning paper, then opened it to the advertising pages. Then she smiled at him.

"It sounds too American to be anything but a fraud. But I know a young man who got work through them. Here it is: 'Atwood's, Brain Brokers. We Find the Right Man for the Right Job. Are You Hiring Brains? Come to Us.' Isn't that delightful?"

He laughed with pleasure.

"What must I do?"

"Well," she said, "there's a five-dollar fee, and then a percentage of the first year's salary. But it's worth trying, isn't it?"

He noticed then her delicate hands and the wedding-ring on the left, and the fact that she was a widow and yet remained clear-eyed and strong-fibered affected him profoundly. All his inmost thoughts found expression, for he knew then that she would understand the worst in him as she divined the best in him. He told her of his migration from the West, his hunt for work, his evening at the Watts', his job at Marshall's, and glanced even with delicate slants at the experience with Bess.

It was nearly midnight when he finished, and he felt then as if he had cleansed the wounds that were festering within him.

"It's not a bad start," she said. "You've got to know life somehow. Now there's just one thing to do, I take it. Get what work you can to tide you over, give you a basis of livelihood, and grope your way to something else."

They rose, and she drew near and placed her hands on his shoulders.

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"Kirby," she said, simply, "I'm glad you came."

His voice was almost inaudible.

"So am I."

They stood so a moment, and her gentle spirit seemed to envelop him like a spring rain-cloud; he felt the sweetest joy faintly stirring through him. Her alien and exotic charm had not been spoiled by the city; it seemed to retain something of sunny woodland and silent meadow. He felt caught up in arms that caressed, in a spirit that released his own and set him free.

"Good night!"

"Good night!"

She laughed again, and he turned and went up. Long and healing sleep came to him.

VIII

THE BRAIN-BROKERS

OVERNIGHT the rain changed to sleet, and the next morning the pavements were coated with thin ice and the world was dark. Kirby boarded a lighted car that seemed to bump deeper and deeper into a brown dinginess of shadow-lost buildings. Getting off at Duane Street he found Broadway sluffing and slipping by, horses falling in the gutter, and umbrellas zigzagging over curveting forms. He pushed his way into the twelve-story Miller Building, treading over the muddy shoe-prints on the marble floor, and took the elevator to the fourth story.

Opening a door marked "Atwood's" he immediately found himself running a gantlet of young American braves. For the entrance-hall, lighted, was lined on either side by bright young men who took his measure visibly and audibly; as, pulling a neighbor's sleeve, "Soft!" or, heads together, "Looks easy," or, addressed to space, "Green." Kirby was depressed. By the time a brisk boy stopped him at the end of the corridor he was nervously on edge.

"Write yer name on this slip."

Kirby did so.

"Hold still a minute; I'll fix yer."

In thirty seconds a private-office door was opened for him, and he stepped into the electric-lit presence of a Mr. Cobb, a smart and fiery interviewer. He seemed full of springs, as if he could leap up and down with smiling strenuosity.

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"Bad morning, Mr.—ah—ah"—he consulted the information slip—"Trask. You show the proper enterprise in venturing out in such weather." He pounded the desk emphatically with his fist. "It spells Success. Big Business is looking for Push and Pluck. For Brain and Brawn. The Get-There-and-Get-Back Booster. If you are the right sort we can help you; if not, you are wasting your time here."

Now Kirby knew that Mr. Cobb was pulling the usual string of pearls from his conjuror's mouth, and yet he began to flush with excitement. Suddenly Mr. Cobb eyed him and sprang, as it were, upon him.

"What's *your* specialty?"

"I've been a reporter."

Mr. Cobb seized a pencil and made entries.

"Where?"

"Trent, Iowa."

"Oh, new here?"

"Yes."

"College graduate?"

"Trent Academy."

"References?"

Kirby spoke nervously.

"I have a letter from the head of the academy, and from the editor of the paper, and from the head of our First National Bank."

"Good. Very good. You must put these in our possession. Now what are you looking for? Remember that Big Business can get cheap help—all it wants; but Big Business depends for its continuance and expansion on Brains, and Brains are at a premium, Mr.—ah—ah—Trask. It is our business to find the Brains, to put the right Man in the right Place. What is *your* place?"

"Something with a future; I'd be willing to start on twelve a week."

"You don't know shorthand, do you?"

"No."

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"A pity, Mr. Trask. I have a rare opening; a private secretaryship to J. J. Harrington. You know J. J., don't you?"

Of course everybody knew J. J., for *Harrington's Magazine* was the first in a new field—the popular ten-cent monthly. This was Mr. Cobb's star play, to dazzle the new-comer, for J. J.'s secretaries lasted about a month, the demand was perpetual, and Mr. Cobb never lacked a rare opening for his young men. Kirby was impressed. He nodded.

"A great American," continued Mr. Cobb, "one of the chiefs of our commerce. Not only the proprietor of the most popular magazine in the United States, but head of the New Storage Battery Street Car Company and the Harmon Airship Company. He is growing like a tropical plant, and the young man who associates himself with J. J. Harrington to-day will be a Captain of Industry to-morrow—if he has Brains and Applies Himself! Too bad you aren't a stenographer. Oh, well! Perhaps something else. We have openings in every direction." And just as Kirby got vistas of gigantic industrialism with step-ladders to the top lofts the contract was pushed under his nose. "Sign here," said Mr. Cobb.

It seemed a privilege to sign away ten per cent. of the first year's salary and to pay the five-dollar fee. Whereupon Kirby was ushered into the hall and told to wait, that he might not miss the Opportunity when it came along.

So he took his place among the young men, and doggedly he held it till lunch-time, and then after lunch until the office-boy briskly put him out.

"Say, you, there's nothing doing. Gee! some folks is regular plants."

Two more such days followed, and he began to glow with anger. Thrice he asked for Mr. Cobb and was told bruskiy that Mr. Cobb was busy; and, finally, waylaying him in the hall at lunch-time, Kirby was met with an indignant stare and a sharp:

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“You surprise me. Patience, young man, patience.”

He began to have a feeling that he had been duped, that the brain-brokers had been chiefly concerned in getting the five-dollar fee and had no intention of finding a place for him. For not only was there a palpable scarcity of jobs, but all the opportunities went to quite a different type of young men. Once again Kirby felt almost a class-difference in clothes and manners. For these others were the Ready-Made Young Men, the youth of the land who heeded the uplifted forefinger of the Captain of Industry in the advertisement, “You Can Succeed”; they had about them an air of success, the alert eye and the strenuous manner, the polished shoes and fresh shirt, the shaved face and the close-cut hair. Their brisk exteriors seemed to be saying: “See, we are subservient, ready, bright, cheerful; we believe in ‘Smile,’ ‘Do it now,’ ‘I’m a-hustling,’ ‘Nothing succeeds like the appearance of success.’” Who could resist these products of the commercial school and the correspondence course—these cheerful Americans?

Yet Kirby found, through chance words with this man and that, that many of these fellows kept bobbing up every few months with the same eternal smile, after being fired from place after place—bright failures that briskly made a circuit of the low places, shedding an empty radiance on an office and failing with a cheer that made their exits like promotions. Thin Kirby and a stout young man named Latham sat there like dark spots on the sun while these brilliant evanescent flames played about them.

Luckily a great snow-storm swept the city on the third afternoon; and these young men, thinking that nothing could develop, stayed at home. Kirby was quite alone in the hall, desolated by the blind rush of snowflakes on the windows.

All at once Mr. Cobb appeared, glancing eagerly. His gaze rested on Kirby with exasperated disappointment,

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and he went back to his office. A moment later he re-appeared, desperately scratching his head.

"Say," he began, "there's a hurry call here. You're not just the man—but, say, it's a clerk job down the Continental Express Company, Broadway, below Wall. Say, how about making a bluff at it?"

Kirby rose stiffly, his hands nervously eager to throttle the brain-broker.

"What does it pay?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Oh, ask twelve to start. Here's the slip. 'Phone if you get it. If you don't, say account the storm we're short, but to-morrow we'll send 'em a crackerjack."

Kirby thought to himself, "I'll get that job to spite you," and went out into the whirling whiteness of Broadway. But few people were on the street, bumping each other in their hurry. The great snow-sweeper went rasping along the car-tracks, blowing clouds of snow like a buffalo snorting in the dust; truckmen sat aloft their trucks in oil-suits; the shop windows were white with mist and stringy with clots. The winds lifted at the corners, piling the snow in drifts, and Kirby had hard footing down the long stretch to Wall Street. There where the skyscrapers looked down on the dwarfed steeple of Trinity Church, as if our modern industrial civilization here showed that it had outgrown the creed of two thousand years, snow was blowing about the graves; and Kirby, glancing through the iron fencing, felt that his own great hopes were buried with the dead.

A little further on, between two tall modern towers, stood the express company's five-story building, old, brownstone, faded, but brilliantly gas-lit. Kirby tramped over the sawdust of the first floor and climbed the tall stairway to the third floor.

He pushed open a dim glass door and entered a middle office, with dark air-shaft and gas-jets burning. Steam-heat bubbled joyously from a radiator, and the room

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smelt strongly of mop and the brown slop-water of the scrubwomen. An old clerk was seated next the door.

"I want to see Mr. Bradsley," said Kirby.

The old clerk ran his pen through his white hair and spoke in a piping voice.

"Through that door there."

Kirby opened a door into a large rear room. Fifty men were standing or sitting at desks, each beneath a shaded electric-bulb, scratching at ledgers and sheets of paper; and in the corner, beside the snow-dimmed pane, sat the chief clerk, dominating all. Kirby approached him.

Bradsley was a big, bluff, half-drunken man, with large mustaches dirty at the ends; egg and ink spots were on his cheap coat; and he had a soft and rotund belly—like an exaggerated gnome astride a beer-barrel. Bradsley was jovial; he took the slip, bade Kirby be seated.

"Ever clerked before?" His voice seemed foggy with liquor, and Kirby got an alcoholic whiff.

Then Kirby lied cheerfully, being now somewhat seasoned in trade.

"Oh yes, I clerked on a newspaper in Iowa."

Bradsley's eyes lit up.

"Iowa, hey? You hail from there?"

"Yes."

"What town?"

"Trent."

"God damn it, do you know Clayton Jones there?"

Kirby felt a thrill of apprehension; his lie might find him out.

"Yes," he murmured.

"Man, he's my wife's second cousin! And I—why, I come from Ames. Welcome, fellow Westerner!"

Kirby was engaged on the spot, and finished out the day at a standing-desk, with a high stool, in the office he had first entered. His duty was to transcribe figures in red ink from one ledger to another, and his salary was twelve

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to begin. He felt thankful and at the same time triumphant. He telephoned Mr. Cobb:

"I secured the position easily."

"Amazing," said the resilient brain-broker. "It's a Start in Life. You can pay us the sixty dollars commission cash, or we'll take a six-per-cent. note for sixty days."

The last word was decidedly with the brain-broker.

A gong sounded at five, and at once like the heart that fails a thousand pens dropped from hands in the five floors of the building, a hum of gaiety hit the walls of the hall and rebounded up and down the corridors and the stairs, and Kirby was part of a downward-dropping cascade of human jocularly. He felt gay, triumphant, secure. Little voices sang in his ear: "Now you're in at last. Now you have a warm berth. Now you can live. No more hunting; no more underworld. You belong. New York absorbs you."

He went out, a five-foot-nine slip of the resistless crowd. The heavens were clearing, letting through a waning moon that peered crookedly over the black top of a skyscraper, a ragged silver passing by; and the people went hardening the snow beneath them and loosing a mist of breath up through the lamp-light. Kirby wedged into the jammed car, warm with human beings, and it was wonderful to know himself alive.

Standing there, his gray eyes sparkling among the warm faces, he passed with the car through a momentous half-hour of life. Now the wonder of the work-freed city going home was his; he had crept inside; he had been accepted at last and had his place; supper waited for him and the freedom of the night, and no toil till the morrow. A weight of worry was lifted from his mind. It was as if for weeks he had been battering despairingly at the gates of the city, and that now the gates had opened and he had entered.

Descending at Twenty-sixth Street, he hurried west, almost sprinting. The march of men and women under

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the lights suggested comrades; were they not all hastening to the arms of the women or the faces of the children? He saw the glow in kitchen and parlor window, and he loved the busy evening life—happy stir at stoves, bright circles of the tables. It now belonged to him.

Excitedly he climbed the stairs. The door of the third-floor front was open, and in the rocker, lamp-flooded, sat Mrs. Waverley. She looked up eagerly. She saw his bright face. Her own lit up.

"Yes," he cried, with a deep burst of feeling, "I've got it!"

"A job?"

"Twelve a week—Continental Express Company—clerking."

It was glorious to have some one waiting to hear this.

"Oh, good!" she cried, and rose from the rocker. "Kirby," she said, "we've got to celebrate!"

So they went out and had an amazing table d'hôte dinner in a West Twenty-fifth Street Italian restaurant, sixty cents apiece, with red or white wine, and a glittering rush of food—oysters and soup, perfect rectangles carved by some uncanny process from curved fishes, slices of beef, halves of spring chicken, withered salad sprinkled with suspicious-looking dressing, ice-cream and demi-tasse of coffee. They ate straight through with deliberate joy, and the wine warmed them on. All about them sat a queer people: the emptyings of studios whose waking seemed to come with the night—young men and women morbidly absorbed in each other; all those whom need only has shunted away from steep-priced Fifth Avenue.

And back in Mrs. Waverley's room they sat late, dilating on the future. And when Kirby got up to go Mrs. Waverley took his hand in both of hers and said:

"You've started in now, and, oh, I expect much of you." (How like what Janice had said; how different in its implications with the morrow's work hanging over his head!) "The job's not your size, Kirby—we'll neither of us forget

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that. But it's a start; you've gotten in. Now stay in, and feel your way to something better. You're going to do it, aren't you?"

His eyes glistened; his voice deepened.

"I am," he said, and hurried to his room. Before lighting the gas he glanced out at the levels of snow, the lined window-sills, and, over all, the drop of the jagged moon, silver among the bristling stars. Then, breathing deep of happiness, he turned back, flooded the room with light, and did a dramatic and significant thing—he set his alarm-clock for seven. Without knowing it, by that small action he brought to an end his initiation into that civilization that centers in New York; by that he irrevocably merged himself with the life of the city. He had become one of the drudges.

IX

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KIRBY became part of a new routine now—it was: up at seven; breakfast at seven-thirty; the ride in the packed cars at eight; the march into the express building with a thousand other men at eight-thirty; and then the long day. At first he rebelled; the hours were intolerable, the childish work unendurable; he would slip from high stool to floor and on again, with the back of his head aware of the clock on the wall. He would pause to dream or to sharpen pencils. He would pour out his troubles to Mrs. Waverley in the evening. But gradually he accepted his lot, and found his work so mechanical that he could trust it to his hands and leave his mind free for day-dreaming. It was as if the smooth belting of business had taken him on like a grain of dust and had traveled along over the wheels with easy and endless stride, bearing him round and round with the dropping days on and on to the end of his life.

The job was petty, and hence his gradual acceptance of it was perilous. For accepted pettiness always made Kirby indifferent and listless, quenched his ambition, stopped his growth. He was really in danger of being a clerk all his life.

Nothing stirred him; not Mrs. Waverley, not the memory of what Trent expected of him, not his glowing expectations of greatness through Jordan Watts. In a way he accepted Bradsley's favorite phrase: "Time heals all wounds." Time had certainly healed his wounded

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pride. He had become a mere unit among the millions of drudges, and he came and went dully. It was as if his spirit slept within him.

Mrs. Waverley would say "Kirby, are you looking around you? Do you hear of nothing?"

"Oh," he would reply, nonchalantly, "something will come my way."

He had no faith in this, however, but he didn't care. All came to death in the end; why should he strive? There seemed no reason for ambition. During the year he was raised to fifteen dollars a week, and now he felt independent, able to keep decently clothed, housed, fed, and amused; why should he break up this easy security? He knew only too well the bitterness of being an outsider. He would never be one again. In fact, he now was in a mental state equivalent to that of his last two years in Trent—careless and indolent activity with no thought of the future. His appearance changed again; more neatness in clothes and manners, less life in the eyes, and no large emotions. A certain exterior hardening now showed, as if he were acquiring a protective shell. He was exactly like thousands of other young men in New York.

The months passed. Spring came with Sunday excursions with Marston, and sometimes with Mrs. Waverley; summer followed, with Mrs. Waverley gone back to Kentucky for a vacation; dull days, hot nights, during which Kirby learned to dissipate with one of his fellow-clerks; autumn and Mrs. Waverley returned together. There was only the two-weeks break of his vacation, and this he spent in Asbury Park, loafing on the sands and bathing in the sea. And all this time Kirby was learning to know New York, her seasonal moods—winter, when she was keen and cold, gemming her white forehead with stars; spring, when she pinned wild roses on her bosom and breathed with restless sweetness down her cool alleys; summer, when her eyes glistened with ardent midnight passion and her hair glimmered with the lightnings and the northern

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lights; autumn, when she seemed to swing to and fro in the gale, tossing up and catching reddened leaves, her cheeks flushed, and singing her children back to work. And all the time the great sea stirring in her heart. Kirby began to know it all and accept it as he accepted his work. It was one of the commonplaces of his life. He did not see the crowds with thousands of eyes passing him; no spectacles of gigantic enterprise suggested a city hung in the skies. He had worn down a few pathways through the city, and kept to these, shuttling from home to work and back again and threading his favorite section of Broadway.

However, several events flashed out like scarlet in the gray procession of the days. Late one winter afternoon Bradsley sent him on an errand to the basement. This was the shipping-department, with platforms stacked with boxes and crates, opening out on the lower rear street to the west of Broadway; the huge express wagons backed into this, the steaming horses stood blanketed, and there the bitter, husky drivers sweated and lifted and shoved and cursed in the winter gloom under the warm offices. Passing through he saw that these great out-door fellows glanced at him contemptuously, as if they scorned clerks, and he felt subtly that scratching mechanically with a pen might not be man-size work. It was a glimpse into a different world—the world of hard labor, of severe poverty; the world of mine and mill and the city street, where the dangerous and dirty work of civilization is done. Under his light and sheltered work were these bitter, dark foundations. It gave him a few days of uneasiness.

Of a different sort was another event. It was the beginning of the Mary myth. For, glancing through the picture supplement of a Sunday paper, he found a page of "Rich Women in Settlement Work"; among them was a poorly reproduced photograph of Mary. This he cut out and kept in his pocketbook and often surreptitiously while he clerked, and nearly every night before retiring,

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he took this out and wove a myth about it. He used the faded picture as a model from which his mind painted *woman*. Mary's beauty thus increased from day to day, till she was a creature of witchery and grace, the dream of ardent loveliness that haunted him. He thought of her coming into the office by some divine accident and glancing at him with tender pity and wistfulness; or, walking in Central Park when the long line of carriages sweeps up and down loaded with the filled gowns of the city, he expected to see her eyes lift and gaze yearningly into his own. Or perchance late at night he would pass up Fifth Avenue and see fire darting from a window of the Watts mansion; whereupon he would scale the wall, smash a pane of glass, dash through the dead house crying "Mary! Mary!" find her lying unconscious on the floor, and bear her through smoke and flame to the cheer-ringing street. He had, of course, no faith that he would ever get to know her; she was worlds away; but was it not exquisitely pathetic to live in a state of thwarted love? Of course, he really thought this was love, whereas it was the idle dream of an idle young man.

And the worst of it was that he actually did come across her. Passing the department stores on West Twenty-third Street one free Saturday afternoon he was opposite Stern's when a carriage stopped and Mary glided over the sidewalk and vanished among the shoppers. He saw her distinctly, and the shock was ghastly. After the Mary of his imagination she was rudely plain-faced and almost vulgarly flesh and blood. From then on the Mary myth waned.

And so he worked, a clerk among clerks, keeping to himself, making few friends. The other clerks paid little attention to him: they thought him a little unpleasant; they felt a temperamental difference that jarred on their worldliness:

There were, however, in the same office two clerks of a different sort, father and son, the Fergusons—Old and

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Young Ferg, as they were called. Old Ferg, white-haired and nearly sixty, sat next the door; his son Edward sat beside him. Edward was a silent, lanky fellow, stoop-shouldered with years of desk-work. His face was muscular in its leanness, his eyes a sad brown, his hair stiffly hung over his high, narrow forehead. And this sad clerk was a mystery that arrested Kirby's attention now and then, but he made no effort to meet him.

Edward's secret was that he only lived when he went away on his two-weeks' vacation. There was something untamed and savage in his nature, something akin to the instinct of honking geese in autumn skies; the keen, outdoor freshness that animals seem to lap up; the flavor of berries or sea-winds or sun on pine-needles. He desired to be a cell in the wild nerve of nature, sharing every sting and thrill of the life of earth. To put such a man in the city was to make him acutely self-conscious, repressed, shy. It was hard for him to speak a whole sentence straight to another human being. He was really a wild-hearted creature caught in the web of industrialism.

Naturally he felt drawn to silent, emotional Kirby; there were points where the characters of both met. But Edward was ordinarily so shy, so deep in his rut, that he could not make the effort to break into a new relationship. However, deep in the autumn, coming back from two weeks of hunting in the Canadian wilderness, he was brown, and his eyes had some of the light of a wild animal; he walked with free stride; he carried a spaciousness of atmosphere; he smelt gloriously of sunburn and the woods.

Kirby was just hanging hat and coat in the wardrobe when Edward came in.

"Back again," he said, gaily. "Back in the mill."

His free spirit was infectious.

"Where have you been?" asked Kirby.

"Canada—hunting moose." And his lips seemed loosened. He told crisply of his experience.

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Kirby was powerfully drawn, released some of his locked-up magnetism, and as a result they went to lunch together.

"Well, at least," said Edward, "I don't live in a boarding-house. It's no place for a human being. The food is like our jobs—rut stuff."

Kirby laughed.

"Where do you live?"

"In a place you never heard of—Nestwood, just outside the city. I tell you what," he said, gaily, "suppose you come up and have a real home meal for a change—come to-night. Frances will be delighted to see a new face."

So that evening, a perfect evening of autumn, they went out into the soft light, with the people all about them swimming, as it were, at the bottom of a sky-well of floating peace, bright and busy life throbbing on the earth in harvest-time, and took the Third Avenue Elevated up through the city and over the gray level of the Harlem River, and on through the new and half-built Bronx. Then at 177th Street a crosstown car to Jerome Avenue, and the trolley there north to its lonely terminus at the city limits—242d Street—passing through open country and the silent color-splashed woods of upper Van Cortlandt Park.

The cool breath of the woods, the odors of damp earth and withering leaves, the sight of shadowy wood-aisles that were balm to stone-encompassed city eyes, the immense quiet after the noise of down-town, brought sweet and deep emotions to Kirby. He breathed larger, the pressure of life relaxed, and he felt an innocent happiness. Then, stepping off the car onto the dirt road, he saw the hill-perched suburb rising beyond the woods, little frame houses half lost in trees, and the rectangular blocks with their little paved gutters and glistening street-lamps.

They cut across an empty lot, brushing through dusty richness of aster and goldenrod and bramble, and Edward

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pointed to the neat green two-family house, with its upper and lower porch, standing over the gutter at the end of the path. A giant oak-tree shadowed it from the back; through the high heavens floated crimson and golden cloud, and the sun spilled a ruddy splendor from the west on house and tree and glistening blade of grass. Kirby was amazed by the profundity and richness of his emotions, and wondered why in this hush of beauty the blue curling smoke of a chimney brought tears to his eyes. It was Earth, whose passion and dream and warm soil had created and sustained him, Earth taking him back, sap of her sap. And it was harvest, the rich profusion of the life that flowers out over the wild breast of Nature. Kirby's deepest instincts vibrated to this; he felt elemental, as if his roots reached down deep in the passionate ground beneath him. He seemed to have come to a paradise.

Edward unlocked the front door, and then pushed the bell-button of the second floor, and at once at the dark top of the stairs a shadowy form appeared.

"Edward—you?"

Kirby was struck by the passionate quality of the voice.

"Yes." Edward began to ascend, and spoke awkwardly. "I've brought some one home to supper, Fran."

"To supper?" Amazement, almost anger, was in the tone. "But I didn't expect any one."

"Oh, Mr. Trask will take pot-luck." Edward tried to put it lightly.

"He'll have to," she said, with some asperity. "No, don't kiss me."

She stepped back swiftly into the warm-lit shadowy dining-room; Edward followed; and Kirby, abashed, astounded, blushing with angry embarrassment, emerged behind him.

Edward spoke with annoyed impatience.

"This is Mr. Trask, Frances."

"Oh, good evening," she said, coldly.

Kirby nodded. And Edward had said that Frances

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would be glad to see a new face! How would she act if she were sorry? Lord, what a firebrand!

She turned to Edward again.

"Did you bring my crochet-needle?"

"No," he said, guiltily; "I forgot."

"Naturally"—her voice was cuttingly sarcastic— and here I am shut up at the end of the world!"

Her candor before a stranger was almost uncanny. She stepped back in the light then, and Kirby saw that she was not tall, but she was lissome, able-bodied, with dark, thin face very expressive at the eyes and lips. He began to feel a poignant fascination: and she was a powerful hater, which meant that she was also a powerful lover. At any rate, she could never be indifferent, never be uninteresting.

She broke the painful hush with a snap.

"Well, I may as well get supper!"

And out she went in a savage, impulsive way into the lighted rear kitchen. The two men stepped out on the upper porch and saw Earth fading in warm twilight, with the lighted cars passing on Jerome Avenue and a dog swiftly stirring through the lost goldenrod of the empty lot. They were speechless with guilty discomposure.

Then Edward said, awkwardly:

"I'm sorry—she'll soon come round."

"Oh, I shouldn't have come," Kirby replied.

"Supper!" they heard her call, and came back and took their places. But already a change had come over her; Kirby noticed that she wore a sprig of goldenrod in her hair and a little sparkling necklace round her throat. These had not been there before, and might have been a token of truce, for she was full of excited animation. Gracefully she waited on the men, passing to and from the kitchen; and when she sat under the low radiance she seemed to delight in cross-questioning Kirby, in drawing out his history, in getting his opinions on New York and the express job. Kirby felt as if she were casting a spell

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on him; he, too, grew unusually communicative, and talked with buoyant gaiety.

He got a clue to the fact that this passionate woman was childless, that she saw little of her husband, and that only when he was tired with work; that she had some of Edward's native savagery; and that, shut away in this lonesome suburb, she smoldered, an intense rebel, ready to explode.

"Yes," she said, "it's a dog's life up here. I don't care what people say; I know it's a shameful thing, but, oh, I want money, *money*; I want luxury and servants and—everything. I could kill Edward sometimes," she laughed, "for being a clerk!"

Edward looked sad and thoughtful, whereupon she came round and smacked his face maliciously.

They went into the parlor and settled down on the old horsehair furniture.

"Aren't they hideous?" she cried. "They're a wedding present from Edward's parents. I *hate* them. Some day I'll—but, you'll see!"

"Oh, come now, Fran!" murmured Edward.

"Oh, you think it isn't in me—but it is. I'm a dangerous woman, Mr. Trask. He doesn't know me any more than he knows—Latin."

Edward released a disc on the phonograph, and the sweet, tragic notes of "Aida" shook the frame house. Kirby watched Frances. She sat leaning forward, her face on her two fists, and in her eyes and quivering lips some dream, perhaps, as of Vikings stealing women. Yes, there was something of the Norse in her.

"Now, I don't want any more music," she said. "I want to talk."

She talked with Kirby, and he told wryly of the discomforts of boarding-house life.

"Why, that's worse than here," she said. "I once did it myself, and I know. Why don't you come and live with us? We have an extra room, and the money would

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help, and you and Ed could go to work together and come back together. I mean it. I'm not joking. Come and see the room."

Edward heartily seconded this, for he felt that Kirby would freshen Frances and keep her out of her morbid moods. It would disperse her loneliness. He showed Kirby the large neat room off the dining-room which contrasted vividly with the Twenty-sixth Street place; and when Kirby stood at the door, ready to go, Frances gripped his hand hard, with a final:

"It's the thing to do—for all of us!"

Edward took him to the car, and treading blindly through the lot, lost in the charm of this place, with its immense spread of starry skies, its balmy silence, its sweet odors, and the little music of wind in the grasses and the far woods, Kirby felt that it would be heavenly to live here. Besides he felt stirred by Frances as by great, clashing music.

The ride was long back into the human-pulsing city, which to-night seemed over-bright and crassly spangled, like a woman of the streets, bold and impudent. It was nearly midnight when Kirby climbed up through the boarding-house. Mrs. Waverley was still sitting up, so he stepped in a moment.

"You look happy to-night!" she said.

"I am, Aunt Annie," he laughed. And then he told her of the visit and the offer of bed and board. And Mrs. Waverley thought: "I shall miss him badly, but it may be best for him. They'll keep him home nights." For she was worried by his night habits, as she was worried by his listless indifference to his future.

"I'd go, Kirby," she said. "Try it, anyway."

"I will, Aunt Annie!"

Her eyes gleamed at him fondly.

"Oh, Kirby," she sighed, "when will I ever get to understand you?"

He lay awake late in the night thinking of Edward's strange wife.

X

FRANCES

FOR a while, after moving up to Nestwood, Kirby seemed each night to go back to some far-off pastoral ancestry. The autumnal torches of the wood were waved by the wind against the conflagration of the sunset, and in the circle of singing fire the house stood hushed among the goldenrods and asters, its windows shining, and a dark woman leaning over the upper porch and watching, watching. Homing birds darkened the upper skies; belated songsters twittered in the ghost atmosphere; some dog barked; chimneys smoked; and the human being seemed to open and feel the warm flow of Earth's multitudinous life. After the pent-in clash of down-town, the commuting toilers came into the easy, undulant rhythms of peace.

Then, in the dark dining-room, they sat out the last of the light, two tired men waited on by the woman who emerged and vanished, a shadow in the shadows. The simplicity and hush of such life seemed ancient as the Earth. When their food disappeared in dusk, light blazed for them, with amazing reality of shining faces; and then there was the evening in the sitting-room. Frances sewed, Edward opened a book on American pioneers, and Kirby sat watching the woman and now and then speaking low with her.

However, the excited animation of that first night did not return to her; she seemed perpetually bleak and desperate. Her burst of interest in Kirby had evidently

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passed, and he became as another lay figure in the furniture of her life. She often spoke with bitterness. One morning, just as Kirby and Edward stood at the door ready to go, she suddenly turned from the window, crossed the room in a strange, impulsive way, almost dancing savagely, flung her arms about her husband's neck, kissed him, and then drew back her head and exclaimed, fiercely:

"My God! Why doesn't it thrill me any more when you put your arms around me?"

Edward was startled; he smiled grimly. Then gently he released himself.

"I've got to hurry, Fran!"

"I wish," she said, tearfully, "your old building would *burn up!*"

But Edward, too, had swiftly changed. The liquid freshness of his Canadian outing had faded; day by day he sank deeper into the rut of the years, and became at last again the shy, ego-centric clerk, tragically sad. He found it hard to be pleasant with Kirby, the choke of tragedy in his throat incessantly making him abrupt. Nor was there much to say; both shared the same life—a life that offered no surprises, no changes, and, hence, no need of discussion and planning. And Kirby found that Edward had been a clerk for eleven years.

It seemed that when Edward was fourteen his father had bought him his first pair of long trousers, and the awkward lad by merely plunging his thin legs into cylinders of cloth had veritably stepped into manhood. He became a wage-earner, clerking with a steamship company till he was seventeen, and then going into the express-company office with his father. And so for eleven years a wild-hearted creature had struggled feebly with one foot in a trap.

His marriage had but enmeshed him the more. At twenty-one, with a salary of twenty dollars a week, the highest he could hope for in years, he had felt powerfully

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that he should not marry. Marriage meant narrowing life into a cheap flat, and no children; for an industrial civilization that keyed up the standards of life in sanitation and comfort and pleasure, and at the same time grudgingly paid its servitors the least possible wage, seemed to make childlessness for many imperative.

He had not wanted to marry; but one day, in a cheap restaurant, he had met Frances, a girl alone in the city, and the acquaintanceship had flamed into passion, and, despite his rebellious struggling, the elemental drive of love had forced him on, just as the pressure of the city had pushed him into his clerkship. Naturally the romance faded in the suburban two-family house, and the barren wife of the ill-paid clerk had become a thwarted, desperate woman. She was bitter, full of an intense apathy, hateful of herself and the stupid neighbors and the lonesome suburb, sometimes hateful of her husband, a leashed menace.

So, as the rich autumn despoiled itself, flung its riches to the dust, and grew nakedly aged and wintry, and all the country-side was bare, Kirby lost the pleasure of home-coming; now a chill settled on his spirit, and he felt as if he were going out to something dead and forlorn. He grew restless in the long evenings, and wanted again the sparkling laughter of excited Broadway, the pagan abandon of the New York night life. He felt, as he put it, as if he would jump out of his skin.

Yet, nevertheless, he could not bring himself to the breaking-point. The spell of Frances persisted—the spell of a witch that drew him morbidly to her. He could easily imagine the eruption of lava and smoke and flame that would ensue from some passionate precipitation. And such an event would whirl him into a madness of passion and love that he had never before experienced; this woman had it in her to be a terrible lover, ready to ruin herself and the world for an enchanted hour.

Sometimes, and especially when she was listening to

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music, he saw the promise in her eyes. Sometimes she seemed to gaze at him as if she were planning an escape through him. His heart beat hard, and he was flushed with swiftened blood.

Yet the routine went on, as if endlessly. And this routine was hardest to bear on Sundays. On that day the bell of the alarm-clock was mute; all slept late, and arose yawning with an extra fatigue; breakfast was slipshod; and then Kirby and Frances and Edward settled down on the horsehair furniture and passed several pounds of Sunday newspaper to each other. There was the comic supplement, with its dreary primary-colored repetitions of horse-play; the magazine section, with its quarter-page headings of "Scientist Claims He Has Triumphed Over Death," "This Heiress Left Millions for a Coachman's Love," "Does Your Heart Ever Feel as if Needles Were Darting Through? Read This," "Vivisector Baring a Monkey's Brain"—a riot of brash sensationalism that gave dull throbs of excitement to dusty hearts. And so they read themselves stupid, and arose yawning, in their Sunday best, and took the car to the city. This car was crowded with consciously appeared folk stupid with the same Sunday process, and they had the fussily dressed and tearful children with them to give an air of restlessness.

The city seemed queerly dead—traffic stopped, the streets hushed in Sabbath; and one might feel the unnerving of millions of people who had nothing to do. The lower city was uncanny, undressed; the tall buildings empty; the streets bared.

Thus they crossed the Bridge and penetrated to the mean back street of Brooklyn where Edward's father lived. It was a tiny frame house; and there was the stout mother and the flabby unmarried sister.

Dull greetings passed, and they sat down to the inevitable dinner—a heavy soup, a two-rib roast, a vegetable like cauliflower or spinach, and pudding or ice-cream. Used

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to light lunches, all felt the enervation of a full dinner, and at once scattered over the house, stretched on bed and lounge, and slept heavily for an hour.

Then came the long ride back through the forlorn, darkening city. Only supper brought relief; by very reaction the splash of gay light, the spread of cold meats and cheese and pickles, brought a wild joyousness.

The only fresh note in these Sunday excursions as the winter deepened was an outburst of complaints from Old Ferg. He was nearly sixty, and had clerked for forty-four years—a whole lifetime. Now, after decades of soundness, he began to ail, to complain of pains in his heart. The stout mother urged him to see a doctor, and Old Ferg's opinion was that "once you start with doctors you're done for."

Every other Thursday Edward got notice of the meeting of his lodge, but he never went. However, one Thursday evening toward the end of November, he decided to go. As a result, for the first time Kirby and Frances were left alone with each other.

It was a startling night; a great wind blew crazily around the house, making it tremble and creak; the night was loud with clash of boughs and the shrill cries of the gale; and so the front sitting-room seemed to bubble with warmth, a glowing and hushed heart in the storm.

So when they heard the front door slam they stepped back from the hall, acutely aware that they were shut in together. For several hours now they would be alone, and the wild night whirled around them like a scarf winding them close.

"Did you close the door?" asked Frances. The strangeness of her voice thrilled him.

"Yes. It's shut tight."

"Br-r-r!" she said, "I'm chilly!"

She stepped into the sitting-room and passed over to the radiator. Warmth rose from it in visible waves. She stood, her hands held over it, her lissome body erect.

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From the center-table the Welsbach lamp threw an intense underlight on empty rocker and Morris chair. The Morris chair was directly against the table, where Edward could get illumination for reading; the rocker faced it.

Kirby paused near the table, looking at her, and suddenly she turned, and he seemed to see that light of the first night flashing in her eyes, as if again she was dreaming of Vikings stealing women—yes, as if she longed for such brutal manhood, such savage mating.

And he remembered a bit out of Norse mythology, the galloping through the air of the Valkyrs on their black horses bearing the slain warriors to Valhalla. It was as if in the whistling wind outside they passed on the wild last ride, the breastplated women, speared, with streaming hair under their helmets, bearing the dead to the North.

“What a night!” he murmured.

“I like it—I love it!” she said, savagely. “It’s big—it’s splendid. That’s the way I’d like to live—not this way!”

Then Kirby felt as if a beautiful peril were overwhelming him, for she advanced slowly toward the table, put a hand on it, leaned a little, and mused.

Neither spoke for a space, but stood with heads in shadow and their hands staring with light. The walls seemed to shake with sudden buffets of wind, the windows rattled, and Kirby felt his head getting hot.

Then all at once she looked up at him.

“How old are you, Kirby?”

He spoke under his breath, almost stammering.

“Twenty-five.”

“Have you ever loved a woman?”

His heart shook like the walls. He could hardly set his lips for speech.

“No—not exactly.”

“I wonder if you really could—but, no,” she said, pas-

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sionately, "men don't know how to love—they don't know how!" Her voice changed. "Go and see if the door is shut."

He tried to smile.

"It is."

"Go and see, anyhow."

He went out; when he returned she stood with her sewing in her hands.

"Are you going to sew?" he asked.

She glanced down at rocker and Morris chair.

"No. I'm not going to sit there to-night. For I've sat there with him until—"

She broke off, musing. He had come very close, and now she lifted eyes that were full of a wild dreaming.

"Twenty-five," she said, hauntingly. "And never loved a woman." The sewing dropped from her hands, and she stood as if waiting for some terrible great deed, as if she watched Kirby to see if he belonged to the Vikings. Blasts of wind seemed to rock the house, and their lonely contact was an exquisite agony.

He reached slowly, inevitably, took her hands, drew her round. Then, remembering Janice on the campus, he reached and kissed her forehead. Whereupon, amazingly, she seized his head in her hands, lifted it, and kissed him on the lips.

"Frances!" he cried.

But she had slipped away and stood looking at him with tremulous bitterness.

"I wanted," she said, with her brutal candor, "to see if it thrilled me."

He was aghast and frozen at this revelation of cold-bloodedness.

"And it—" he began.

"No," she said, with wonderful tenderness. "I'm a fool, Kirby, a fool of a woman. I've treated you badly. I'm going to bed, but, oh"—she sighed—"I just had to see!"

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She left him standing there speechless, shocked out of his illusions, almost remorseful; for at last the sane thought came to him that perhaps it was not the noblest thing in the world to lend himself to the breaking-up of a friend's home. He was astounded to think how he had slipped into this entanglement; and he went to bed, sobered, resolved to return to the city.

Yet he stayed on, and the house became more desolate than ever. Frances now paid no attention to him; she seemed to be in a fearful trance; and Kirby felt that just as her woman's body was barren, so was the house and their hearts and minds. He began to be a little afraid of her; the air was charged with the oncoming of some terrible event. It was probably this feeling of being caught in a Greek tragedy that kept him from leaving; it was as if he had to see it out.

On the evening of the ninth of December, a cold and windy night, Kirby and Edward stepped off the car at the terminal at quarter to seven. There had been a block on the line. They stepped silently over the road to the little eminence of the empty lot, and then stopped.

"That's strange," said Edward.

In the center of the lot a great bonfire roared, scattering sparks. Almost in terror they stepped forward and saw, on the burning heap, the horsehair sofa of the sitting-room.

"Good God!" gasped Edward. "It's Frances!"

And then they were struck stock still by the wild sight in the December evening, the leaping flames, and the sudden revealing of a woman new to them—a wild creature, crouching, hair loosened in wind, flame-lit eyes dilated, lips parted—living as she hadn't lived for years.

They felt as if their bodies were in the fire as they came up.

"But *that* is our furniture," said Edward, mechanically. It was too astounding to believe.

"I couldn't stand them any longer, Eddy," she cried,

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fiercely, and yet with strange exultation: "I've seen them too long."

And he could not be angered, for he understood; she was burning up the barren years.

And it seemed to Kirby that evening that Edward found his wife newly beautiful and alluring; a fresh passion went into their tamed love—a gust of joy. Like the mirth of Christmas morning, which is partly the strangeness of a green tree and the glitter of lights in over-familiar surroundings, so bringing the miracle of new environment, was the mirth of these three forced to sit in the dining-room because the parlor was utterly empty, looking, as Frances put it, as if the flat's six rooms were teeth and one of them had been pulled out. And she told with excited laughter how she had come to her sudden decision, how she had called up Olsen, the Swede, from the floor below; how she had forced the trembling man to lug the furniture, piece by piece, into the empty lot, where, against his terrified protests, she had set fire to the heap.

Kirby sat watching her like a pupil being taught about life. Was she human? For to the young man the spectacle of the fire and its reaction on this stale couple crashed through all his experience and his traditions. It was unimaginable; it made life fantastic.

But it was as a brand lighting luridly the submerged depths of his mind, so that he was forced to look inward. With that fierce flame beating in, he lay awake long that night; inklings of startling truth came to him. The life of the treadmill, dream-led adventurous human nature harnessed for too long a time, led to just this. For eleven years Edward had clerked. In ten more years Kirby, too, might be such a thwarted soul. Sharply he knew, then, that he was a failure, and he felt that for the first time he began really to see himself and his work. For nearly a year he had been in a strange trance; but now his eyes were open, and he decided on the morrow to look with clear

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vision on the trap that held him. For trap it was; Frances might burn furniture, but what did that avail her? Her husband's salary was still twenty a week, and there was no future and no escape. Kirby's year of indolence was being shaken out of him.

XI

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IF anything, Edward and Frances felt more bitter than usual in the morning, but it was a tender bitterness, shot through by a gentler regard for each other. The worst of it was that they would have to tell the family about the destruction of the wedding gift; and such a recital to people who had no adventure in them would rob the event of its beauty—make it a sordid and ugly, even a wicked thing. Then there was the cost of new furniture; perhaps enough savings to jeopardize Edward's next vacation. And then, worse yet, the fire had lit up the tragedy of their lives, so that they had to look it in the face; this made it all the harder to go on, yet there was nothing to do, no escape. It would be folly to leave a position that paid more than he could hope for elsewhere, and in the cold of the morning—they heard wagon-wheels whistling in the ruts, and the sound of it set their teeth on edge—they seemed, if anything, in a harder predicament than before. For previously they had tried to fool themselves; now the truth was in each other's eyes, and they had to live with it. And not only the truth of their home life; that whole day Edward saw his environment with a new and stabbing vividness.

But the dark winter morning began in the most ordinary way. Olsen had not yet started the hot-water heater, and when, at six-twenty, the alarm-clock went off and Edward snatched it from the chair beside him and stuffed it under his pillow, Frances slipped out savagely

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on a floor that burned like ice and into air that was freezingly bitter.

"I'll light the stove," she gasped, inserting her naked feet into slippers and hustling on a pink wrapper. "Now, Ed, don't fall asleep."

She dashed from the room which gave directly into the kitchen, and stood with teeth clicking as she lit the stove. Kirby was already in the bath-room, shaved, and nearly dressed when Edward slipped in, gray with fatigue.

"Cold," said Kirby. He looked at Edward's face sharply; he, too, was awake and aware this morning.

They heard Frances muttering "Br-r-r! I think it's colder in here than outdoors."

Edward took out his shaving apparatus; the clear water was burning cold. Frances appeared in the doorway.

"The milk's frozen—look."

She held up the bottle, from the neck of which the frozen cream protruded like a jack-in-the-box.

"I'll heat some water for you, Ed."

He felt too bitter to speak.

"Haven't time!" he muttered. "Get the breakfast."

A little later, facing the naked and uncannily cold sitting-room, they drank hot coffee and ate hot oatmeal. Not a word was said. Then, in the creaking silence, the radiator began to thump.

"I suppose," thought Frances, "the letter-carrier 'll get here around noon, and nothing else will happen to-day. Lord, I'll die again of the excitement."

They rose, and while the men muffled their throats and got on coat and hat she strode to the window, shuddering.

"This place," she thought, "looks worse than ever; it's as lonesome as a toothache."

She breathed on the frosted pane, rubbed a spot clear, and peered through on the shabby hill-perched suburb—the mean, poverty-stricken frame houses, the narrow lamp-lit streets, the naked trees.

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"Nothing but dogs here," she thought—"human or the other kind."

The men now stood at the door, and she suddenly turned, glided over, reached, and kissed her husband.

"Good-by," she murmured, with despairing sadness. "Good-by."

He was, she thought, with a pang, exceedingly good to her. Not one complaint over her wild, unnatural deed. And he looked so shabby and hopeless.

He smiled sadly, and then he and Kirby went down the stairs and cut across the empty lot, avoiding little patches of ice, in a wintry gray world still spotted with street-lights. But they could not avoid the ashes and charred wood, the heap huddled like freezing beggars keeping each other warm, a foot of a chair, the blackened sofa-frame, the runners of the rocker where Frances had sewed night after night, and bits of upholstery and little scattered and matted lumps of horsehair. To Edward it was his inner life lying before him.

They hurried by, speechless. A lighted car was waiting at the lonely terminal on Jerome Avenue, and the motor-man and conductor were inside, with shut doors, swinging their arms and dancing up and down. The two got in, but likewise were too cold to sit.

They stood moodily passing weather words with the conductor down a twenty-minute stretch of bleak Bronx bareness. Laborers got on, numbers brought the illusion of warmth, but at 177th Street they had to change cars, waiting six long minutes at the open corner for the trolley to bear them crosstown. Then at Third Avenue they purchased newspapers and climbed to the Elevated station, and in the warm and crowded car they tried to relax and to read the news as they were borne past thousands of people eating breakfast.

They got off at Hanover Square, emerging suddenly small in the bottom of that high region of skyscrapers. Broadway was still gray and cruelly wind-swept, and a

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crowd of stenographers and clerks hurried along the pavements and into the doorways. And they noticed with new vividness the brilliant gas-lit building and felt like cogs clicking back into a machine as they joined the throng of men that tramped across the sawdust of the first floor and up the tall stairs.

As ever, they pushed open the dim glass door and entered the middle office, its air-shaft window reflecting the burning gas-jets. As ever, the steam-heat bubbled joyously from the radiator, and the room smelt strongly of mop and brown slop-water. And they took off coat and hat, carefully placed them in the wooden wardrobe, pulled out their keys, unlocked their desks. And Kirby sat down, glancing about, his mind scratched by every one of these little facts; but Edward stood in a dream.

One fierce thought was uppermost in Edward's mind; he had gone through this whole morning process for exactly eleven years, day after dull day, just as precise and unfailing as his alarm-clock; and he hated it, he now knew, with all his heart and soul. He *hated it*.

And he knew, more than ever, that he only lived two weeks out of the year. For fifty weeks he was a machine; for two fierce summer weeks he was that mystery—*himself*. That strange fellow who discarded linen collar, polished shoes, necktie, and all decency and went, in corduroy and woolen, gun in hand, a free man in the Canadian wilderness—a silent man, with nostrils breathing balsam, with heart leaping, tracking the moose in trails beyond the lights, where a newspaper's best use was to wrap up a cold lunch, where a clerk ceased to be an ink-stained cipher and became a careless god for whom the earth and the heavens were spread.

The anemic, smart-dressed young fellows could never have divined the wild streak in Young Ferg. They disliked his silence, being very voluble themselves. In fact, a group of these undersized and flabby young men now entered, quenching cigarettes against the desks, striking

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folded-arm and leg-crossed attitudes toward each other, and with nimble gaiety passing wit on the Big Three of Clerkdom—gambling, whisky, and women.

“Gee! but she was a pippin—how about it?”

“Did y’ hear? Brant’s got in bad on B. & F. margin. The loan-shark for him!”

“Here comes Bradsley; drunk again!”

And this was a fact, for Bradsley came in jovially, foggy and groggy with liquor.

“’Lo, Ferg,” he said, groping past the dreaming clerk. “How’s yer dad?”

“Not down yet!” muttered Edward.

But just then Edward’s father came in, in his light, tripping way, hopping almost like a bird, with head cocked to one side, a dry, dry little man, threadbare, with little grizzled beard and fluffy white hair, and pulpy, colorless face. His bright, small eyes were bloodshot; he had a nervous habit of rubbing his hands together, hands ineradicably stained with record-ink.

Openly Edward tolerated his father; secretly this morning he despised him. “He has the soul of a slave, he’s a cog. Eleven years,” he thought, darkly, “I’ve been like him—but he’s been at it forty-four.”

And suddenly he saw himself clerking on and on for thirty-three more years and gradually turning into this dry little thing, his skull stuffed with tariff schedules, his fingers black with ink, running his pen through his hair, whenever he was puzzled, till his scalp itched. Why, having squeezed all the humanness out of himself, had his father forced Edward at fourteen to go clerking likewise? Poor automaton, thought Edward, bitterly, so meagerly educated that he plopped at every stranger this revelation of genius in the family:

“I have a daughter, sir, who can play things right off—by ear!”

They called him Old Ferg; he was a fixture in the business; he would be here to-day, to-morrow, and then again

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on Monday morning. Carefully reaching his coat over a nail, he turned to Edward and spoke perfunctorily.

"How's Frances?"

"Oh, all right!"

But Edward's temples began to throb; he had half a mind to tell his father immediately of the fire and have it over with. How should he word it? how give sane expression to such a bewildering event? And, as he stood bursting with vague speech, he saw again those wild flames lighting up not only the tragedy of his life, but revealing a new Frances. His heart grew small in his breast; he was cruelly realizing, as never before, what it meant to Frances to remain barren, to stay childless, to have an empty house and vacant heart—to brood all day over a discontented clerk who did not thrill her when he kissed her. But, he asked himself for the millionth time, how could they have children on a salary of twenty dollars a week? And the one solution seemed impossible. How could he give up his two weeks' hunting-trip—that is, how could he give up his real *life*?

Marcellus, the Spanish clerk, once confided to him how his wife had broken her health by ridding herself of the unborn; yet Marcellus deemed it wise to smoke a certain domestic brand of ten-cent cigar "to keep up with the bunch" and be a "sport." Was the hunting-trip more justifiable?

Then he noticed his father opening his desk, and decided that he could not tell the impossible news now. Instead he remembered family courtesy.

"How are the folks?" he asked.

Old Ferg spoke lightly:

"Mother expects you and Frances and Mr. Trask over Sunday to dinner, as usual, but she told me to tell you she's ordered a two-rib roast. *She's* all right, but I guess I'm a bit upset."

"What's the matter?" asked Edward, carelessly, sitting down and pulling out a bunch of printed tariff sheets.

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"Pain in the back of my head and in my heart."

Edward had heard this so often of late that he paid no attention. But Kirby, forced to listen, turned round now and looked, as if for the first time, at the white-haired father. He had just seated himself, a large ledger open at his right, loose sheets at his left, and a blotter spread before him. This blotter, Kirby noticed, was simply crusted with ink-spots. The old clerk set a pen between his teeth, then suddenly grabbed it, struck it into the well, lifted it, slung off a flash of ink on the blotter, leaned to the right, and wrote. Each dip in the ink-well repeated this process. The machine, thought Kirby, which had run smoothly for years and would doubtless run on for years more, had begun its day's work. Kirby felt an intolerable pity for this man, and for Edward, and for these others, and for himself. Acutely he saw the life of clerks.

Now a gong sounded; idle clerks scurried to desks, hands arranged papers, and over all the five floors of the building an army of pen-points began the march of their measureless routine across the clock-paced hours. Inevitable this: a host of grown men submitting to child's work long-drawn-out, work that wore the nerves raw, so that at night they craved strong drink, the game of chance, and the dive-net woman.

Edward, more than Kirby, knew why they did it, even as he knew why he did it. The public schools had made them too respectable for manual work and unfit for anything else. That was it! Genteel! genteel! That was the word that directed their lives, that kept them from sinking into the working class, down among the people who are honestly poor, who make no pretense of prosperity, that made them cling like a faded fringe to the dust-dragged skirt of the middle class. A faded fringe, with manicured nails, shaved and perfumed face, smart clothes, a "flat," not a "tenement," and a general veneer to hide their bitter poverty. What was the future

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for them? Look at Old Ferg at sixty getting forty dollars a week!

An icy sleet smote the rear windows behind Bradsley's desk, wind howled down the air-shaft, but the steam bubbled through the radiator-valve; and Edward and his father, side by side, worlds apart, and Kirby and the dim others, toiled busily in the ever-increasing warmth. Illimitable time seemed to engulf them, broken only—at ten-thirty—by cheerful Howard, secretary to the traffic-manager, a robust young Westerner. He tapped Old Ferg on the shoulder.

“What should the rate on fourth class be, Chitiwa to Greensdale?”

Old Ferg leaped up, still the automaton, thumbing off each phrase on his right-hand fingers:

“*If*,” Kirby heard, dimly, “the rate from Chitiwa to Paxley is forty-three cents, then Chitiwa to Greensdale ought to be forty-five. The Interstate Commerce Commission—”

It seemed endless, but at last Howard went, and illimitable time engulfed them again.

The sleet smote, the radiator bubbled, the pens scratched. Then queerly, without warning, there came a hitch, as if an earthquake had swallowed the building. It was only Old Ferg uttering one syllable, but it held something so startlingly intimate and unbusiness-like that Edward felt the blood leave his cheeks. His father had merely cried low:

“*Ed!*”

He wheeled, looked sharply. The pen dropped from his father's hand, and slowly the wizened clerk crumpled in his chair, face purple. The convulsed hands seized the chair-arms. Edward felt his own feet harnessed to the floor; he could not rise for a moment.

“What's happened?” he muttered. “Look—look out!”

He expected his father to go into convulsions, and tried to hold him back with words. The old clerk gasped:

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"My head—fetch me home, Eddy."

The "Eddy" brought an unexpected bitter sob to Edward's throat. Clenching his fists, he leaped up, confused. And a thrill went subtly over the third floor; the human drama halted the army of pen-points; clerks began to rise here and there; there was a crowding-in, a startled whispering, exultant and fearful: "It's Old Ferg! He's got a stroke!" Kirby looked up, half-crazed with a strange delight; but only half-drunken Bradsley acted, first forcing a pocket-flask between the clenched teeth, then sending Marcellus to 'phone for a taxicab.

The flabby faces suddenly became intensely human, tariffs and schedules were struck underfoot, and a lovely girdle of grief and exaltation was put about the old clerk. It was all "Eddy, get him home; Eddy, get a specialist; Eddy, this and that."

The silent son had taken on new manhood in that place.

Old Ferg smiled back at their eager remarks: "How d'yer feel? Better, eh? You're all right! It'll soon pass! See you Monday!" But they did not fool him. As four lifted him up, "Good-by," he murmured. "Good-by."

In a flash his meaning to the office became apparent—the fact that he was the future of these young men, that this was life for them. Some of them cried strangely as he was borne away. The machine had run down after forty-four years of service. Old Ferg's clerkship was over.

As the taxi fled up the skyscraper-cañon and over Brooklyn Bridge, softly bumping, sleet streaking and dimming the windows, and the icy wind breathing sharply through the door cracks, Edward held his father in his arms, Kirby sat opposite in the strange gloom, and none of them spoke. Pity and love for the poor thing swelled the son's heart. What a life! What an end to it all! This poor worn-out drudge, whose grizzled beard tickled

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his fingers. What was it all for? Just that tariffs and schedules in intricate thousands might die in that head? Poor, worn-out clerk!

They were in Brooklyn. Up the mean back street in the tiny frame house the stout mother, the unmarried sister who played tunes right off, were waiting. The wheels grated against the curb, the chauffeur, dripping ice, jerked the door open, and sleet fell with his words.

"Want to come quick!"

Swiftly they bore him, slipping on icy pavement, and up ice-sheathed steps. The chauffeur rang the bell. They waited, and the stricken man groaned, and Edward felt faint, for the door opened on a crack; it was his mother.

"Mother, dad—" he began.

"*John!*" she shrieked.

Kirby sat in the cold parlor for hours, now exalted, now feeling stunned. It was unbelievable that this thing had happened; the mystery of events overwhelmed him. For a year he had sat in a seemingly endless routine, and now at once an earthquake-upheaval had changed life into something exciting, dramatic, wonderful. And last night there was the fire! By what coincidence could two such catastrophes come to one family overnight? Were there prearranged miracles in the world? Or was this life, a smoldering in a family for years, breaking out now here, now there, at the moment of combustion? How lucky that Edward had said nothing to his father about the furniture! He was spared that, at any rate! But what would come of all this? Did it not mean merely the pinch harder, the misery keener? What if the old clerk died? At any rate, he, Kirby, was done with such an existence; the world tragedy that underlay its smooth pettiness seemed to explode through his heart.

Several times, chilled to the bone, he decided to slip away; he did not belong here. Yet he felt caught in

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strong currents that bore him against his will. He stayed on; darkness came. Then some sobbing female shuffled along the hall, fumbled, lit the hall gas-jet, and passed on. The light fell across the dingy parlor, and Kirby watched it illuminating the faded pattern of the carpet.

All at once he heard doors opening and shutting and muffled sobbing. For a moment his lips twitched bitterly and his heart overflowed painfully in his breast. Then he heard steps on the stairs. Could it be Edward?

He went out in the hall. Edward was descending; and, looking up, he saw the lean face transformed, lit, the eyes wonderful. A blaze of power was in the features.

"My father is dead," said Edward.

And a sob escaped Kirby; but he did not know then or later what had lit up the lean clerk's face.

It had been a simple, a universal matter. Edward had sat out the afternoon in a dark corner of the dim, familiar, bedroom, with center-jet burning low, double bed and threadbare furniture; and the room had seemed strange and new to him. He sat as if through endless time. The windows shook and rattled, wind whistled in the chimney, and spurts of smoke came through the open register. The doctor had been leaning over the bed. Edward could only see the humped covers over his father's feet. The doctor rose, turned softly, and nodded. Edward knew what it meant. He pulled out his watch and saw the time clearly—it was seven minutes after six. He rose gently and tiptoed across the room.

"Yes," whispered the doctor, "it's over."

"Tell my mother," said Edward, quietly.

The doctor stepped out. Edward was alone. He leaned over the bed. This was his father, and yet not his father; he was amazed that he had felt pity before. Suddenly his heart was lifted with awe and reverence. Whence came this majesty to the face of a common clerk? Was it possible that his wizened father had carried about

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with him, under schedules and ink-stains, something marvelous and benign? Had his son never known him? Was there not something great in an old clerk slipping away from his desk and the measured hours to go on this impossibly wild adventure?

He looked, he leaned, he touched dry lips to the cold forehead, and he cried softly like a lonely child.

Yet even then an odd exultation began to rise in his heart. . . . If this is the fate of man: to break loose from all things, and risk all on the tremendous peril of the Unknown, why wait till death to do it?

Through slanting sleet, over the black lot, and toward lonely street-lamps and the lights of Olsen's house, Kirby and Edward made their way; and Edward was brimmed with the excitement of bearing great news.

"Oh, Fran," he thought, "you'll open your eyes at this!"

They tramped up the stoop, stamped on the mat, opened the lower door, climbed the steps. She heard them coming, flung wide the upper door, and cried:

"You're late, Ed!"

Her dark, pale face in the half-light was passionate with relief.

"Yes," he said, quietly, "but I've got something to tell you."

"*What is it?*" she snapped, sensing something tremendous in his tone.

"It's father—"

"*Father?*" She had expected something else.

He almost smiled.

"Got a stroke."

"And now—now?" Her voice thrilled with a sort of tragic pleasure. After months of gray days, at last something red and bleeding. What though it was tragic?

Then to Edward's amazement and Kirby's—and hers—Edward gave a lurch forward, buried his head on her shoulder, and sobbed hoarsely.

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"Dead, Frances—he's dead!"

She hugged him convulsively, her throat choking her. She helped him into the warm dining-room. Then he turned, seized her, whispered, strangely:

"Frances."

"Yes?"

"I'm not going to wait till I die."

"Eddy," she cried, "what do you mean?"

They stared at each other, exultation in their eyes. Again he saw the woman who crouched over the flaming furniture.

"You mean"—she was breathless—"we'll—leave *here*—go *West*?"

"Yes—lumbering, anything—man's work."

And so eleven years and a barren future were set on fire and sent blazing to the four winds. . . . For they had learned from death to take risks.

And Kirby saw all, heard all. Like a great knife slashing, his bonds were cut; he was free; power filled him. He was human, and before a mighty deed he became mighty. He could have laughed and cried with joy, for he was done with drudgery.



"YOU MEAN WE'LL—LEAVE HERE—GO WEST?"

XII

ALTERCATION WITH A LADY

KIRBY had a vivid dream that night. He was on the sleeper again, coming to New York, and the traveling salesman was saying:

“Wonderful, ain’t it, how those fellers rose to the top—messenger-boy to millionaire.”

And Kirby, looking out of the window, saw the fire of the steel-mills. And he was thinking over again that those mills might yet flame for him, a night advertisement in the skies of America. His excitement grew tremendous. He saw the great city lying below him in the night, the irregular building-humped darkness showered with glittering lights, miles of lights beating against the vast star-flecked sky. He was to take that teeming metropolis by storm, for Janice had said:

“Kirby, you are going to be a great man. I give you ten years. Even then you’ll only be thirty-four.”

And he went into the dazzling room of the throne, and Mary Watts enfolded him, whispering:

“You are the conqueror of the world.”

He awoke, pulsing with exultation. He leaped out of bed, his whole being crying out for achievement and action. Now he was himself again, powerful with a huge crushing strength and the bull-headedness that broke blindly through opposition. The demon of greatness danced through his brain.

“I know I’ve got it in me,” he told himself. “I could rip up the whole city this morning.”

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And he thought of New York again as a waterspout lifting into the clouds, and he a drop sucked precipitously to the top. Where had he been this whole year? How absurd to accept an easy defeat. Well, he was wiser now, he was older, he knew more of life, he was "onto the ropes"; once again he would plunge in, and, beating down the opposition of others, seize upon power. These other men had as many weaknesses as he; and if he were armed with his will-power, how could they withstand him? He was only twenty-five; he was fresh and new. The moment for action had come.

And the morning seemed to bear out his impulsive anticipations. For when he reached the office he found that he was a popular hero. The third floor mobbed him. A death-notice had appeared in the morning papers, and the clerks divined that Kirby had had the rare luck to be in at the finish.

They surrounded him with funereal gaiety, and his gray eyes flashed, his head was erect, his arms folded.

"Yes," he said, speaking from independent heights to the drudges, "the old man's dead. Died at seven minutes past six. Ed was in with him at the time. No, didn't say a word; fell asleep."

"Well," said Bradsley, with all the grace of half an hour in the company of Scotch whisky, "let's take up a collection, boys, and buy Old Ferg a whopper of a wreath." He waved his hand expressively. "'We Mourn Our Loss'—roses and lilies and forget-me-nots."

In the thrilling silence the company indulged in profound and original thought, which, at last, leaped into utterance:

"We all come to it in the end," said Marcellus.

"Of course," said Bradsley, sagely, "he couldn't expect to live forever."

"At that," murmured another, "sixty years is a lifetime."

A fat round boy spoke:

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"As long as a fellow must die, he couldn't pick an easier way than that. Quick and clean, and no fussing and no rotting."

"Gee!" said another—and everybody concurred in this—"life's a funny thing."

"Wonder who'll get his job!" murmured Marcellus.

But Bradsley sounded the deeper note:

"He was always the same—worked hard, knew his business, never was unkind to a cat. Sober and honest and saving. He was good, was Old Ferg. This place will seem different without him."

And indeed it did. The closed desk, the empty chair gave the dull ache of loss, the tragedy of change. Fantastic mystery engulfed the tariff department, and after the first heartiness of morning, induced by sleep and breakfast, there was a bewildering sense of a wrong world, of an inevitable and cruel process against which the caught soul struggled vainly. Clerking, gambling, dissipating might be petty things, but clerks were marvelous creatures emerging from infinite darkness and passing on to infinite darkness. The brightness of New York was but a flash on the way, as if a starry hand dipped them in the flash and took them out again. Yet they had to go on penning the rate from Chitiwa to Paxley, from Council Bluffs to Deadwood. Did the unillumined Darkness hear their pen-points scratching?

This dull feeling of amputation, this social pain, as it were, threatened Kirby's self-enlargement more than once during the morning; but when the noon gong sounded he buttoned up his jacket, straightened his tie, patted down the wavy hair over the right temple, and went through the crowding clerks to Bradsley's desk.

Bradsley was lighting his noon cigar, half of which he smoked before lunch and half after.

"'Lo, Trask!" he said. Then Kirby's bearing impressed him, and he looked up.

"I've been wanting to tell you something," Kirby

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began. He stopped and blushed. In spite of everything, the moment grew ominously important; he was about to snap the smooth belting of a year.

"Always glad to hear," Bradsley muttered, uneasily.

"You see," blurted Kirby, "I've got to leave here."

Bradsley's forehead wrinkled.

"What do you mean? Leave your job?"

"Yes."

"What's up? Pay too low?"

"Well, no—"

"Got some other job?"

"Not just yet, but—"

"Treated you right, haven't we?"

"Yes."

"No kick coming?"

"No—"

Bradsley leaned toward him, beaming.

"Then don't be a damn fool. You're good for eighteen by spring—latest, fall. Bellows, General Traffic-Manager, started as a clerk. Great chance for the unusual man. Just take another think, eh?"

Kirby's eyes flashed, and he caught his man in the pupils, whereupon Bradsley looked away quickly. Kirby's voice was as decisive as ten-pins dropping.

"No, Mr. Bradsley, I'm leaving."

"Sure," murmured Bradsley, nervously.

It was a test of power. Yes, Kirby had it in him. He rose gaily and went to lunch. He felt now an independence that was delightful. There was something heroic in leaving warm security and plunging into the bitter dark—a sublime foolhardiness; but he was going to do it. With his year's savings—they ran to less than sixty dollars—and with the hard-shelled strength that now seemed his, he felt that he could beat down a hundred Bradsleys.

Effort that afternoon seemed a waste of time, so Kirby didn't over-indulge. He would begin to-morrow morning

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by bullying the Brain-Brokers; they would find that he was not the young man of a year ago. Besides, he himself would advertise; and in the broadcast pen-scratching, which seemed already to have forgotten Old Ferg, whose loss meant merely one pen-point the less, Kirby secretly wrote samples, as:

A Young Man of education and native power who wants a job that is big—the bigger the better—

which words set him dreaming, until he mentally added: "This young man is a born master of men; he craves the chance to swing some big enterprise in the American conquest of the commerce of the world; he wants to organize industry into an Empire of the West." Finally the magic word "Napoleon" came to him. He leaned against the desk, drunk. He saw himself sitting at a mahogany desk in a splendid office, such as the express-company President had; a stenographer sat at his left, a high official at his right; reports and mail were stacked before him; he was telephoning Chicago. On the wall hung a map showing branches of the industry all over the world; and there were photographs of the mills. A hundred thousand men were under his generalship, and he had a power of life and death over these and remote populations.

He could imagine what these clerks would say then—yes, and what Trent would say then. But he would be as inaccessible to these as a star.

He took a down-town supper that night, for he was bound for Mrs. Waverley. He needed to tell some one who would share his vision, and back him with belief. Aunt Annie knew; yes, she alone knew. His supper ran to seventy cents—more than he had ever spent before; and when the waiter wisely brought change of the dollar in dimes, Kirby felt so capitalistic that he waved his hand and said:

"Keep it!"

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Whereupon the waiter helped him on with hat and coat as if he were an invalid.

The night was soft, the air wet with the melting of the snow, and a faint mist went up and gave halos to the lamps. Emerging at Twenty-sixth Street, Kirby found a heavy slush slapping under his rubbers, and upper Broadway was a fairyland of vaporous fire. There was just the beginning of the night stir—glide of cab and the slosh of little feet with skirts held high. After two steady weeks of the suburb he heard again the calling of the women, an added excitement. He was not joyous, he was not happy; it was a spirit of hard triumph and dizzying enterprise. And the city under the mist seemed like a brilliant gem to be fastened in his shirt-front.

The landlady opened the door for him.

"Well!" she said, wiping her red-rimmed eyes with her apron. "You're a stranger. Must be two weeks now."

"Is Mrs. Waverley in?" he asked, with hard excitement.

The abruptness cut her off.

"She's been in a week waiting for you—I guess."

He hurried up the stairs, stepped with manly pounding stride down the hall to the open door.

"Aunt Annie!" he called.

The gas-stove burned at her feet, the lamp at her side, and in the softening radiance she sat, her gray eyes lifting. Relief and happiness were in her voice.

"Kirby?"

He came in; and she rose, taking his hand. She was going to ask him where he had been this fortnight, but she saw his hard, flushed face, his brilliant eyes, his new erectness of carriage. He was a new Kirby.

"Why," she murmured, "what has happened, Kirby?"

"Aunt Annie," he cried, squeezing her hand, "I've chucked my job!"

She felt the tingle of a new excitement.

"Your job? Really?"

"Yes. I'm through. Sit down, and I'll tell you!"

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She sat down with mingled emotions. There was something unpleasant about Kirby this evening; besides, the news was unexpected; and she reflected, too, that he had not thought it worth while to consult with her in advance.

"I suppose," she said, "you've found something else, then."

"No. But I'm going to."

Her heart pained her.

"Then why did you leave?"

He was aware now that she was vaguely displeased; and he thought: "There's the woman of it. Just at the moment I need her most she flunks." It made expression hard.

"Oh, you see, it's like this! You know Old Ferg—Edward's father—well, he got a stroke yesterday and died; and so Ed and his wife are leaving for the West. If they could leave, I could."

Mrs. Waverley looked at him, amazed. He had spoiled his case in the stating of it. All the grandeur behind the last two days was belittled into something sordid. Mrs. Waverley had been told more than once of the old man; this brutal statement of his death shocked her inexpressibly. But she only murmured, with forced tranquillity:

"What has that to do with your leaving?"

"Oh," he said in an off-hand way, "I made up my mind to quit and go out after something big. I'm ripe for it. And I know I can do it."

"But there's nothing in view."

"There will be."

"You tried that a year ago."

"I'm a year older now. I know the game."

"And what sort of a job can you get—with your experience?"

"I don't know."

"Neither," she said, with a strange tremor in her voice, "do I."

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He glanced at her then, and saw that her cheeks were pink, her eyes dangerously flashing. It nettled him; it all came down to the fact that women were unreliable.

Then this gentle woman spoke with an anger that was astounding.

"Kirby, I don't like you when you talk and act this way. It's not like you."

He felt hot all over.

"Does any one expect me to be a drudge all my life? I've got to make a break some time."

"I've told you that right along. But this isn't the way."

"What's the way?" Involuntarily rudeness crept into his voice.

Her eyes grew moist, but she spoke sharply.

"Just as I told you—you must train for something else. You can't expect the world to be anxious to get incompetence and inexperience. You've got to acquire some specialty to lift you above the level of the clerks."

"Edward and his wife—" he began.

"What's good for them," she interrupted, "may not be good for you. Besides, you're not leaving New York; you're just one among thousands of untrained young men."

He winced; she had never spoken before with such directness. It made him angrier.

"And what can I train for?"

"Well, even—why, even shorthand. Didn't you tell me a year ago that if you had known stenography you could have become secretary to Mr. Harrington?"

He started up, plunged his hands into his trousers pockets and walked up and down.

"Oh," he exclaimed, exasperated, "I was green then. There's nothing in it."

"What of it? Many men start that way. It's a handle, at least, to some of the big things."

"Now, when"—he paused—"could I find time for that?"

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“At night. Your work doesn’t tire you, and you might do it instead of—” She was going to add “running around,” but she desisted.

He understood, however, and grew a little pale.

“I gave up my job to-day,” he said, in a hard voice. “So we might as well think of something else.”

She spoke slowly:

“I think you could get it back.”

“Ask Bradsley, after to-day? No; I’m not a beggar.”

She rose then.

“Kirby,” she said, “it’s a big thing to admit you’re wrong when you are wrong.”

“But I’m not wrong.”

Then there was a desperate silence. He could not imagine himself leaving the room without saying good night and shaking her hand. Yet he could not bring himself to do it. He stood there, head high, face hot—a powerful belligerent. She looked at him, and then she suppressed a smile.

“Think it over,” she said, quietly. “Now it’s getting late, and you won’t be home for over an hour. Good night.”

He took her hand limply, tried to say something and failed, stumbly seized on hat and coat, and left. And he felt that he had dealt her a blow in the face, that he had been inexpressibly rude to her. Pride fell clattering around him; dreams of conquest crumbled; he was merely an ordinary fellow who had lost his temper.

And Mrs. Waverley was thinking:

“Goodness, if he ever gets going, nothing will stop him! But I’d be sorry for him and those about him. It would make him monstrous.”

Yet she laughed delightedly, for she remembered how he stood there too high and mighty and too angered to bid her good-by. She was very fond of Kirby. . . .

Kirby, in the mean time, got no further than Broadway. It was only a little after nine, and he remembered a “Guth-

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rie Commercial School" on West Twenty-third Street. He hurried over. The school was on the second floor of the corner building, a plate-glass loft above the flaring shop fronts. He ascended the wooden steps and entered the little office. A girl with a golden pompadour and disconcerting blue eyes looked up from a flat desk.

"Mr. Guthrie in?"

"Do you want to enter the school?"

"I'm inquiring."

"He's dictating in the next room. You can step in and wait for him."

Kirby went in. Five gas-jets burned, the air was stuffy and slightly perfumed with the cheap cologne of the students, and the plate-glass window was misty. At two long board-tables, supported by wooden horses, sat fifteen or sixteen girls and boys on kitchen chairs busily penciling note-books. Often they stuck the pencils in their mouths, and when he entered a phalanx of girl-eyes wheeled round on him. But Mr. Guthrie, walking with long-legged strides up and down the bare floor, never noticed. He was a tall Englishman, with flowing mustaches and mild, blue eyes. His left hand held a watch, and his right a text-book. He was dictating slowly and studying the second-hand.

"HOLBROOK & Co.,

"Indianapolis, Ind.

"GENTLEMEN,—In reply to your favor of the 15th inst., we beg to say that car-load lots of lumber at this season are quoted in the market at an advance of, etc."

At the end of the letter Mr. Guthrie looked up and spoke sadly:

"That was only at the rate of fifty words a minute."

Kirby now noticed that the girls stuck pencils in their artificial hair and that many were strenuously chewing

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gum. They eyed him curiously and gossiped together. He saw, too, on the wall a placard:

On the Great Clock of Time there is but One Word—Now.

And another:

NAPOLEON ON CONFIDENCE

Be happy. Do not allow yourself to be easily affected. Take care of your health. Fear nothing, and never doubt success.

This American optimism made him uneasy. It was getting altogether too commonplace for him.

Then Mr. Guthrie approached him.

“Did you want to see me?”

“Yes—about entering the school.”

Mr. Guthrie turned to his students.

“You can transcribe now.”

They shuffled out noisily, laughing and chatting, and Kirby heard in an adjoining room the immense clatter of typewriting machines. He sat down beside the sad Englishman.

“What are the terms?” he asked.

“Ten a month.”

“And for how long?”

“It depends on you. We have bright pupils who do it in four or five.”

“You get a position for each graduate?”

“Try to. That, too, depends on the pupil. You’ve got to be up to the mark.”

“And when could I begin?”

“Any time. I’ll give you a circular.”

Kirby’s heart had been sinking; now it seemed to drop out of his diaphragm and vanish into an abyss. Clerking was bad enough, but to shut himself in with these gum-chewing, cheap-scented girls and these slangy impudent

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boys was asking too much of him. The pettiness of such dictations, such mass-typewriting! And that afternoon he had imagined the mahogany office and the Napoleonic leadership.

Yet the next morning a haggard young man came humbly to Bradsley.

"Mr. Bradsley," he said, "I made a mistake yesterday. I shouldn't have given up my job. Is it too late to stay?"

Bradsley jumped up and thumped him.

"Glad to hear it. Glad you came to your senses."

And that evening a timid fellow came into Mrs. Waverley's room.

"Aunt Annie," he said, with quivering lips and liquid eyes, "I'm keeping the job, and—I'm going to learn shorthand."

She rose, laughing strangely. She seized his hand in both of hers.

"You've done a big thing, Kirby. And it means you are going to be really a great man."

Joy came to them, fresh, reconciling joy; they overflowed with tender and wistful comradeship. And Kirby never forgot her words.

XIII

THE SLOW WAY

FOUR or five months, Guthrie had said. But when Kirby asked for a diploma at the end of the fourth the sad Englishman laid a hand on his shoulder.

"But, my dear boy, you're not fit yet. I couldn't possibly send you out for another month."

At the expiration of the fifth he heard the same news, and so at the end of the sixth. He grew suspicious, he felt that Guthrie was making money out of him; but he needed a diploma. It was autumn before he got it.

These months were a burden to him. He now loathed his clerkship with the same bitter intensity that Edward had shown; it was a daily torture. He could only scratch away savagely, sustained by a feeling that in ten days or a couple of weeks he would be free. And he became irritable and bad-tempered, an impatient, growling young man. The other clerks began to fear him, especially after one hot morning. Bradsley had not yet come; but Tom, Bradsley's big athletic son, was sitting at his desk, and the fifty others lounged near. As Kirby passed the desk Tom muttered audibly:

"Trask would be all right if he didn't have a swelled head."

Kirby turned on him and thundered:

"Get up, and I'll beat you."

Tom arose with alacrity, and in a second they were at it all over the floor, knocking down stools, dislodging clerks. Then Kirby closed in bull-headedly and knocked

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the big fellow down. He stayed down, ominously. Frightened clerks administered whisky; but Kirby stood, fists ready, glowering at the roomful.

Luckily Tom came to before his father entered, and nothing was said. Marcellus, however, summed up the general attitude:

“Gee! that Trask is a savage.”

Kirby felt relieved for several days. He had shown publicly his feeling for the whole place. And after that the clerks left him alone, a proud, impatient, haughty fellow, dropping venom from his pen. The pity was he couldn't write in red ink or blood.

Fortunately he was very busy five nights a week at school. Ardently, then, on Saturday night he went to theater and the Tenderloin, and on Sunday roughed around with tedious Marston; for he was now back at the boarding-house. The Fergusons had long since departed, striking out for new Oklahoma, where by lot they secured a bit of ground in a projected town and lived gaily in a tent with thousands of other settlers while the frame houses went up. Mrs. Waverley, too, had gone. It was most unexpected, but she had been offered the position of principal in the girls' seminary in her Kentucky home-town, an offer too good to refuse. She and Kirby corresponded.

Worst of all, Kirby's mother became seriously ill in the summer, and finally he was summoned. But when he reached Trent she was already dead, and he followed the coffin to the little cemetery. Trent seemed a pitiable place, amazingly shrunken and provincial, full of small gossip and prying eyes. The Haddens were away, the newspaper had changed hands, and the people who knew him greeted him without ardor; he walked among them, a failure, a “bad lot.” Even his sisters seemed petty. The eldest had married and now lived in Chicago; the youngest planned to teach in Pueblo, Colorado.

He was terribly shocked at the sight of his mother's face.

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He had always thought of it as round and comely, the eyes full of smothered power. Now it was a mass of wasted wrinkles, and he could not imagine that those lips had once kissed him. Life seemed sharply tragic; all came to this. And he knew she had died disappointed in him, that he had brought her only heart-sickness and trouble. He scourged himself because his letters to her had been cold and perfunctory.

And so he returned to the city, dressed in black, remorseful, restless, lonesome. But as he worked on he began to be absorbed by the school. The bright, thin life of these girls and boys seemed pitiable. It was here as in all the commercial schools. A lot of school-children who were ignorant of even the primary requirements of commerce, such as arithmetic, spelling, and grammar, were here ground through a rapid mill that gave them skilled fingers without skilled minds. So the city was flooded with cheap workers, most of whom sank into the ranks of copyists earning, by the tedious and lengthy toil of typing addresses on circulars or filling in typewritten blanks, a salary of not more than a dollar a day. A thousand addresses, for instance, brought a dollar. The typewriter employment agencies were crushed with applicants who daily sat herded together waiting an opportunity, or pounded the streets desolately, looking in at shop windows, or mobbed any office that had advertised. In the end many had to go into the department stores. Like the clerks, they were raised to something higher without the education to sustain them. But a swift, half-baked commercialism cheerfully ground them out and took their ten dollars a month.

He got to like them in a way, but he thought that a talk on manners, gum-chewing, loud talking, clean nails, tidy hair, might have helped.

The atmosphere of the school was cheerful. He was taught that "Specialization is the trend of the times"; that "the fingers must be trained until they become supple,

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strong, efficient"; that you must "never miss the big chance, yet never lose sight of details"; that in typing "inflexibility is stagnation"; and there was a wealth of poetry in this:

"Have you ever noticed how the master violinist holds his bow? The wrist is so flexible that it might be hung with a single silken strand—yet there is *power* there, but it is controlled power."

He liked to think of violin-playing in hanging his fingers over the keys in speed practice, when over and over again at a speed of one hundred words a minute he typed this famous line:

"Paul hit the yellow cur a whack on the head."

A sentence, according to Guthrie, that tunes the typist up to the speed key.

Or the classic: "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party."

Or this masterly composition, which holds amazingly every letter of the alphabet:

"The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog."

These sentences ran through his head at night; ever afterward, looking at a typewriter, his lips mumbled them.

And as to the stenography, he got a habit which never left him, of tracing with his finger, on desk or table, shorthand characters when he heard people formally speaking.

Yet, withal, the noisy typewriter-room, the stuffy dictation-room exercised subtle charms over him. He was fascinated by the typewriting machine, which seemed, as indeed it was, a wonderful thing: painful pen-scrawling of ages back to hieroglyphs on stone now superseded by the light touch of keys and the swift emergence of neat and line-locked print; but, stranger still was shorthand, which made the fingers nearly as fleet as thought, surely as fleet as speech; the words dropped from the dictator's lips to the stenographer's note-book, caught on the fly, as it were, and saved in their very arrangement. Out of this grew the speed of modern business, which made it possible

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for an executive to weave gigantic correspondences between himself and the world and yet be free for other work. . . . And the typed screed flew from sender to receiver, a permanent record. . . . Kirby was to be one of the flying shuttles in this miracle. It seemed to add to business a touch of the Arabian nights—part of the new mysteries of transportation and telephone and telegraph and all the instruments that draw earth's ends together into a common council-room, a sort of town-hall-meeting of the world. . . . Space was shrinking, time extending, and a vague brotherhood loomed through the crass interweaving of buy-and-sell. . . .

And so the months passed. Finally, in September, Guthrie gave Kirby a diploma with an affectionate pat on the back.

"Mr. Trask," he said, "you're the finest mind I've met on this side the Atlantic."

It was reminiscent of a remark by Professor Hadden.

On the next morning Kirby got leave of absence from Bradsley and went to the Brain-Brokers. The same gantlet of Ready-Made Young Men lustrously brightened the entrance-hall; there were faces there he had seen before; the same office-boy barred the way, but Mr. Cobb had departed. In his place was a superb young man of the Gibson type.

However, the phonograph-record was the same; only the horn was changed.

"Atwood's," he said, "is a clearing-house for Brains—the link between the Job and the Man. You see, what we try to do is find the Man. . . ."

As the bright formulas were reeled off by this comfortable mouthpiece Kirby felt, with a new thrill of power, how he had grown since he sat here in this same chair two years since, a young man, shy and heart-sick, overwhelmed with cheap talk.

He broke in with cold impatience,

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"Mr. Dwight, I know that, but I've come here for a job. Have you anything open?"

The record stopped as if the needle were stuck. Mr. Dwight felt uncomfortable before the gray eyes. He puffed on his cigar, thwarted.

"Eh, you've been a clerk, then?"

"Yes. But I want something better."

Then Mr. Dwight brightened, as if sudden light soaked his brain-cells.

"Know shorthand?"

"I do," said Kirby, grimly.

"Lucky, that! We have a rare opening—a secretaryship to J. J. Harrington, proprietor of *Harrington's Magazine*, the New Storage Battery Street Car Company, the Harmon Airship Company. You know J. J., don't you?"

Kirby had a feeling of unreality, as if time had stood still. At the same time he smelt a rat. What was this perpetual bright secretaryship that dangled before each applicant?

He grinned at Mr. Dwight.

"You had the same job open when I was here last."

The Gibson face lacked human expression. There was a cough and a hasty,

"Surely. The man who went in then has by now gone on, gone up—who knows?"

Well, Kirby didn't know, and neither, of course, did he know that one couldn't throw a stone in New York without hitting a J. J. secretary.

"Oh, I'll try it," said Kirby, with grim condescension. He began to think that J. J. was a modern myth generated by commercial hysteria.

So he tried it, ferrying that morning to Long Island City and getting a train out to Inwood. He bought a copy of *Harrington's* at the station news-stand and spent the three-fourths-of-an-hour ride in studying possibilities. The magazine was cheap, crisp, popular, sprinkled with illustrations, a lean slice of reading-matter between thick

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chunks of advertising. There were five short stories with titles and underlines indicating love, adventure, horse-play, and "problem"; several bright articles, garnished with photographs, on musical comedies, how shoes are made, the conquest of the air, women geniuses; some nondescript thumpety-thump love-verse; a serial of automobile love; and a picture section of stage beauties. It was all clever, readable, and slightly sensational, and it was indubitably American; the reading-matter merely a flashy excuse for that great modern institution of Advertising whereby the manufacturer displayed his wares in obscure corners and over the immense distances of the States. Each copy of the magazine was a clever salesman, and Kirby understood that *Harrington's* had a circulation of four hundred thousand. Four hundred thousand salesmen creating and stimulating appetites and needs. For these advertising pages were gay and terse, pungent with excitable newness. It was a joy to bathe in such endless optimism and enterprise and to know that the whole world was eagerly begging to serve you for the sake of your health and happiness. It inspired confidence in a country palpably hustling, alive, groaning with wealth it wanted to share with the reader, secrets it desired to impart (at two or three dollars per), advice it languished to give.

"Were it not for Acid Mouth your teeth should last 100 years. . . . Dentacore."

"The John Mattress smile in the morning means a day of clean work and clear thinking."

"Cheer up! Get a 50c. bottle of Kleenit anywhere."

"Just ask your doctor what *he* thinks of Jaundice-Juice."

"Don't Meddle with a Corn. Don't Pare it."

"Why Kill Yourself by Smoking a Strong Pipe?"

"A sheep wears his wool on the Outside. That's where it is in Warren Underwear."

"Tell me your foot troubles. It will ease Your Mind; *I* will ease Your Feet."

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“Woman’s Fight with Dirt has always been an Unequal One.”

“There is nothing so stimulating to jaded nerves as the weird strains of impassioned martial music.”

And then the clothing advertisements with clean-shaven, shoulder-padded, perfectly fitted wax figures, and the get-rich-quick schemes with their opium-dreams of opulence and ease, and the patent medicines. All these were the modern embodiment of ancient lures—the fountain of youth, alchemy, the tree of knowledge, Aladdin’s lamp. Emerging from a half-hour bath in the lambent pages, one felt that luscious beatitude had been for years ignorantly missed; but it was not too late, however; six postal-cards and a few money-orders would bring the bliss of angels—or millionaires—by fast freight or swift express.

And presiding over these lures, gathering them from far cities, binding them and showering them on four hundred thousand homes, sat J. J. Harrington. It was like sitting unperturbed in the core of a scarlet cyclone, accelerating the whirl of color by divine command. Kirby felt intoxicated and perturbed. He was “up against the real thing” again—not a Jordan Watts, an Olympian, but a near-Olympian, a power raised above the multitude. Like a man with the flames of whisky running through him, craving a greater stimulus, so in Kirby grew a hard excitement, a spirit of trampling enterprise. But he quivered with subdued fright at the thought of facing the great J. J.

Inwood was revealed in mild September sunshine. To the left of the station, bisecting the tracks, ran a dusty village street of cheap, dim stores and paint-peeled boarding-houses; but to the right rose an eminence on which stood the model factory of *Harrington’s*—a long, narrow, three-storied cement building with superb, pillared porticoes at either end. Far up the track stood the red-brick, three-acre factory of the storage-battery street-cars and the airships. Smoke ascended in the soft liquid

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light of early Autumn, and facing the factories, over the tracks, a deep and tranquil wood was fading into brown and crimson.

Peace and silence; the station was empty save for a sleepy ticket-seller; wooden cases were stacked before the closed door of the baggage-master's room; the rails flashed and tremulated with sun; and the shadow of the cement building lay coolly on its green, sloping lawn. Then a buckboard clattered over the railroad crossing, and the impact of hoofs died in the dust beyond. Kirby felt as if he had reached the Undisturbed—the profundity of rural peace. And *Harrington's* became unreal again, the weaving shadows of windy trees, the St. Vitus' dance of phantoms.

Smilingly he approached the portico, entered a cool hall, ascended a broad flight of steps to a large center hall on the top floor. Shadow and coolness were here, and shafts of moted light from opened office doors. A boy sat at a desk dreamily counting the number of words in a type-written manuscript; save for the mumble of his lips, the stillness all but obliterated the faint rumblings of a printing-press in the basement.

The click of Kirby's heels echoed through the place; the boy glanced up, fatigued.

"Mr. Harrington in?"

"Which Mr. Harrington?"

This was disturbing.

"Mr. J. J."

"Gone to the city."

Kirby had a tendency to collapse. He had nerved himself for an ordeal. The withdrawal of the moment of climax left him weak.

"Whom can I see, then?"

"Well, there's Mr. Martin Harrington, the Managing Editor."

The boy trudged lazily into a corner room; and Kirby, waiting, heard dull voices, and then from another room

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the low drone of dictation to some stenographer. The fact that soon he, too, might sit at the feet of some master and be dictated to and have to go out then and transcribe painfully at a typewriter was unpleasant. He knew, too, that he was inexperienced; that Atwood's had sent him out without even testing him, that he had "nerve" to try for so high a position, that probably he would flunk when it came to the scratch. For he had found in school that it was one thing to write shorthand and quite another to read what he had written; those gentle little curves could tease the mind stupid. Hearing that dictation-drone, his blood froze with bad omens. He would have to "bluff" superbly to hold his first job.

"Well, then I'll bluff," said the American in Kirby. "It's a game of bluff from start to finish. They all do it—they have to."

The advertisements of *Harrington's* had been working while he waited.

The office-boy now appeared.

"All right," he said, and Kirby followed. He entered a cool corner room, with open windows on two sides. Martin Harrington sat at the flat center desk, manuscripts and letter-files heaped before him. He was an exceeding tall and thin individual, with large, dark, suspicious eyes and a nervous manner.

"Atwood's sent me," said Kirby.

There was a slight aristocratic contempt in Martin's voice.

"Oh, a stenographer!"

Kirby winced. There was a cruel difference between being a stenographer and being a secretary.

"They said Mr. Harrington wanted a secretary."

"He does. What experience have you had?"

Kirby was ready for that.

"I've been two years with the Continental Express Company, and I've worked on a newspaper a couple of years."

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He did not say that shorthand was a fresh acquisition. "Well," said Martin, "I might try you."

He pushed a button, the office-boy appeared, and a notebook was secured. Kirby stretched it on the flap of the desk, and sat, pencil in hand, waiting. He went hot and cold by turns, acutely aware that he was alone in the world, that nothing could help him—that the soul of man passes through life in utter naked loneliness. "Bluff" would not make legible confused notes. But so much depended on his success; it would open up such a tremendous chance! Sitting there, it seemed that this establishment swung in the circle of the mighty, and the gates might open if he won through this test. At one stroke he would be lifted into the world he had dreamed of, far out of the ranks of the drudges, with countless possibilities a step ahead. And his consciousness of this magic opportunity made him exquisitely nervous.

Luckily Martin was slow at composition; the letter was brief, covering the rejection of a manuscript, and Kirby scrawled it down blindly, with the cold sweat on his forehead.

"You'll find paper and a typewriter in the next room," said Martin.

Kirby went into the little office, which was bare of all save a desk and the machine, but it was some time before his trembling fingers could tap the keys, and thrice he spoiled a sheet. Finally he desperately thumped out the letter, and took it, flushed and hot, to the Managing Editor.

Martin sniffed at it.

"It'll do, I guess," he said, vaguely, whereon Kirby's heart gave a leap of triumph, but he added: "Of course, you'll have to see J. J. I haven't anything to do with his secretaries."

This was painful; so was the tinge of contempt about his secretaries.

"When can I see him?" Kirby asked, chokingly.

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"Couldn't say."

"Is he in mornings?"

"Sometimes—sometimes not."

"Will he be in to-morrow morning?"

"I wouldn't dare predict. You'll have to take pot-luck."

Evidently J. J. was the wind that bloweth where it listeth. Kirby went home crestfallen.

However, in the morning he decided not to report to Bradsley at all, but to camp out on the trail of the Captain of Industry. But in the vacant hall the boy said, cheerfully:

"Just left for the city. No, won't be back to-day."

There was nothing to do but vanish gracefully and come again on the morrow. He took the eight-o'clock train, and the office-boy was gleeful at his reappearance.

"Nothing doing. J. J.'s in New York."

Kirby got wildly hot. What high and mighty folk were these that made the race dance attendance on them, spending time and money on train-trips? What did old J. J. think that he, Kirby, was?

"But"—he spoke sharply—"he's coming back, isn't he?"

The boy was abashed.

"Well," he said, meekly, "if he comes he'll be on the eleven-forty train."

Kirby went out and cooled himself in the woods, crashing through the undergrowth, startling squirrels, breaking in on the liquid notes of birds. He was aroused, determined, mad as a bull. He'd show old J. J.!

He exhausted the woods by ten, and tried the village. Its heavy tranquillity goaded him; he was for shooting it up, Western style, the dead 'burg'! A cobbler was tapping shoes; a harness-maker mending harness; a shoe-store was dustily idle; a general store quavered with the passing voices of loungers; the post-office was asleep; the restaurant dirty and empty; the drug-store in a trance. And,

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oh, the boarding-houses with shut windows and the label "Boarders Wanted" on the porch-post!

He went back to the dead station. Sun glanced blindly along the endless rails, and heat throbbed upward from them in metallic waves. He sat down on a packing-case, moodily waiting, and little gusts of warm air blew in his face. All nature was in a Sabbath doze. A sparrow preening himself on the glistening telegraph-wire was an important visitant.

Then the telegraph-key began clicking, the baggage-master strolled up from the street and unlocked his door, and a commercial traveler, with valises in both hands, ambled onto the rusty-red platform. The rails now began to hum, a whistle blew in the distance, and at the tracks' end a diminished locomotive appeared, belching convolutions of gray smoke. Momently the engine grew, with thunder and clang of bell, until it loomed, a rushing one-eyed dragon, rolling immensely and hotly by with swift revealing of passenger-cars, and stopped. The conductor swung off the steps, watch in hand; the engineer tinkered at the huge wheels. It was the rushing spirit of the modern world, the distances telescoped in its speed. And the whole continent was weaving with the winged carriers, that made one city the suburb of another.

Kirby had arisen, and stood grimly, his excitement hard and taut.

A bulky, healthy, middle-aged gentleman swung off, valise in hand, nodded genially to the baggage-master, and passed swiftly. Kirby fell into step with him.

"Mr. Harrington?"

Then sparkling little black eyes were turned to him, and with them a charmingly gracious smile on the smooth-shaven, slightly wrinkled face. The smile, the glance, were disarming. Kirby felt a sunny warmth of pleasure.

"Yes," said J. J., in a voice full of enchanting rhythms, a voice wondrously alive, rich, and unique, "what can I do for you?"

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"Atwood's sent me for the secretary position."

"Indeed. Well, walk along with me!"

J. J. walked swiftly; Kirby had to energize to keep up. And J. J. plied him with questions:

"Where were you born, Mr. ——"

"Trask. Kirby Trask. I was born in Trent, Iowa."

"Middle Western town. American family?"

"Yes. New Englanders that pioneered in the West."

"Anglo-Saxon stock," said J. J. "That's the kind we need. It's the backbone of Western civilization. Do you mind telling me your age?"

The polite grace of this was healing and lovely. "After all," thought Kirby, "the great men are simple; it's only the underlings that are holier-than-thou."

"I'm twenty-six."

"And you've had—what experience?"

Kirby told him briefly; they now swept past the cement factory and took a gravel path that led up the slopes behind the building to a large Colonial house at the top.

"Are you married?" asked J. J.

"No—not yet," Kirby smiled.

"Excellent. Not afraid to use your brains?"

"I hope not."

"Nor of hard work and long hours?"

"No, indeed."

"There's only one type of man I can use. One who could rise to the top."

Kirby's soul dilated; was he not this man?

"That's the only kind of job I want."

"Have they tried you at the office?"

"Mr. Martin did."

"Satisfactory?"

"He said so."

They reached the steps of the porch. J. J. turned, beaming at him.

"Suppose we try, beginning to-morrow morning, at twenty a week?"

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Kirby's heart took a flier.

"Yes."

"Of course, you'll have to move to Inwood at once. I begin early. How early could you start in the morning?"

"Any time you say," gasped the drunken fellow.

"Seven even?"

"Surely."

"Be at this house, then, seven A.M to-morrow. Good day, Mr. Trask."

He vanished, smiling. What could be easier? what more natural? what more satisfactory?

"This is glorious," thought Kirby, "glorious."

He trod on air; he exulted in every fiber. Yes, he had broken in; he had "nailed the job." The gates, at last, had opened. Genius was to have its fling. J. J., like all great men, had probed by a mere glance of eyes his power and his possibilities. It was an unbelievable miracle. Yes, he'd begin work at dawn if necessary, or at two in the morning.

He looked down on the express job as from a mountain-top. Down there were the poor drudges, the humdrum existence of the petty crowd.

"Glorious," he laughed, "glorious, and twenty a week!"

As for the pesky shorthand and typewriting—well, what was the use of thinking of unpleasant things?

XIV

TROUBLE BEGINS

MORNING and Kirby got up together, and both were a little gray. When the alarm-clock scalped Kirby of sleep at four-thirty, the room was still dim with the street-lamp, and Kirby had to light the gas to dress. Then he stuffed pajamas and comb and brush in the suitcase, snapped it shut, took a last look at the room, and went down through the halls, under stains of light, with hard excitement. He felt a bitter strength sustaining him, as if he were nerved against a charge of murder or a surgical operation.

A light burned in the dining-room, and from the lighted kitchen, where poor Gertie, the waitress, was up an hour ahead of her time to get some breakfast for "the young gentleman," came a penetrating, pungent odor of coffee.

"All right, sir," she called in, desolately, and brought in a tray of breakfast. He glanced at her and saw that the last two years had despoiled her completely of what beauty she had. Her stringy hair was matted about the temples; rings were brown under the faded eyes; her form was unshapely; and she slouched about, a broken house-slave taking to herself, as it were, all that dirt of life which, cast off by the strong and lucky, yet engulfs humanity.

"So you're leaving us." She sniffed a little. It meant, plainly, "You are going on to glory, but for me there is neither success nor love; merely day after day of the mop, the towel, the broom, the dish, and the bed." Just for a

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moment Kirby felt that modern moral squirming which makes the poor a Banquo's ghost at the feast of the fortunate. He felt an unpleasant twinge at the monstrous inequality; but, after all, he had not made the world. Besides, he had enough troubles ahead.

So, dragging his heavy suit-case, he went out through the gloom of the street. In the first dim heave of dawn the street-lamps flamed sharp; here and there an all-night restaurant flooded the pavement with an oblong of light, and he felt as if he were stealing through sleep like some plotter of the Underworld. On the ferry were laborers muffled up against the cold sea-wind, and as the boat put out on the waters, dawn of the saddest, most delicate gray and white was tremulous on the two misty cities and the hurrying tides. The ferry whistled hoarsely, persistently, against the low fog, and tugs passed like phantoms with eyes of vaporous fire.

The lighted train was filled with silent, fatigued laborers who sank luxuriously in the bubbling, steamy warmth. Kirby, his nose on the closed window, felt that life was hard and fearful. He got glimpses of toiling night-shifts in the illumined factories, saw dim canals emerging as on a photographic plate in the growing light, and beheld bare fields and shabby suburbs. Again he was breaking irrevocably with the past, and plunging through the dawn to a vague and troublous future, to a self-precipitated destiny that might involve destruction and death. At least it would involve transcribing shorthand notes, and at the moment he could think of nothing more horrible.

A grim, nervous, excited young man, then, lugged a suit-case past the cement building and up the gravel path. Sleep possessed the blank-windowed house, and Kirby pushed the bell-button lightly. Then in the silence a chain clanked, a key turned, and the door opened. A sad old butler, with cheeks covered, as it were, with a red frost, looked down at the intruder.

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"Are you the new secretary?" he asked, as if he were compelled to put this melancholy question every morning.

"Yes," said Kirby.

"Well, then," said the butler, "you're to leave your hat and coat on the rack here and take your note-book and pencil—them was Mr. Harrington's orders—and go to the second floor to the last room to the right and knock on the door."

Kirby froze.

"His bedroom?" he murmured.

"Oh yes, sir."

"You're sure?"

"Oh yes, sir. All his secretaries go to his bedroom. This way, sir."

Kirby suppressed a hysterical laugh. Note-book and fountain-pen in hand, he ascended the soft-carpeted stairs and tripped guiltily along the hushed hall. It was five minutes to seven. What was going to happen next in this mad-house? He studied the door for several throbbing minutes, then precipitously knuckled it.

A sleepy voice murmured, "Well?"

"It's Mr. Trask," he said. His tongue felt paralyzed.

"Oh yes, come in!"

Just as he pushed in the door, just as he got a vague, swift glimpse of an enormous corner room, with four high windows, roll-top desk in the far corner, bureau, revolving cabinets full of books and papers, a screen hiding another corner, and in the very middle a single brass bed with J. J. in it, just as he took his first step and flashed this outlay, J. J. reached his hand to a wall-rack stuffed with manuscripts and papers right above his head and began talking crisply. In horror Kirby realized that he was dictating, and he just had enough presence of mind to stagger across the room jotting with his pen on a bobbing, palpitating note-book. But of what he wrote or how he wrote it he had no least sane inkling.

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"My dear Mr. Cuivilier"—J. J. was bolstered up in his white nightgown, his hair mussed, his cheeks unshaven—"I sat up till one-thirty this morning absorbed in your charming story, 'The Unequivocal Woman.' It quite took my breath away. It has power, grace, style. There is, I feel, no American writer who can so charmingly set forth the complexities and alluring romance of women as you yourself. The narrative, too, has all the qualities of modern fiction—it is brisk, brittle, entrancing. I notice that by some untoward accident I have kept the manuscript four months, thereby delaying a happy half-hour. And so I regret all the more that we can find no place for it in the magazine. Believe me, with best wishes"

Poor Mr. Cuivilier, soon to glow and expand over the opening of this letter, and then to collapse over the end! There was drama here worthy of Kirby's attention, but that young man sat doubled up as if he had the gripes, and on his sweat-dripping face was blank horror, as one who, having emptied a medicine-bottle, suddenly cries: "But I've taken poison; I'm dying." Words, words, words, and here and there one of them in drunken shorthand!

"My dear Mr. Terhune," J. J. was going on, totally oblivious of such mechanism as a private secretary.

But Kirby gasped weakly:

"But I didn't get down that first one—I mean, all of it."

J. J. looked up with eyes blazing. Where was the gracious gentleman of yesterday?

"Now you've smashed a whole train of thought," he snapped. "You've choked my subconscious flow. Learn not to interrupt; leave a blank space and fill in afterward. My dear Mr. Terhune—"

A wave of nausea threatened Kirby's body; swift death were preferable to this. But J. J. had stopped, wild with exasperation.

"I've lost the whole hell-roaring business. Really,

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Mr. Trask, this won't do. Do you object to my dressing?"

Kirby switched on a ghastly grin.

"No," he whispered.

He foresaw a breathing-space. Whereupon J. J. leaped out of bed in his bare feet and began athletic exercises in the center of the room, arms out, over head, hands down till they touched the floor, leg up, foot kicking; but just as Kirby was getting hysterical over this spectacle the Cuivilier letter poured over him again with all its swift, cold beauty. Something snapped in him; a gymnazing J. J. who could combine business with athletics, making his body do one thing while his brain did another, was too much for Kirby's young mind; he became callous and desperately blithely careless, letting his pen dance as it would.

J. J. now pulled a tub of cold water from under his bed, set the screen about it, and, while a crazed Kirby heard the water splash, the swift speech of this amazing man fell like rain over the screen-top.

Next, Kirby, glancing up, felt like shrieking, and looked away to save himself. For J. J., clad only in woolen underwear, was leaning toward the mirror over the sink and busily shaving himself. And still the subconscious flowed, flowed forever. Ha, thought Kirby, is this then Big Business? And blithely his pen careened. The man in the death-cell may as well enjoy himself before the execution.

He was dimly aware that J. J. was fully dressed, when there was a knock on the door.

"Come," cried J. J. "And yet you ought to train yourself in style. Master English, young man, before you attempt to create art—"

The butler entered with a tray of breakfast, and J. J. abruptly wheeled on him.

"Pound on Mr. Martin's door!" he shouted, in a rage to the old man. "That stinking son-of-a-gun has got to

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learn to rise early. I've been using *my* brain for an hour already. For, as Emerson said, you may be a god with the divine afflatus, but you've got to know grammar, too—"

He sat down and broke his eggs, but broke not the flow of eloquence. Then Martin came in, rubbing his eyes.

"Father," he murmured.

J. J. was just in "what our literature needs," and also his cup of coffee, but he turned with savage grace:

"What the hell you want?"

Martin was just as hot-tempered.

"You said you wanted to see the staff at eight-thirty. Shall I bring them in?"

"My God, Martin, you'd make hell stink! Do I want what I want, or don't I want what I want? What do you think of that, Mr. Trask?"

Mr. Trask was devoid of thought; he sat there like a hen with its head off, a sick collapse.

"Well, you know," cried Martin at the door, "you're always wanting something else—"

"Get out of here!" roared J. J., and, as the door slammed, "Needs fresh vigor, Western snap; our public is getting tired of flabby wishwash. It wants red blood, punch, vim, stuff with the guts—"

And still the nimble pen careened. J. J. now sat at his desk and started, myriad-brainy man:

"Change of systems for manufacturing departments. A. Bracket."

"What?" burst from Kirby.

J. J. turned on him and pounded fist in hand.

"Learn this at once—bracket everything; a-b-c everything; one-two-three everything. It's the only way to clarify the brain. You must learn to analyze, to divide a subject into its parts. You can't *think* otherwise. Good idea! Take this: 'Instructions to the staff—I want all employees to learn to analyze. Make no

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reports hereafter except in this form.'” He helped Kirby by a map on pad paper:

GENERAL SUBJECT

| | | |
|---------------|---|------------------------|
| A. Subheading | { | 1. First minor heading |
| | | 2. Second “ “ |
| | | 3. Third “ “ |
| | | 4. Fourth “ “ |

““ In this way we may by some miracle coerce you to use your brains.’ ”

He laughed now delightedly, and confided in his secretary.

“They’re waste-baskets, that’s what they are; not editors and managers. They go round and round like a whirlwind of slop-water. I expect something else of you.”

Came then a timid knock on the door. “Come in,” cried J. J., and in filed seven expectant men—Martin, managing editor; Edgar, the younger son, manager of the storage-battery street-cars; Boyd, business-manager; Hurley, associate editor; Campbell, assistant editor; Jonison, art editor; Meggs, head of subscription department.

J. J. never turned from his desk, but sat pulling at a bunch of reports, glaring and muttering. The seven formed a semicircle behind him. Kirby was incapable of any new emotions, but he thought grimly that this was a scene in a comic opera, and not life. And the seven seemed a little frightened.

Silence; then a terrific pounding on the desk, and the bellowing of a bull:

“Whose report is this?”

The seven craned their necks.

“Mine,” muttered Boyd, guiltily.

Without turning, J. J. flung it to the floor behind him.

“Pick that up!” he thundered.

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Meekly Boyd stooped and picked it. Then J. J. wheeled round, an insane light in his eyes, flecks of salivary foam on his lip corners:

"What's in your skull, Mr. Boyd? *Mush?* If a boy of seven wrote such driveling damned rot, I'd spank him. Minor expenditures! Minor pus! Rotten! Rotten! It stinks!"

"I'm sure, Mr. Harrington," said Boyd, gently, "I do the best I can. Every one knows that!"

"My grandmother knows it!" roared J. J., and turned to the next. One after the other the reports were flung to the floor; one after the other the seven stooped and picked them up; one after the other received a profane explosion. Were these men or dogs? thought Kirby. A saving anger leaped in him; he'd just like to see J. J. talk to *him* like that!

Then all at once J. J. leaped up, danced in a small circle, shook his fist in the faces of the seven, and gave what seemed to be a series of smothered shrieks.

Beginning with a slow glide of "cuss words," taking a slant with choice and surprising obscenity, and beautifully, by gently ascending curves, rising up and up to the most elemental word in the English language, J. J. bathed the seven in the most amazing profanity of the Western world. Kirby felt the life leave his body, reason departed, and then he felt a primal joy. He had never witnessed a mind more completely relieved of its feelings; speech could go no further; J. J. was the one man who could totally express himself.

And for the first time in his life Kirby felt the tiger joy of seeing human beings trampled. There was something of the jungle in this rending of limb from limb; the sight evoked the baser instincts. It was as if Kirby had tasted blood for the first time in the brute, primitive battles of American business; he got a mouthful of the ruthlessness, greed, rapacity of modern commerce. The fighter awoke in him, the hard, glittering, tigerish hunter, and he lusted

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to get into the world-scrimmage himself. He, too, had it in him to trample his way over the fallen bodies of the weak.

Without argument the vanquished and cursed seven departed, whereupon J. J. turned to Kirby with a ravishing smile:

“What do you think of them, Mr. Trask? But come, I must catch my train. Put on your hat and coat and walk to the station. I must dictate on the way!”

Kirby heard these words, but there was no reason for believing them. Yet in ten minutes he was a gymnast himself, desperately driving his legs along the gravel path to keep up with his cyclonic boss, in one hand near his nose the note-book, in the other his pen. The pen and note-book seemed to keep jumping at each other. Sometimes they met; sometimes they didn't.

Earth rotated about him, a green blur that gave to the red of the station, and suddenly to the red of the train. Subconsciously he was aware of J. J. hanging onto the steps and the conductor crying “All aboard.”

“This process of making a storage-battery is new—discovered by Fenwick not six months ago—its use—” B-z-z! the words died, and Kirby, glancing up, saw J. J.'s head projecting from the car platform ten feet away, passing like foam out of earshot.

Kirby stood there mentally dismembered. He felt as if he were a nervous wreck; all his strength had left him, and he quivered in every muscle. His brain was like a hollow drum.

“Holy mackerel!” he muttered.

What manner of mortal was this J. J.? Was he human at all? Did he keep up this whirlwind speed and energy every day? Where did he get his vitality? Was it necessary to be like this to succeed in business? There was no strenuous President as yet to acquaint the youth of America with the powers of man; hence, Kirby was dumfounded. Yes, he was dizzy.

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And those shorthand notes—what should he do with them? It was a ghastly predicament.

Suddenly, then, the noon whistle blew, and out of the building poured a stream of pressmen and the girls of the subscription department. It struck Kirby that he had better find a boarding-house.

He turned and staggered up the dusty street and entered a labeled house.

The landlady showed him a little room on the second floor, but he didn't like it. He surmised that the walls were merely laths covered with paper; the whole house had a tremulous fragility. Yet he took the room; he knew of nothing better.

Then he went down to the noon meal. About the long table sat a gang of powerful pressmen in overalls, with oily, grimy arms bare to the elbows . . . huge chunks of men, roughly jesting; big, elemental comrades with primitive hunger and health. They looked at Kirby as if he didn't belong, came there by accident, and he felt ashamedly embarrassed, just as he had before the husky express drivers in the Broadway basement. There was something small in his fineness, his sensitiveness; something large and of the Earth in their primal roughness. He had come without appetite, but now the sight of food disgusted him.

Huge bowls of large boiled potatoes with the skins on were placed at either end of the table by an iron-muscled Amazon, and then in the center a great platter in which red slabs of beef swam in gravy. At once the pressmen leaned, half rising, forked all they could jab, and began eating like ravening animals. Slop! slop! went their mouths. Kirby, overwhelmed by the morning and by glowing anticipations of note-reading and by this primeval spectacle, sat there like some poor, sick thing left to die by a cruel world.

And at one the grueling began. He sat in the bare office at the typewriter and tried to read his notes. He

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racked his brain over the curves and angles, the vowels and consonants. Sweat dripped down his white face. All that he made out was "Cuivilier—one-thirty—morn-ing—story—grace—no American writer—women—your-self—"

"Yes," he thought, "something about rejecting a story; oh yes, liked it, but it couldn't go."

Suddenly he laughed, and the room echoed.

"I'm not going to lose without a fight," he thought. "I'm going to *bluff* it! If I don't I'm lost; if I do, well—by Jingo! J. J.'s bluff; so am I!"

And so through the long afternoon he picked legible scraps from the garbage of his notes, and composed letters with all his ingenuity and imaginative power.

Brent, the manuscript-clerk, came in at four o'clock to give him a story for J. J. He beheld the wreck of young life.

"Where you stopping?" he asked.

Kirby told him.

"Oh, you want to come to my boarding-house. It's mighty nice."

Kirby eagerly agreed, and Brent promised to wait for him that evening.

At six o'clock, still toiling under electric light, he was staggered by the office-boy entering and saying, glibly:

"J. J. wants you. Bring your note-book."

He went up to the room, and for an hour took dictation. Then he went out. Brent was waiting for him, but Kirby was beyond fresh sensation. As they walked, he heard, dimly:

"J. J. is the most godless man I've ever met. He ought to be stood up and shot with a Gatling gun."

To this sentiment he heartily subscribed. Then he was aware of a neat dining-room, a hovering family, food, and a room at the head of the stairs. He went straight to bed. It was eight o'clock.

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The day had been a nightmare of excitement, strenuousness, insanity, terror, toil, and exhaustion.

"A little more," he thought, "and I'll go out of my mind. What's that man, anyway? No wonder he can't keep a secretary."

He had never been so tired in his life; he had never worked so ruinously. And as he fell asleep two demon shapes glared at him from the foot of the bed—one was Seven A.M. To-morrow, and the other was Typewritten Letters which J. J. is Going to Read.

XV

TROUBLE CONTINUES

TWICE the next morning Mrs. Allison awoke Kirby, and finally she had to summon her powerful husband, who pulled the private secretary out of the jaws of sleep as if he had been a tooth.

Kirby sat at the edge of the bed and looked with mercy-begging eyes on his tormentor.

"Yes," he yawned, "be with you in a minute!"

And back he plunged to the balm of the pillow. Mr. Allison, however, was a Son of Duty. He shook the young gentleman vigorously.

"J. J.'ll be waiting, Mr. Trask. And you know what that means."

The phrase magically brought him to. He felt his heart trying to escape through the prison-bars of his ribs. And as he swiftly dressed he thought:

"I've lost my nerve. By now he's read that stuff. But, even if he hasn't, another day like yesterday will drive me mad."

There was a smell of burning leaves in the air, pervading the house . . . a crisp, searching smell, exquisite, the Earth's incense floating up to the Lord of Harvests. Somewhere in remote gardens the tranquil gardeners were gathering the bough-lost leaves to send the smokes of peace through the transparent sunshine. For such dreamy quiet, the hush of the hours over the fruitful Earth, the changes of the sun on pasture and hollow wood, Kirby's shredded spirit was aching. J. J. now seemed

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merely a circus-performer riding the three horses of storage-batteries, airships, and the magazine; a troubled pinch of noise and dust spinning vainly in the silence of engulfing skies. And Kirby thought of his lost clerkship, the calm, unchanging days, the complete mastery of the work in hand, the freedom of the untired nights, and wished himself back in the gliding ease of the rut. He had the weak and dissolving tiredness of the convalescent who tries to walk for the first time and swiftly crawls back to bed.

Brent's work did not begin until eight-thirty, so Kirby ate alone at six-thirty with Allison and his stout son. Both were excellent carpenters, tanned and sinewy, fresh with their unhurried outdoor work; they seemed to have absorbed into their fiber the stout grain of oak and maple and pine; they seemed almost odorous of the sun-soaked sawdust that gushed as the teeth bit through the wood. Kirby envied them their sound labor, their powerful handling of things, their healthy, complacent minds. To drive a nail straight, to dovetail moldings, to plane a shingle seemed to put these men into the rhythm of growing Nature.

But though he envied them, they in turn showed keen admiration and respect for the secretary of the great J. J. He found that J. J. obsessed Inwood; more, that he *was* Inwood. The place was but his appendage, the inhabitants either his employees or those who thrived by their presence. J. J. was like a feudal baron with a whole township of peasants dependent upon him.

"He's a great man, is J. J.," said Allison. "He's made this place. But he's a queer one. Trouble all the time over to the factories, and he's run up bills with the tradespeople something amazing—hundreds of dollars. They do say he's in financial deep water, what with those crazy airships—" He paused, and both he and his son laughed rackingly. "Oh, Lord! When those airships try to fly! For I've noticed God didn't put wings on our shoulders.

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And them storage-batteries—dreams, as you'll find, Mr. Trask. But now it's twelve minutes of seven."

As Kirby hurried through the perfect morning his unquiet was sharpened by these unpleasant tidings. Airships! How absurd! For the newspapers at this time were blithely ridiculing and helping to kill poor Langley of the Smithsonian, whose assistants were persistently swimming and sinking in the Potomac instead of flying over it. And in such insane enterprise J. J. was engaging—airships and storage-batteries. Kirby had the first dull glimmer of the notion that the whole J. J. institution might be merely a quicksand swallowing money and men and brave ideas. Financial deep water! Was this, then, Big Business, and did its emergence in American life mean merely the ruin of investor and toiler and the blighting of love and hope and quiet joy? He felt that already something good had been killed within him.

There was not much time, however, for such reflection. A more immediate terror pressed.

"By now," thought Kirby, again, "he's read that stuff. Anyhow, I'm up against another day."

He began to feel physically sick as he approached the house; he had a tremendous desire to rid himself of his breakfast. The front door was open, and he entered and hung up coat and hat. Then, quivering with raw excitement, he mounted the stairs. A low, thin whimpering, as of a soul being tortured to death, came from the shadows of the upper hall. It was a thin, bitter thread of agony, and the sound made his heart stop. Aghast, he took a few steps forward. Then he saw a huge mastiff circling with his teeth the wrist of one of the office-boys. In that clutch the boy could not move and did not dare cry out. The big animal stood quietly, with shining eyes. Kirby was overmastered with horror.

"Can't you get loose?" he whispered.

"No." The boy breathed hard and whimpered again. "He's Mr. Edgar's—this is his door."

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"Keep still, then!"

Kirby knocked, and heard the dog breathing sharply. It seemed hard to knock again.

"Yes?" came a sleepy voice.

"Come here a moment," said Kirby.

The door opened; Edgar was in his nightgown.

"What is it?"

"Your dog's got hold of one of the boys."

Edgar laughed keenly.

"He's a dandy watch-dog, all right. Blunt," he called, "come here!"

The dog brushed by Kirby and disappeared with his master, and the frightened child scuttered away. Kirby found that his face was bathed in sweat and his limbs trembling as if his muscles were trying to break from the bones.

"What a ghastly house!" he thought. "And how cruel!"

The little incident seemed like a sudden searchlight turned on J. J.; it was a symbol of this Big Business. Terrorism, force, cruelty. Kirby grew hot with anger.

"To thunder with them all!" he thought, and knocked on J. J.'s door.

"Come," said J. J., and again, as yesterday, the hand reached up to the rack, and dictation sped Kirby across the room. He had no time for anger or defiance or dread; he could only desperately scrawl and scratch all through the weird process of athletics, bathing, dressing, and breakfast. But when, after breakfast, J. J. sat down at his desk and began to finger the typewritten letters which lay there in a neat heap, Kirby felt unnerved again and strove vainly to muster up defiance. He sat there watching the fingers dandle the convicting evidence as if he were a cat in the clutch of a snake.

"They seem rather crude," said J. J., and looked hard at Kirby.

Kirby blushed and swallowed a cough.

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"You said," he muttered, "I should leave blank spaces and fill in afterward."

J. J.'s eyes twinkled; his voice had the lilt of lovely melody.

"I'm afraid, then, that your whole note-book is blank, Mr. Trask."

He laughed; Kirby laughed, too. This was delightful. It was generous, intuitive in understanding, merciful. Indeed, through all the rush and drive of work and the profane explosions, J. J. seemed in a golden mood this morning, and Kirby felt that he could almost love this magnetic, charming, terrible, profane, wicked fellow.

"I ought to go slower; I ought to remember that you aren't accustomed to my way, Mr. Trask," he said. "But I forget my manners in my work. At such times you must pardon me."

Kirby felt that he was liked, and his heart gave a leap of joy. It was intoxicating. The dream of swift dominance filled him again, running through him like an arousing liquor. It was as if the tightening pressure of the last twenty-four hours, straining against a trap-door in his mind, had now suddenly broken through, releasing a reservoir of strength beneath that gushed up, wiped away his fatigue and gave him the alert confidence of position and the brilliant joy of success. He was holding down a big job, his employer liked him; so thought came with brittle snap, his eyes glittered, and he jotted down his notes with savage keenness. In fact, the relentless speeding-up that J. J. enforced upon him was already bringing a more rapid perfecting than months of the school. And so, with a growing lustiness, he watched the antics of the industrial captain.

The wonder of the place was that each event that came along was unexpected, pulsing with the quality of mystery, romance, adventure. The day was a series of explosive surprises, and the constant stimulation keyed life to an electric tenseness. No drudge-work here, no dull repeti-

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tion of the days as in his clerkship. It was all the difference between being a ferry captain and a pirate.

At nine Martin came in.

"Here are five letters about Faversham's story."

"Faversham?" cried J. J. "Who the devil's Faversham?"

"Don't you know? We printed his first story in the September number—you know; the story about the drunken father."

"*That* piffle? Well, don't stand there all morning with the juice dripping. Use your brains; be terse."

"Aw, cut it!" cried Martin. "I've been trying to tell you for ten minutes; five people, one in Indian Territory, one in Chicago, one in New York, and two in Ohio have written in praising the story."

"Let's see." J. J. glanced at the letters. Then he jumped out of his seat, his brain glowing.

"He's the coming man!" he cried. "Take this, Mr. Trask: 'My dear Mr. Faversham,—Your story seems to have stirred the animals in great shape. We are hearing about it on all sides. But that does not surprise me; I have felt right along that you sounded a new note—the note of social sympathy. I feel that you have a great future before you, that your genius will yet make you a darling of the American people. Come up and take lunch with me. I think we could arrange for a story a month.'"

Thus blithely and easily could this man touch with his finger the trembling skepticism and obscuration of struggling talent, and evoke, at one light contact, an exultant soul. Kirby thrilled at this modern use of magic. Rub the lamp and, presto! atomic Faversham, doing hack-work in a hall bedroom, becomes the great, popular author—Everett Hardy Faversham. Of course, if five letters somehow erred in judgment, then a balloon was inflated dangerously, and a Faversham, called to do something greater than his power, was doomed to annihilation.

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Such instances were common; the mail was full of them; but that very morning brought one into the room. J. J. was just in the thick of an amazing article he was dictating, an article headed "Why Women Can't Ride Astride," and Kirby was just seeing a great light through the words "Women's legs are round, men's flat; hence, only men's legs can get a firm grip on a horse" when J. J., glancing up accidentally, became aware of the old butler standing at the door. He had been there five minutes.

J. J. clapped a hand to his head.

"My train of thought!" he roared. "Too late. What's the message?"

The butler brought a card, and J. J. glanced at it.

"Knox! Knox! Has to bring a stink up here. Oh, show him up!" He turned to Kirby. "That fellow will give my whole morning a bad taste."

And he stood, facing the door, hands clasped behind his back, chin nestling in his high collar. Kirby looked at him and wondered of what he was reminded Yes, Napoleon, a bulkier-bodied Napoleon. It was like a flash in the dark. Now he knew what J. J. was up to. And, in fact, over J. J.'s desk hung a large picture of the Little Corporal.

Then a sorry-looking fellow of thirty-five entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Knox," said J. J.

"Good morning. Mr. Harrington, I came up to see about the stories—why you don't take them any more."

J. J. spoke eloquently in a hurt voice.

"Is there any need to ask? I can't say how disappointed I am in you. After such high expectations! You haven't made good, Mr. Knox—" And as Knox started to protest J. J.'s hand went up and his voice deepened. "No, no, you haven't made good—"

"But, Mr. Harrington—"

"Let me finish. I gave you every opportunity. I singled you out and raised you up. I'm deeply disap-

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pointed. I expected you to develop, grow, hit harder. But you've lost your punch. You've gone back on me. No, don't break in, please. I'm convinced, Mr. Knox, that you weren't cut out for a writer; some other work—you'd better try something else."

"But my last story, 'The First-Born'—"

"That," said J. J., damning it completely, "isn't a story at all. It's a sketch."

"It's the same stuff you always took."

"Come, come, don't do my thinking for me. Sordid, your writing is sordid. And the public is tired of reading unpleasant things. The tired business man needs refreshment, romance, optimism."

Knox spoke quiveringly:

"Mr. Harrington, you raised my expectations so in the beginning that I took my wife and child—brought them to New York. And now you're throwing me over. What is there for me to do?"

J. J.'s voice became soft, melodious:

"Why, I'm sorry, Mr. Knox, I'm sorry. This is a hard world, and we all get sandbagged in the end. What more can I say? We all make our mistakes. And if I could put your personal affairs before the good of the magazine, believe me, I would. But you yourself, as a fair-minded man, know that this is impossible."

Knox gave him one despairing look, turned, and shambled out, a broken man. Thus neatly and with an easy gesture J. J. stuck a pin through the balloon he himself had inflated, and one of his former great men was blithely dumped into the garbage-heap of the failures. But he did the deed so convincingly, and with such sure touch, that Kirby entirely missed the tragedy of a blighted career and exulted in the free, big power that made or marred little human beings. J. J. seemed some sort of a god who could call a soul into life and then smite it. Kirby was made drunk with the feeling that he shared the power of this god, that he was J. J.'s good right arm,

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or at least his pen, that he was on the side of the Thunderer and helped to wield Thor's hammer.

This feeling was sharpened, and, in fact, all the dominance and fierce lust of authority was evoked in Kirby by an order J. J. now dictated:

TO THE STAFF AND HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS

Hereafter all reports and requests will be handed in to Mr. Trask, and come through him to me.

You will also consider any orders that he gives as emanating from me.

"You see," said J. J., smiling, "I want my secretary to be a real one."

So Kirby went down to the factory with a new haughtiness, a new spring in his walk, a new fire in his eye. He typed the order and took copies of it about. The seven received it ruefully, but before the gray eyes of this bull-headed young man they maintained a discreet silence; all save Martin and Brent.

Martin muttered:

"The old man's crazy. You've only been here a day."

Brent looked at Kirby sharply.

"Ha!" he laughed. "I wouldn't be surprised if you're going to be the next favorite."

"What do you mean?" asked Kirby.

"Oh, he's always got one. Boyd was his last. Now look at him. He's leading a dog's life. Watch out, Kirby!"

Again the notion of quicksands. But Kirby laughed it away; now that he was aroused and had power, he felt that in a pinch he could even flatten the strength of J. J.

"I'm not like these others," he told himself. "J. J. is up against something new this time."

So he went back to the room of the Superman. But when he reached the open door he heard a string of hot filth and profanity punctured by the angry comments of Edgar. Father and son were damning each other.

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Kirby entered on the words:

"Ought to kick you out. You've not even got the guts of Mr. Trask."

This was obvious; but Edgar, seeing Kirby, grew white-faced, and sputtered:

"I won't have you putting him over me. I wouldn't take a hello from him."

"Wouldn't . . . you hell-roaring," etc. "I'll make you!"

Whereupon Edgar rushed out and slammed the door. To Kirby's amazement, he saw tears trickling down J. J.'s face. The Captain of Industry seemed broken, and in his voice was quivering pathos.

"I shouldn't have spoken that way before you; but"—he paused and could barely speak—"you can't know what it is to be a father."

This was wonderful. It showed that the great man had his human weakness, that as a father he failed as most mortals do.

But a little later he was dictating a letter to Langley, that "No matter what ridicule and abuse we must endure, I shall go down to everlasting ruin with you to establish your great truth. Man is destined to fly; every element must give before his spirit of conquest; Earth is his . . ."

Such were the kaleidoscopic changes of this magical man. He seemed to be everywhere at once, slaying here, upraising there, weeping, laughing, cursing, scheming. Now he was heart and soul in the campaign against child labor, now risking his fortune and his life in pioneering some great new project. Surely, thought Kirby, he was a genius, or at least a near-genius; big enough to fight battles for democracy, to send fine dreams among the drudges, to shed his charm on lonely farms and shabby slums, to stand by a Langley while all the world scoffed, to toil terribly, to swing aggregations of men. Yes, he was typically a big American, not struggling merely for power and money, though he wanted both, but also engaged in a spiritual enterprise—a desire to do large and ample deeds,

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to create a greater America, to educate the people, to further science and what he thought was democracy. But still, was he truly great? There was a Lincoln who could loaf and invite his soul, be undecided, worried, and wait and wait for the hidden truth, and who had gentle pity and helped men by taking on his own shoulders a part of their guilt and their grief. No, J. J. was not a Lincoln, but a restless half-genius, impatient, cruelly swift, lacking poise.

His charm was that of an imaginative boy with a king's power—a sort of boy-poet. And this made him a perfect popular editor—the magnetic needle deflected by every faint change in the popular current—giving up his heart and soul ten times a day to each new scheme that sprang, full-grown, from his heated mind. He could grasp the straw of an idea, and out of this flimsy and sordid material build a glorious cloud-world of vision and color; and then, like a boy, after the passage of hours or days, when the new scheme began to stale, he flung it petulantly away, already lost in something else. Unreliable, easily promising, rarely performing, lovable, hatable, unique. Talent might suffer, but his swift responses kept his magazine salable—a revel of new sensations for a jaded and overworked people.

And Kirby exulted in it; he felt that he now lived where life was hottest, where the speed was greatest, where power went forth changing and manipulating the world. Here he belonged, for just this he had come on his lonely pilgrimage from Trent. And Kirby, inexperienced, felt sure that this violence was a part of greatness. He did not know, of course, that before the financial troubles began J. J. had been one of the sweetest and gentlest of men. The lack of money was poisoning him.

But the proof of his power came again and again. Martin stopped in at eleven-thirty and said that Hank, the foreman of the press-room, was raising trouble. He was a little drunk and was going around swearing that he was

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going to "do" for J. J., knock him down when he met him next.

"Tell him to come here at once," snapped J. J.

Twenty minutes later he came, an ugly giant slouching through the doorway. He had a great head, black eyes, and unshaven cheeks; he was in overalls, and his bare arms undulated with serpentine muscles; his big fists were clenched, and he kept muttering ferociously. It seemed to Kirby that J. J., who was by far the smaller man, was in real danger.

"What the devil you want?" growled Hank, ominously.

J. J. merely turned, without rising.

"I want you to be a man, Hank, and not a big beast." His voice was sharply quiet.

"Jes' get up," muttered Hank, "and I'll make a floor-mop of yer; jes' get up."

He advanced slowly.

"Hank," said J. J., with wonderful sweetness, "three months ago I called at your house and saw your wife and children."

Hank paused at these words, his curiosity aroused.

"Your wife is a lovely young woman," J. J. continued, "and the children are as fine as a man could want. They love you, I could see that. You ought to be proud of such a family, yes, instead of breaking their hearts by acting like a big beast. What will your wife say when you come home in this condition? And what will your own children think of their father?"

Hank stared at him, and, being elemental in his emotions, this primitive appeal stabbed him in his heart. Suddenly his shoulders heaved, and he began to sob heavily.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Harrington," he muttered.

"Hank, you're a good man at heart. Now you go back to your work and behave yourself. That's all."

And out Hank went. J. J. had known exactly the right thing to do; unerringly he touched the central nerve.

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Kirby's brain was hardly quick enough to react on all these revelations, but again he felt that he could almost love this man.

Lunch-time came.

"It's late," said J. J. "Come down and have a bite with us."

Kirby did so, and at once wished he hadn't. About the table sat six of the cursed seven; J. J.; Kirby; Mrs. Harrington, a stout, faded-faced, silent woman; and a young couple, friends of the family. This was bad enough; but worse, the table had not the familiar table-cloth, merely doilies under the plates. This made Kirby nervous—the table seemed so vulgarly naked. He blushed, and sat with sealed lips, again the outsider.

Then, glancing up between courses, he was horrified to see the young lady smoking a cigarette. He had seen women of the streets do this, of course, yet the sight was inexpressibly shocking. It but sharpened his speechlessness.

A discussion was going on about hypnotism.

"I've practised it," said Martin. "Want to see a test?" They did.

"Wait till William comes in."

William was Martin's valet, and also waited on the table. There was silence while they waited. Finally the kitchen door opened, and pale-faced, servile William came in, a platter on his upraised hand.

He had not taken ten steps before Martin murmured: "Sleep, William," and made passes with his hand.

William stopped as if brought up by a bullet, platter still upraised, eyes vacant, stiffened into a trance. Then Martin released him, and William went on totally unconscious of his dramatic act.

Kirby felt again that this house was ghastly. He decided never to eat there again.

J. J. started for town after lunch, and Kirby was left alone for the afternoon. He toiled ferociously, and,

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though by six o'clock he was so fatigued that he thought he should sink asleep over the machine, and though his back and his fingers ached unendurably, he felt brightly happy. He had the feeling that he was coming on.

Out in the lovely twilight he and Brent walked home together. The woods were ghostly, and in the orange-colored sky the evening star sparkled alone.

"Well, how do you like it?" asked Brent.

"Oh, it's great," said Kirby.

"I hope you keep on thinking so," said the plain-spoken manuscript clerk.

The side street was shaded like a lane by large maple-trees, and they stepped softly over the fallen leaves, clicked the gate, entered the quiet house, and went up and washed. But Kirby's excited mind kept beating on in this nest of peace, this soil-deep harvest-hush. The great evening laid no cool finger to his lips, folded him with no garment of oblivion and homely joy.

He went down to the supper-table, buoyant, eager to brag a little. A jolly spirit ruled the room, and Kirby now became thoroughly conscious of its occupants. Last night he had been dimly aware of being introduced to a daughter; to-night, almost with amazement, he noticed her, a girl of eighteen—Myrtle Allison.

Her brother was teasing her.

"You're not dressed up to-night, are you?"

Her laugh tinkled delightfully, and she blushed quickly.

"Mr. Trask," said Fred Allison, "why do you suppose Myrtle is dressed fit to kill to-night? Can you guess?"

"Fred!" cried Myrtle. "Please don't."

"Leave the girl be," said Mrs. Allison, laughing. "Your turn will come next, Fred, if you're not careful."

Fred roared with laughter.

"Don't you believe it! Well, sis, what are you blushing about?"

She became confused, and looked away.

"You're too mean," she whispered, ready to cry.

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For she had met Kirby's eyes, and she saw that he saw. Her simplicity and shyness could not bear this candor.

Her father swiftly changed the talk to shield her:

"Well, what do you think of J. J., Mr. Trask?"

But Kirby's desire to boast had faded in this homely atmosphere.

"I think he knows how to make people work," he said, and they laughed with delight.

They had barely finished supper when a young man entered, and Myrtle rose to meet him. And Kirby had revealed to him the exquisite glory of her girlhood. She seemed to hold, for her few moments, the light and vanishing wonder of youth; in her silvery laughter and the wild-rose coloring of her cheeks, in her slender grace, in her softened hair and the rainy freshness of her eyes, there was gathered for a brief hour the dreams of the fields in April, the float of the clouds at sunrise, the transient and tragic loveliness of the spring.

Watching her, Kirby felt the day fall from him; ambition, blood-tasting, the mad chaos of J. J., the ruinous power, passed like a dissolving cloud over this young girl. Not since Mrs. Waverley had left him had Kirby felt so cleansed and free. It was as if he had two natures—one, the fighter; the other, the tender comrade and lover; and as if it needed a woman or a girl to keep the more gracious one alive.

XVI

THE FAVORITE

KIRBY now rapidly developed that dual personality so common in American life. He was, to use the popular phrase, one man in business, another at home. In the factory he was haughty, secretive, decisive, loving to see his will break down the wills of others; he exulted in sheer strength and sly fighting; but when, at the day's end, he stepped down the lane of maples, he was willing to have a young girl take, as it were, his heavy armor from his bruised shoulders, helmet from his head and lance from his hand, and then envelop him in tenderness and song. She had a sweet, clear voice, and often in the crowded front parlor, with the family lounging about, she played on the piano and sang negro songs and some of the sentimental American balladry. George Westcott, her lover, went out to Chicago shortly after Kirby's arrival, and for a time Kirby saw much of her.

She would consent to Sunday-afternoon walks along the roads around Inwood, and they would loiter pleasantly along, with the automobiles dusting by them; or sometimes take a trolley to the sea and spend a few hours on the sand. At such times Kirby was liquid-clear in his emotions, chivalrous, charming, full of mirth and wistful tenderness. But she was very loyal to Westcott, and their companionship developed little further. Her innocence, her emotions as changeful as the sea, her elusive and quick beauty, her soft voice and gentle manners, brought all that was beautiful in Kirby to the surface and kept it from dying.

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"I wonder," said Allison once, "how such a nice, thoughtful fellow ever gets on with J. J."

But he did get on, and went with amazing rapidity. Kirby always needed something big to bring him out, and his new job was, in a way, gigantic. It aroused his whole nature and developed one resource after another. It was not long before he was an expert in stenography and typewriting, easily outdistancing the speedy J. J. But he was not content with merely secretarial work and the fun of watching the chameleon changes of the business; he went about, poking in here and there, and mastering this and that detail, the secrets of this and that department. His brain grew active with schemes, and almost daily he had some vital suggestion which J. J. eagerly seized upon, expanded, and put into action. In fact, J. J. found him stimulating.

"Mr. Trask," he said, "there's something in you—receptivity, sympathy, imagination—that gives me freshness."

And Kirby found that J. J. was a master in absorbing other brains, draining them of their best, and using the fresh strength in his own work. But Kirby, instead of being drained by the process, used the same method himself and drew from others, and even from J. J., ideas and manners and ways of work.

It was not long before he became known as J. J.'s favorite, and hence feared. Once or twice he carried tales back that resulted in explosions in the editorial office. Besides that, he showed a native power of his own—a haughty hardness, an abrupt speech, a flash of eyes, and overbearing carriage that provoked timorousness in others. He was typically American in the swiftness with which he acquired a whole new set of manners—learning a way of eating by watching the staff at table, a way of ridding himself of questioners from Martin, this gesture and lilt of speech from J. J., and that walk from Edgar. As a result, he began to dress more fastidiously, getting

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his clothes made to order, wearing a stick-pin in his tie, and picking colors and cut with expert eye. He also began an acquaintanceship with Hurley, the associate editor, and through him learned how to play golf, a game he didn't much care for in itself, but which brought him in social contact with successful men. In fact, Kirby had no use for games; business was the real game, after all, for it touched all life, whereas a little play game did nothing but bring out a facile skill and ended in a few points either way. Besides, he could never bear to lose. He always lost his temper with the game.

The staff was jealous of him, naturally. His rise was a matter of a few weeks; he was young, and they found their years of experience overridden by this haughty young man. But his power was too real to be conspired against, and it grew from month to month. J. J. trusted him implicitly, left much of the correspondence to be answered by his secretary, and, when absent, allowed Kirby to carry on the routine with full authority. He got in the habit, too, of having Kirby investigate various departments and report on how they worked and what results they showed; and the silent, abrupt, hard young man made the employees quail.

As, for instance, finger on report sheet, he might say to Meggs, head of subscription department:

"You show two hundred less subscribers this May than last. Why?"

Meggs would try to be pleasant.

"Lots of reasons, Mr. Trask. Hard times—"

Kirby would break in:

"*Wendell's Magazine* shows an increase, I'm told. Hard times, Mr. Meggs?"

Meggs would color up.

"Well, if I must say so, the magazine hasn't been up to the mark lately."

"Exactly where?"

"Well, human interest—"

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"That's guesswork. Let me see the circular you sent out this month and also that of last May."

Kirby would then study these.

"I thought so. Nothing new; same old drool; you'd better have a talk with J. J. Do you think people will bite the same bait twice?"

And Kirby would light a whopping big black cigar, for he was learning to be a great smoker now, and a great drinker. First, the terrific drive of work required the whip of stimulation to keep it going, and, second, drinking put him "next" to his associates and the newcomer, and smoking gave him a guard against intrusion. Cigar in mouth, he could take a puff when he was embarrassed for an answer, or when he wanted to stand off an encroaching power. Five quiet puffs would disconcert an unruly or angry man, and they gave Kirby a great air of reserve and aloofness and stored strength. He soon became known by his cigar and the way he twisted up one whole side of his face to keep it in place.

There were nights, too, when he reveled in New York to "blow off steam," as he put it. For at times the companionship of gentle Myrtle did not rid him of his frenzied but repressed excitement. He fell also into a habit of eating big meals and eating with thoughtless speed. And as a result of the drinking, the food, the more luxurious habits of life, he gradually began to get a little stout, his face filled out, until he looked like a sleek, dangerous fellow, with bristling gray eyes. He was always, however, very handsome in his way, and women invariably were attracted to him.

His power over J. J. was very real. One morning, about three months after Kirby's coming, J. J. was in an unusually tempestuous mood. He found a bad error in one of the letters. Quick as a flash he turned on his secretary.

"You damned young—" he began, but he got no further. Kirby rose abruptly, his cheeks hot.

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"I resign my job, Mr. Harrington," he snapped, and started for the door.

J. J. arose at once.

"Mr. Trask."

Kirby turned. He saw J. J.'s face, agitated, wistful, almost tearful.

"I want to apologize to you," said J. J. "You're quite right. I respect you for your feelings; I think all the more of you."

And so Kirby came back, and remained, amazingly, the only uncursed man on the premises.

He was kept supremely busy. Sometimes he accompanied J. J. to New York and took dictation on the train; sometimes he was sent alone to the city to interview some author or placate some creditor. When summer came, and J. J. had to be away for several weeks, Kirby was allowed a free hand with routine work; and in the following summer he was even allowed to put into effect a system he had originated for handling the mail-bags. Naturally, each time he asked for a raise in salary he received it, until at last he had forty a week. Out of this he saved only ten, however, for he was a liberal spender.

And all the time he gloried in the work. He had little use for the editorial side of the magazine; he reveled, rather, in the audacity and imaginative greatness of the business, the storminess of J. J., the subjugation of employees by that terrible man, the hand-to-hand conflicts he engaged in with every human being that appeared. There was continual storm and stress in the place; hardly a week went by without J. J. uprooting the methods of work and instituting some new system.

"Won't give them time to cake," he said. "A caked thing is dead."

And men came and went in swift careers, raised by this magician at one season to be dropped at another. And there were all sorts of problems to be met: there was a vast sum owing to the paper company; artists and authors were

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clamoring for checks, and certain banks refused to make further loans. But Kirby persistently shut his eyes to the fact that he was apparently treading perilously on quicksand.

No other man had been a secretary so long; but Kirby, as he himself knew, was out of the ordinary run. He had no weak kindness, no qualms of conscience, no woman's intervention to hold him back. He argued that life is a fight, and the victory is with the hardest fighter; that this is the law of nature, and that it behooves men to live within the law.

And so came the autumn of the second year, and then, one morning in October, an unusual occurrence. Kirby was typing in his little office when he heard shouts and a scuffling noise. He went out in the hall just in time to see the door of Boyd's room slam shut. A cowering office-boy greeted him, and the staff and other employees were emerging from the other offices.

"What is it?" asked Kirby.

"Mr. Boyd and Mr. Martin are scrapping."

It was so, really so, and it was delightful. A thrilled group stood there while furniture crashed, glass was shattered, and elemental English pierced the air.

Hurley and Edgar took bets.

"Ten to five on Martin," said Hurley.

"Take you up," cried Edgar; "Boyd knows jiu-jitsu."

"Aye," said Hurley, "but Martin has a solar-plexus left."

Meggs held the stakes, tittering.

"It ain't jiu-jitsu or lefts," he mumbled; "it's chairs and ink-wells."

Crash, bang, and then the impact of bodies on the straining door.

"You little English pup," they heard from Martin, "put down that paper-cutter!"

"Not till I've jabbed you," said Boyd.

"Murder," mumbled Meggs.

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And Kirby felt that now the real spirit of the place was asserting itself in its most normal way; just this was done daily, though without fists and bloodshed.

Just then J. J. came swiftly up the stairs. He came rarely, but had a most unfortunate way of coming at the moment of crisis. The group turned pale.

"What is it?" asked J. J.

They told him, and he knocked vigorously on the door.

"Martin," he shouted, "come out of there!"

A hush within; the door opened, and the group, craning their necks, gaped in on a scene of desolate ruin. Chairs lay broken, Boyd's desk was naked, paper strewed the floor, and the walls and floor ran black and red ink. There stood the two combatants, breathing in gasps, clothes torn, fists clenched, like two caught school-boys.

J. J. spoke hoarsely:

"I can't speak for inexpressible shame—two grown men—heads of this business—to indulge in this disgraceful row. Martin, go up to your room; Boyd, I will see you later."

He turned and passed out, Martin following like a whipped dog, and silence returned. But the room had to be rekalsomined, and when Boyd put in a bill for seventy-five cents for having a black eye painted the amount was paid by the cashier and the bill duly entered by the bookkeeper on the books.

The next morning Boyd was summoned to J. J.'s room. Kirby was there getting dictation. The former favorite, with his painted eye, came in very quietly. J. J. turned on him:

"Have you anything to say?"

"Yes," said Boyd, in his low, English voice, "when I came to you I was a decent fellow. Now I'm little less than a beast. I beg to resign my position."

"I accept," said J. J. "You can go to-day. Good morning."

And, swallowing tears, another broken man passed out

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from the room that was a very rack for the cracking and rending of the human soul.

J. J. sat in thought a moment, then looked at Kirby.

"You could get a stenographer to help you out with my work," he said, "and so be free to carry Boyd's work for a while, until we see whether you are big enough for it. I think you could do it. At least we'll try, at three thousand a year—Acting Business Manager. If you make good you get that job."

And so Kirby rose. He was twenty-eight. It was another case of a young American put into power without much real foundation of training or experience. In his drunken triumph he carefully forgot the making and breaking of Boyd, as men on the make are apt to do.

XVII

THE WOMAN

AFTER two years of being dictated to Kirby now had the luxurious joy of dictating to another. He would tell the office-boy to ask Mr. Loughlin to come in, and a pale young man, just as tremulous as ever Kirby was, would come in deferentially, pull out the flap of the desk, adjust his note-book, and wait for the terrible Business Manager. Then Kirby, rocking back in his revolving-chair, pulling on a cigar, a letter in his hand and thought knitting his brow, would say:

“Take this dictation. Jackson Press Company, Nyack, etc.”

He felt now that he was a man of standing in the world, and so did the factory; for a man who could run the business on the one hand and on the other keep in the secret counsels of J. J. was a man to be deferred to. The staff was raw with jealousy, but could not even show it.

However, there were two yellow streaks in Kirby's triumph. One was the fact that he was only *Acting* Business Manager; that he was on trial, and that if he failed to make good he would be veritably reduced in rank in the eyes of all, a shame he could not tolerate. The other was the palpable flimsiness of the whole institution. Now that he had control, he could really see the financial undertow, a fierce back-wash of increasing debt that threatened at any moment to drown the entire business. He could not delude himself longer; at short notice the

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enterprise might cease, in which case he would be out of work. And he was sane enough to know that with his superficial experience he would not be able to get a position of this kind elsewhere. It meant sinking back to the drudges; it meant eventual failure.

He made his brain sweat over this problem: how to escape upward before he was dragged downward. For some time there was no clue. Then finally he evolved a Machiavellian scheme.

It so happened that J. J. had begun a new series of articles in the magazine, on "Captains of Industry," one each on the head of each trust, as sugar, beef, tobacco, wool, oil, and steel. This naturally brought in Jordan Watts. A letter was addressed to him, informing him that the magazine already had material in hand for the article, but preferred to get it from him direct. The answer came from Mary Watts. It ran briefly:

"My father, as you know, is opposed to giving information to the press. However, it would be unwise to publish an uncorrected statement. If you will send the article to me I will pass upon it."

J. J. replied that it would be to Watts' interest to furnish the basis of an entirely fresh article, one convincing in its straightforwardness, and finally Mary answered that the matter had been left in her hands. "I handle at present all the publicity work for my father," and if Mr. Harrington would send a question-blank she would see if it were wise to fill it out.

At this point Kirby asked that the matter be put in his hands. J. J. was deeply involved in an airship meet and had little time for formulating question-blanks, hence, in his usual way with Kirby, he consented.

Kirby now pushed his scheme, thereby entering the ranks of those fortune-hunters who, like a black swarm, buzz around the hive of the millionaire. And this was the not unnatural outcome of the teachings that had nourished his youth; the cheap American get-there-you-can-succeed

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philosophy; and the man who but a few years since had wept over a ruined Bess now, by the pressure of savage business, became himself one of those trampers who make what they are the shop-girl and the drudge. Yet the outcome was so logical that not once did he wince. It was himself against the world; it was crush or be crushed.

It was quite natural, too, that he should meet the Watts; they were the peak of the mountain, and no matter which side he climbed they stood there before him. Then what more simple than, having aimed at them once, he should now aim at them again? He had missed the first opportunity through inexperience and ignorance; he was different now; he was a power himself; he was a vital part of the power of the press, a power that could equal at a pinch the power of a millionairé. Clothed with this authority he could speak face to face with Mary or her father, and they who had so charmingly turned him out-of-doors four years ago would have to take cognizance of him to-day.

He remembered Mary as plain-faced and girlish and very lovely in the way she had tried to shield and comfort him. At that time he had felt younger than she; now he felt immeasurably older. If he met her now his developed masculinity would overshadow her, and he knew the tricks whereby he could dominate. He surely knew now how he attracted women.

Once there had been an explosion in the photograph-room, and Kirby, running out to the end of the hall with fifty others, saw the pall of smoke in the sky-lit room. With splendid incaution he dashed in, crawled on his stomach, and dragged the unconscious photographer out. And the huddled girls of the subscription department wept, not for a burned and overpowered photographer, but for a singed Kirby Trask. He knew this, and, walking out on a warm noon, he could not help but be aware of these girls, lounging in the grass of the railroad embankment, eating their lunch and gazing after him. He re-

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membered, too, Janice and Bess, Mrs. Waverley and Myrtle, even Mary—though he tried to forget Frances Ferguson.

In fact, Kirby was becoming, in a way, a Richard-the-Lion-Hearted—bold, cold, haughty, and yet with such a reckless dash that weaker men followed him and women loved him.

“A young devil,” said Meggs, and took a certain fearful pride in being ordered about by him.

There was curiously some of this reckless splendor even in this new plan, this attempt to rush a millionaire. He did not know, of course, whether Mary was affianced or not—he had seen no newspaper report on the subject—yet he imagined that she might be. And he was sane enough not to expect anything so extraordinary. What he hoped for was that he might meet Mary, win her friendship, through her insinuate himself into the life of old Watts, show his power, and secure some place in the machinery of the Trust. Once in, he had no doubt of himself.

In short, he hoped to escape through Mary up to the top before he was dragged down again to the bottom. The situation was critical and needed desperate action; he was doing nothing dishonest, no, nothing more than thousands of men were doing daily in one way and another—political hangers-on, office-seekers, social climbers, professional men, employees. Yes, it sometimes seemed as if the whole world were doing it; as if all recognized the truth which the commercial traveler on the sleeper had put so bluntly:

“It takes pull now, *pull*. All the push in the world won't help a feller.”

And this “pull” could only be secured through personal alliances. Acquaintanceship, friendship, were the means of rising.

So he wrote to Mary:

“Mr. Harrington has placed the matter of the ‘Captains of Industry’ article in my hands. We feel that the

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question-blank would be unsatisfactory both to you and to us; it might necessitate a lengthy correspondence. It might be wiser, as it would be quicker and easier, to have an interview of twenty minutes. And if you will name a place and date we can dispose of the matter at once."

This was a chance shot; if it carried home he might meet her. If he met her she might remember him. Much might follow.

He sent the letter on a Saturday; the following Tuesday came the reply, typewritten on note-paper, and signed in Mary's large hand:

"I understand that Inwood is a short automobile ride from the city. I will be out there, unless I hear from you, on Wednesday afternoon at three."

He could have leaped up and shouted with victorious exultation. Then he had misgivings; he would have preferred to meet her in the city where he could see her alone. J. J. might be on the scene to absorb the young woman as he absorbed everything; or the staff might intervene. He decided then to tell no one about the interview, and to leave orders that if on Wednesday afternoon any one asked for Mr. Trask he (or she) was to be sent up to the house. The plan was not without its merit, for J. J.'s library on the ground floor needed overhauling, a job that had been deferred from time to time. He could go there and watch from the window and intercept her before she reached any one else.

So on Wednesday morning this cheerful, premeditating young man shaved and dressed with fastidious care, gave his hair the highest excellence of waviness, and went to work feeling like a powerful, smooth-running dynamo. Lunch came, one o'clock, two. He went up to the library.

"Where's J. J.?" he asked the butler.

"Gone to the city."

Fortune smiled upon him. Wonderful, indeed, he reflected, what made for success in this world. There was Brent, for instance, the manuscript clerk, just as fearless,

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just as big-brained, just as hard a worker as Kirby. Yet Brent stayed low, couldn't rise, couldn't work out of the rut. Was it that he lacked recklessness? Recklessness ruined as often as made a man, and all the recklessness in the world was impotent against locked doors. It must be then a matter of luck. Kirby was lucky—lucky that he went to Atwood's, lucky that the J. J. opening was there, lucky that J. J. liked him, and now supremely lucky that Mary Watts was adventurous enough (or was it curious enough?) to come out to Inwood on a chance letter.

The library was a long, dusky room, with high ceiling, with old-fashioned sooty white-marble fireplace, and with many-folding brown shutters on the storm-stained Gothic windows. Unprotected books cluttered wooden shelves to the ceiling; the furniture was old, and the corners carelessly filled with dusty heaps of manuscripts, with stacks of old file-boxes, with creaking revolving-cabinets. The room had no library atmosphere, no inviting radiance of warmth and comfort for the browsing reader. It was more like a cold, forbidding store-room, shadowy and tinged with purple gloom.

Yet to-day an atmosphere of romance and secret adventure pervaded it, like some dark stone tower-room of the Middle Ages where a man and woman whispered together in the twilight to keep their voices from echoing through the perilous halls. Charmed and expectant, Kirby fingered gingerly the dusty file-boxes, and ever and again went to the windows and glanced out. He had half a fear that she would not come.

The day was gray, silent, as if snow were in the air, and an intimate melancholy lay like an enfolding spirit on the bare slopes, the gravel path, the model factory with its plume of steamy smoke, and the bare woods beyond. A precipitation of sadness and loving gloom lived downwardly on all things, the gray-bosomed, gray-haired ancient sky laying her desolate breast on the wintry

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earth. And traced against the gray were the bare branches of the frozen trees.

Kirby's spirit was touched by this melancholy, and some of his excitement died in it like a hot flash in its own gray smoke. For a moment he wondered at his own hardness and self-absorption, for the day touched him like a woman, and the hidden beauty of his spirit quivered at the touch.

He went back to the file-boxes, and then back and forth. The light seemed to be waning in the growing gloom.

"She may not come at all in this weather," he reflected.

Then, in the silence, he heard the far chug-chug of an automobile, and glancing out saw a big brown French car stopping before the portico of the factory. A chauffeur got out and went lightly up the steps. Kirby grew hot about the temples, an unexpected feeling of timidity palsied him, and vivid memories of four years ago came back. Then he had nerved himself, and at the crucial moment lost his nerve. After all, he was the same human being. He wished almost angrily that the day had been of a different temper—sharp wind and sunshine, storm, anything that could keep a man hardy. This weather was dissolving.

Then, as he expected, the chauffeur came down and re-entered the car, which started with a snort. He felt as if his doom were coming toward him; as if unescapable Nemesis were overwhelming him; his blood rushed to his head and he trembled. Now the car was lost under the slope of the hill, now it took the long curve of the carriage road, now it was hidden beyond the house, and now, abruptly, it swept up to the porch and stopped. He got a glimpse of a muffled woman in the rear seat, veil over head, and heavy automobile coat.

But he bolted for the door, to intercept the butler, and flung it open. The chauffeur came up, a powerful, clean-faced man, in leather boots, great fur-lined gloves, and heavy coat.

"Mr. Trask in?"

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“Yes. Miss Watts? Show her in.”

His voice came in unfamiliar accents.

The chauffeur went back, and in the eternity that followed Kirby knew himself for a bold fool. He was glad that he had not the gray eyes of a Mrs. Waverley upon him.

Now the woman descended from the car and came with firm tread up the steps. He had the fleeting impression that it was not Mary Watts at all, but some entire stranger. She stood before him, and her voice had a sound, healthy ring:

“Mr. Trask?”

“Yes,” he said, a little huskily. “Miss Watts? Step into the library, please.”

He closed the door and followed her. With a graceful motion she was unpinning and taking off the veil, and he helped her off with the coat. Then she glanced round and sat down. There was a freedom and health in her motions that was sharply, pleasantly perceptible.

And then, as Kirby saw the face and the simple black dress—for she was in mourning for her sister's death—he experienced an unhinging shock. He had made no allowance for the four years that had changed him from a disorganized youth to a powerful man; but these same years had changed Mary. The pleasant, impulsive girl-ishness had fled; she had matured, she was rounded, and her face, which he had thought now plain, now blushing radiantly, was superb; soft, simply waved dark hair over a powerful forehead; large brown, honest eyes; a strong jaw. And yet she appeared very young, as if she knew men, knew manners, knew the ways of the world, but seemed, with large eyes, trying to wonderingly peer into the mysteries of life. It was as if she knew nothing of her own unfolded nature, the generations that were sealed up in her, the woman-mate that lay within her, tranced, waiting the kiss that should waken not only her, but the whole palace of the woman. She had the face and bearing of a woman

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who thought, who felt, honest before all things—emotionally, intellectually honest. There was no lie in Mary Watts. And yet through all ran the cloudy wistfulness of an unmated woman.

Kirby's abrupt silence, painful with this flood of revelation, caused her to look up and examine him. She bent forward a little.

"I must have met you—somewhere."

It was half a statement, half a question. He turned red.

"You did," he faltered. "Four years ago. I came to your house for supper."

She seemed to be reading his soul with those honest eyes.

"Four years ago. And what was the occasion?"

"I had just come to the city—Mrs. Janice Hadden had given me a letter to your father."

"I remember." Her soft laughter was clear. "And father was rude to you, until you exploded on him. I've never forgotten that; it was unusual." He began to breathe easier and feel elated. She went on, earnestly: "I really meant to ask you up again, to make up for that night, and I know it's no excuse that I've been simply swept along all this time."

He could say nothing. He smiled, and sat down.

"And now you're here, interviewing people."

"Yes," he said, and he could not help adding, "I'm Acting Business Manager."

"In four years. Splendid!" she said, enthusiastically. Then she looked at him and spoke in a probing way: "But does the Business Manager get up articles?"

He squirmed inwardly. Her honesty was getting unpleasant.

"No," he murmured, trying to smile, "but I'm still doing some of Mr. Harrington's secretarial work."

"I see."

Speech evidently was at an end. In the waning light he saw her face glistening out of the black shadows. Beauty and life were there, shining in the engulfing

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dark, the beam of a lightship on stormy seas. Something profoundly devout was stirred in him, and he felt in the clutch of a huge, exquisite power.

Then, to snap the silence, she began a rapid questioning that reminded him strangely of her father.

"How long have you been here?"

"Two years."

"And you started as secretary?"

"Yes."

"And before then?"

He could hardly speak for shame.

"I worked with the Continental Express Company."

"As a stenographer?"

She would have the truth, and out it came:

"As a clerk." The words seemed to burn his lips. "Now," he thought, "she'll despise me."

"Clerk to Business Manager in four years," she said, meditatively. "That shows power."

And there was a hint in her voice that possibly she thought of Kirby as a man inherently great, and, like Janice Hadden, she would have enjoyed projecting him. It showed, too, though Kirby could not glimpse this, that she was looking for real values; that she put crude strength before the weak-spined polish of some of the men of her set. The daughter of a messenger-boy had not grown very far from the common soil.

Again there was silence, and Kirby scourged himself because he was proving so unexpectedly the same old two-and-sixpence. He left all the responsibility of communication with her.

She spoke in a changed voice:

"Well, we may as well get the business over with, Mr. Trask. What can I tell you?"

This was tonic; the man of action was saved from drowning.

"Just this," he said, abruptly. "We want the plain facts of Mr. Watts' life."

THE WOMAN

"But you have those already."

"We may have them wrong."

"All right," she said.

He got a note-book and took it in shorthand. He had hesitated about doing this, for it would put him in an inferior position; when he did it finally it was on impulse. But Mary admired this lack of ceremony, this businesslike simplicity. He sat near the window, and now a change of clouds sent on him a pale, whitish light that brought out all the bull-headed strength of his head.

She dictated limpidly, slowly, out of a clear mind. And she showed far less false pride than Kirby had. He did not want to admit clerking; she seemed to delight in picturing her father as a poor boy of humble origin, as a messenger, a telegraph operator, a secretary, a superintendent, a manufacturer. And before she finished Kirby felt definitely how slight the real wall is between the different classes in American civilization, the *real* wall, for the wall of manners and power and position and comfort was tragic enough, as he knew.

There was one part of the narrative that she slurred over, however. It had to do with her father's business methods. He asked a probing question or two, but finally she said, in a quivering voice:

"No, publicity hasn't any right there. People wouldn't understand, as I do. Besides, we're giving away millions of dollars to set some things right."

This moral viewpoint was new to him.

"She's too honest," he thought. "I'd hate to have her investigating me."

A blank silence again followed the ending of the interview. He felt that she was watching him, and, looking up, he saw her face with its cloudy wistfulness.

She smiled at him very sweetly, he thought.

"Have you ever seen an automobile at close range?" she asked.

"No," he replied.

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Automobiles were still enough of a novelty at that time to warrant inspection. He helped her into her coat, she put the veil over her head, and they went out. The chauffeur began cranking up the machine, but she showed Kirby the parts. Finally she said:

“Get in; I’ll run it for you.”

The chauffeur looked up sharply.

“You hadn’t better, Miss Watts. You’ve not really learnt yet.”

She laughed. “Oh yes, I’m going to do it,” and leaped in and took the driving-seat. “Come on, Mr. Trask.”

He got in beside her, the chauffeur grimly jumped out of the way, and at a twist of her wrist the car leaped from under them and glided easily along the curve of the drive. The action seemed to reveal all her power to Kirby; it appeared to him that it was a powerful human being who so lightly and easily sped the huge car along. And her presence was beginning to fill him with a painful glory—his growing emotions threatening to overmaster him.

“It’s glorious, isn’t it?” she exclaimed, as she made a swift circle and the car flew back to the house again. “Some day I’m going out all alone and let out the speed and simply jump the hills. It’s a sort of freedom.”

The car stopped and they stepped down. Darkness was now devouring the world, and here and there a protesting light appeared in house and factory window. She stood very close to him, and as she said good-by she took his hand and seemed to study him at close range. He felt faint and dizzily happy. Suddenly her personality seemed to invade his, so that he was lost in the tides of her spirit. It was as if the trembling mystery of existence was laid bare for a brief flash, as if the hurried and muffled destiny of humanity revealed its primal light and the far glory that it yearned toward. There was something undying in the moment; out of the dark a man and a woman emerging, touching hands, glancing in each other’s eyes. And all the realities made it more poignant and touched

THE WOMAN

with wonder—the darkening heavens, the clash of the chauffeur's boots on the pebbles, the breathing of the machine, the lights in the growing night.

She, too, felt the presence of that remote and far Romance that leaned for a brief moment and lit their faces and passed.

“Good-by,” she said, wistfully. “You're to get that delayed invitation now, depend upon me. It will come soon. In the mean time, if you must see me any more about the article, come to the city.” Her voice seemed like a cloud passing through the cloud of his own spirit.

“Good-by,” he murmured, breathless.

She stepped in, the chauffeur climbed to his seat, she smiled dimly, and then the night took her.

He stood, as if his soul had been stripped naked, a quivering human being in the dark. The great primal force of life, the limitless systole and diastole of that power that makes the suns and planets ebb and flow and penetrates the atoms and the mated animals, the pulsing of that swing of all the world which Kirby had thus far felt in dim throbs, but always rid himself of, so that he at last thought he was free of it and could go his hard way untroubled, now clutched him, drenched him, possessed him, and his little vain works crumbled in that Tremendousness. He marveled that he had thought of fortune-hunting. He marveled that his little brain had busily schemed. It was as if an earthquake had shattered his career.

“That's what a woman is,” he told himself with blinding amazement. “And I—yes, I'm a man. She's a woman.”

And he felt as if he were the most unfortunate fellow in the world. He had planned without reckoning on Nature. He had thought himself a free master; he was merely an atom in the fury of the suns.

XVIII

THE RIDE

HAD Kirby been told that his honored father had secretly lived a life of dissoluteness and murder the crude shock would have dazed him less than the discovery that he was merely that little white animal—man—nailed to the flying débris of the stars. Stunned, he saw life afresh. It was not happiness, there was no rapture in the thoughts that Mary evoked, there was merely realization. Her personality seemed to have saturated his, and the obsession was almost painful.

It was exactly as if his work, his schemes, his plots were a lot of little strings he had been tying together, each string leading to some new power out of sight, until finally, impatient, he had dropped a spark on them, to find, to his horror, that they were fuses that burned rapidly down to a mine that exploded all his life. He felt that somehow he had ruined himself; that by changing his whole direction from business success to the following of a woman he had become a helpless slave.

Natures such as Kirby's, when once aroused, are hard to quiet. He did his best to pull out from his heart this woman's power. He told himself that he was adding himself to a whole swarm of suitors; that Mary was too keen not to see through his ambitions and pretensions; that even if she favored him she was like a king's daughter, bound to a high marriage; that he had nothing to offer such a woman but his unpleasant self; that he had been an unfortunate fool in trying to use a woman as a handle

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to success; and yet, despite this feverish reasoning, he could only go about as if he were drugged.

He lost the zest of his work; he felt in the morning a distaste for the heaps of letters and reports; the buzz of J. J. and his employees was a petty noise of gnats in his ear, and as a result his work suffered. The staff were quick to see this, quick to tell J. J., and J. J. found it was true.

"You're falling down, Mr. Trask," he said in all kindness, "just at the moment when I am expecting you to make good."

Kirby murmured some excuse, and decided to try harder. It was useless; he showed moodiness, pettishness, absence of mind. Sometimes he lost his temper and railed and stormed in the manner of J. J. Besides, he lost sleep at night, and came to his work fatigued, at war with himself and all others. It was a most unfortunate time to develop such qualities. He was on the very brink of promotion, and a few weeks of intense drive and hard, brittle action would have carried him over.

"Pretty soon," he told himself, "I'll lose the job, and go to thunder in New York."

Such cases were not uncommon; hardly a week passed without some newspaper report of a successful man committing suicide, or disappearing, or disgracing himself. Many of them doubtless had vanquished all things save sex; when they met that primal force they dissolved like summer clouds.

Mary had opened the way for visits at the Fifth Avenue house, and he soon found reasons enough for consulting her further about the article. So he ran in to town and saw her. He found no opportunity for intimacy, however. She was extremely busy, and in the atmosphere of her own home seemed distant and strange to him. It was as if she were a different woman—almost a business woman. So these trips made him more feverish than ever; he told himself each time he would never go again, but again he went, drawn irresistibly.

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However, on the third visit, he found her deeply abstracted and troubled by a problem in philanthropy. Should she turn over half a million dollars for medical research? There was so much waste in this work, the processes so slow, while the immediate needs of the poor cried out for relief. Kirby urged medical research.

"Better get at the roots of our troubles and prevent, than try merely to ameliorate."

And he spoke with such sure logic that, as he noticed, her interest in him reached a new pitch, as if she found not only crude force in him, but executive power, high mentality, larger vision. She grew unusually animated and detained him for two hours. Naturally, he had to come twice more, and each time he felt that she leaned more trustingly upon his power. Yet it was too much like one business partner depending on another, too impersonal; not once did she speak of herself or of him, not once question him as she had done that first day, and so he went home each time in a fresh turmoil, a man drugged. However, as he left the last time, just at parting, she spoke in a new way:

"You know that invitation It's coming soon."

It fired him with strange hopes, but it was ruinous to his work, and it now seemed clear to him that he was making his future with J. J. impossible. His first desire each morning was to sort out his mail; he would run through the stack looking for Mary's handwriting; that lacking, his chief interest died. In this way a feverish week went by.

Then on a Thursday morning, sitting down at his desk, he had the feeling of receiving a reprieve just as the noose fastened round his neck. He saw a little envelope. The letter ran:

MY DEAR MR. TRASK,—This time I am keeping my word. But if you come you will have to make a week-end of it, for I am taking a fortnight at our High Hill place, Pactic, New York.

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You could come Saturday, of course. The train leaves at 9 A.M., Grand Central Station, and reaches here at 11.45. But that would lose you in a crowd. Why don't you come Friday morning? In that way we could have a real visit.

Sincerely, MARY WATTS.

He was not elated. It was more like flame consuming him. But it was a complete relief to get into action again, to cut the leash and scurry away. And he reflected that Mary was more than good to him; she was heavenly to offer a day of herself alone.

He went straight to J. J. and asked for two days off.

J. J. was very fond of Kirby.

"Yes, go by all means," he said. "Perhaps the rest and change are what you need. You've been driving too hard." But to himself he added: "He's involved with a woman at last. That explains it."

So the next morning he rose at six, and, suit-case in hand, caught the seven-thirty, easily making the nine-o'clock train in New York. At eleven-forty-five the swift express stopped at Pactic, and he got off. Beyond the pretty wood-and-stone station stretched a little tree-shaded country village with a square of stores and a soldiers' monument. Kirby stood, hesitating. Then the big chauffeur approached him:

"This way, Mr. Trask."

He was relieved of the suit-case and ushered into the brown automobile. Swiftly the car crossed the tracks, swept through a street of cottages, and then through a back country of hilly farms. Kirby was struck by the resemblance of this day to the day when Mary had first come to him. A snow which had fallen recently had now nearly vanished, leaving mere fragments and patches along the roadside and on the brown and barren fields; the skies were cloudy, the air soft and expectant, and the wintry landscape passed like a sad and brooding vagrant that was lying face down on the aching Earth.

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Ineffable melancholy came to Kirby's heart, a soft vapor of tears, of longing, of child-like emotion. Past bleak and empty woods they sped, past gray barns and lonely farm-houses, past bare orchards with the gnarled trees standing in rows like tattered Bread-Lines, past streams that went thinly and with bitter complaining among the cold stones. Finally, over the pastoral slopes, Kirby saw, above engirdling woods, a far house on a hill-top.

"High Hill," muttered the chauffeur.

They lost it at once under the breasts of heaving pastures where the cattle were out in the soft weather trying to pull nourishment from the soaked and matted ground. Again Kirby was aware of the strong Earth-passion, his true and primal mother reabsorbing him. A touch of sad wildness was in his heart, of going back to the perilous open skies and the vast untracked Earth.

A mile brought the car to the high stone wall, the great gate, the keeper's stone lodge. It passed through that gateway and was lost at once in primitive wilderness. The ancient woods seemed untouched, full of rotten logs, fallen branches, and the débris of centuries; the gloomy depths suggested powerful beasts roaming for prey. This forest, in turn, gave way to pastures and huge stables, and these again to smooth-shaven golf-links stretching endlessly to the right. More woods then, and a little natural lake, with boat-house and trimmed banks, and finally a cleared woods full of paths and rustic benches, and at last, up the slopes, graceful lawns with the house in the center. He had half expected a transplanted European castle, moated, turreted, barred, a forbidding and cold barracks. Instead, the great gray-stone house spread comfortably, with sun-parlors and porches and large windows; hospitable, inviting, warm.

But the whole estate spoke of boundless wealth and power; every inch of it humiliated Kirby, who had only a suit-case, his little body, and his feverish mind. It was

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monstrous that he should go so naked on earth, while these people clothed themselves in cities and wildernesses, houses and stables. A gust of his old diffidence threatened him.

He got out stiffly, and the chauffeur rang for him. A man-servant relieved him of hat and coat, and, dimly aware of a big hearth fire in the large hall, he was led up carpeted stairs to a corner room. Then he found himself alone.

The room was comfortable, almost cozy. The radiator filled it with warmth, the large windows looked out on stretches of far pastoral country, the ceiling was wainscoted, the furniture heavy and easy. On the bed lay a bath-robe; under it, slippers; a writing-desk held note-paper, envelopes, pen, and ink; a table was stacked with an assortment of books picked for various tastes, as Shakespeare, Byron, William Vaughn Moody, Aristotle, Dante, Darwin, Robert Chambers, Dumas, Nicolay and Hay, Anthony Hope, Mark Twain; a cabinet held whisky and cordials and cigars; and adjoining the room was a bath-room. Thoughtfulness could go no further; neither could luxury.

There was the painful contrast between this and his little room at the Allisons; there was the feeling that he was allowed to taste the sweets of the world, only to be hurled back to poverty; there was the sense of intruding, of not belonging. And thinking of a Mary to whom these things were commonplace and expected, it seemed terrible that she should have such power. It all made her that much more remote and uncompanionable.

When he came down to the great hall again, down the winding stairs, he heard curtains rustle, and out into the firelight Mary stepped with her firm, easy stride. All this week he had, curiously enough, been conjuring up a terrific regal empress; now he was amazed by her simple appearance, her directness. She was not even the business woman any more; she was personal, intimate, feminine. She seemed to have on the same black dress she had worn

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that day at Inwood, and again he saw the soft, wavy brown hair, the large, honest brown eyes, the powerful forehead.

She gave him her hand and spoke sincerely, warmly: "I'm glad you came." Then she went straight to business. "We must get lunch over with right away." She laughed with enthusiasm. "I've learned to run the car since I saw you, and we must get out early and jump those hills. You won't mind if I wreck you?"

Her power, her command was indisputable, yet he felt care and diffidence dropping from him. He felt even a little happy; it was comforting to be with her.

They entered a soft-lit dining-room, and sat facing each other, alone at table. And currents of confidence went warming through him. What could be more natural than lunching with this honest-eyed woman?

"Well," she said, "how is the article coming on?"

That put him on solid ground.

"Well, I put all the stuff together, with the corrections you made, and then turned it over to Mansfield, our special-article man. He'll send you a copy for final correction before we set it up."

Again the probing glance that seemed to cut through to his secret soul.

"I thought *you* were going to write it. Why not?"

"Oh, that honesty!" he thought, and inwardly squirmed. "I?" He tried to laugh. "I can't write a word."

She looked at him squarely. He thought she was going to ask, "Then why didn't I see Mansfield instead of you?" and sickly apprehension seized him. But she was silent, a little puzzled. Then mercifully she changed the subject.

"Do you like your work at Harrington's?"

"Oh yes," he laughed.

"Then you don't really."

"Well," he muttered, "it's splendid in a way."

"And in another way?"

The truth was pulled from him.

"You see, it hasn't much future."

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"On account of the sons?"

"The whole business."

"I see. And clerking—that must have been a bore to you."

He tried to resist this searching probe; it was hard because she was so vitally interested and so warmly sincere.

"What makes you think so?" he laughed.

She laughed, too.

"It would be like putting a pirate in a china-closet."

Pleasure filled him; she could spot his strength as well as his weakness. Yes, she could read him right through.

And soon he found himself telling her of the boarding-house and Mrs. Waverley, of the express company and the Fergusons, and even of Trent. Her face had all the cloudy wistfulness he had noticed before.

"I wish I had a real job," she said, "and earned my own living. I envy you. I go around seeing things instead of doing them."

This note of discontent was surprising; it put her, in a way, on his level. And he felt that she had boundless admiration for any one who struggled and really achieved. As if her heart hankered for the coarseness and dirt and red pains of broadcast life; the things her father and mother had known; the ancient bondage of the race.

Then immediately after lunch they wrapped up and went out to the car. The chauffeur was waiting; all was ready.

"It's not good weather for an open car," said Mary, "but I can't stand being cooped in outdoors."

"It looks like snow, Miss Watts," said the chauffeur.

"So much the better!"

"But you hadn't better go far. It might be hard to come back."

"We'll make an adventure of it, Mr. Trask," she laughed. "Come on."

He took the seat beside her, and the car with light grace bore them fleetingly down the macadam road, past links

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and stables and woods, and out through the gates. Then Mary turned to the left.

"I'm going to take you to the top of the Giant. I feel most at home on cliffs."

The winged wheels flew them over the hills and down the hollows, past the farms, the pastures, and the orchards, and again Kirby felt the driving power of this woman. She sat there mature, eager, glad, and yet healthily young.

Ever after his most vivid image of her was against gray backgrounds. For the heavens stooped toward the Earth, and the smokes from farm-houses seemed bowed with age and could not straighten; a divine melancholy brooded on the dead stubble of the fields; the bitter cry of waters was crossed by the wheels on the jumping planks of bridges, and the woods stood like grieving old women at the graves of their buried youth. It was as if the Earth were in pain and the clouds were about to administer the gentle anesthetic of the snow.

"Somber and beautiful," was Mary's comment. "I'm glad you came to-day."

He felt drawn to her, faint, helpless. He thought of her at the moment as a mother of men, a strong, placid soul who could enfold him and heal him.

She seemed meditative.

"You met my sister, didn't you?"

"Yes," he murmured.

She gave him a stricken glance.

"Alice died three months ago—in childbirth—and the baby, too. There's nothing sadder in life than that."

He said nothing; he could only think, "She's a great soul, a great woman," and he shrank beside her.

Now the car began climbing a seemingly endless hill, each level bringing a new rise and the woods shutting off the top. Now and then, at the right, the earth fell away to a far valley, that, as they rose, spread farther, leaping now one range of hills, then another.

They came through to a sort of upward tableland, a

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large, cleared tract of pastures and fields; stone walls stretched beside the road, and a snug little farm-house, with barn and outhouses, stood to their right. In the field opposite they saw two young girls both together astride a running, unsaddled horse. It was a pretty sight—the hair of youth flying, the bodies lifting and falling, the arms of the rear girl hugging the other. All at once the horse reared, the girls slipped, shrieked, and came bouncing down on the ground in a sitting position.

It was ludicrous but alarming. Mary stopped the machine, Kirby was about to leap out. But they heard the girls laughing merrily, and at once the youngsters rose, gesticulated their joy, and raced after the galloping horse.

Kirby and Mary laughed.

“Wasn’t that lovely?” she said, and on they went.

The road now became steep and rocky, with here and there patches of grass and here and there level rock; a wild, stunted forest engulfed them, and they could see nothing but the rising road ahead. There seemed miles of this, until all at once they emerged on a grassy plateau in the heavens, and to the right gray rocks reaching roughly up.

“Here we are,” said Mary.

She led the way, and they scrambled up the rocks, clinging to sharp corners, getting a foothold in crannies and cracks, until suddenly they stood erect on the rim of the world. The cliff was stupendous; below them the world lay, an unrolling map of valleys and ranges of hills, lakes, and a misty, heaving horizon. A bright wind blew in their faces out of boundless space.

“I have a favorite seat here,” said Mary, and with sure agility she reached from rock to rock along the dizzy edge, and seated herself in a secure cranny, her feet hanging over space. Kirby could do nothing but awkwardly follow. The slope of the rock brought them close together.

Mary leaned forward as if, wings spread, she was about to swoop through the air.

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"Oh," she said in a disappointed tone. "We can't see the railroad tracks—there's mist along the valley."

But as they looked they saw mushrooms of fire bobbing along the mist, which turned from white to black.

"It's a freight-train," said Mary.

That lost train accentuated their loneliness, and Kirby felt that they were alone in the wide world; that now, in an emergency, they had only each other on the whole Earth. An elemental rapture stole through him; this woman had him, and he her, and the swirl of J. J. and the tumult of the city and the walls of caste and class fell away to the valleys. On this height they were two equal souls—the Edenic pair, the man and the woman—held, as it were, in the upraised hands of the Earth, who showed to the heavens this divine product of her eons of struggle and experiment. They were the first and last of things; through them Earth reached fruition.

"There's only one thing to do," said Mary in an exultant voice. "I've brought my pocket Coleridge with me."

And she pulled from her coat a well-thumbed volume, and read, softly, thrillingly, in the low light, "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni." Kirby had never cared for poetry, and he had a contempt for men who could sit around gushing it; but now from her lips he heard the rocks and the hills expressing themselves:

Who, with living flowers
Of loveliest blue, spread garlands at your feet?
God! let the torrents, like a shout of nations,
Answer! and let the ice-plains echo, God!

* * * *

Ye living flowers that skirt the eternal frost!
Ye wild goats sporting round the eagle's nest!
Ye eagles, playmates of the thunder-storm!
Ye lightnings, the dread arrows of the clouds!
Ye signs and wonders of the element!
Utter forth God and fill the hills with praise!"

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The poem seemed to free something in her; she breathed big, exulting.

"That man," she said, "was born with a star on his forehead!"

He could only say, banally:

"You're fond of poets."

"Yes," she answered, smiling. "But there are poets of action, too. I sometimes think my father was one. You know Kipling's

'Dreamer devout by vision led
Beyond our grasp and reach,
The travail of his spirit bred
Cities in place of speech.'

That's it, isn't it? Father has written epics in steel and skyscrapers; possibly," she mused, "in brotherhood."

"I must get Kipling," he told himself. She was interpreting life anew for him. He saw Watts and J. J., even himself, in a new way.

The light now began to wane rapidly, a great wind arose, and gusts of soft snow fell on them, swiftly blotting out one range of hills after another, until the valley was lost too, and they were closed in, in a world of whirling white.

"Isn't this glorious?" said Mary.

But Kirby was fully aroused, executive.

"We'll have to get out of this quick if you want to get home."

She obeyed him with lovely spirit, and he felt a new elation, a new masculine strength. He could command, too, when the time came.

She had some trouble in cranking up the machine, and laughed grimly over it. It seemed impossible to light the lamps, and finally she gave it up and climbed in, and did not object when Kirby wrapped a buffalo-robe about her shoulders and his.

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"Good sense," he thought. "She knows it's no time for fooling."

The air was getting darker momentarily, the wind increasing, and a fierce storm smote them, blinding them. Through the oppressive silence they started, then stopped.

"We'll have to feel our way," she said, quietly. "You don't mind?"

"No," he replied.

They were very close together under that robe; it stirred with their breathing and the motions of her arms.

She stopped often; tried a bit of bumpy ground; searched for wagon-ruts; strained through the snow. And for a long time they said nothing, but to Kirby it was inexpressibly sweet and wonderful to be out with her in the storm. It seemed now as if they could never leave each other hereafter.

The darkness now deepened into an appalling snow-swirling night, moist and intense, and, though the wind began to fall as they reached lower levels, they were lost in engulfing blackness that seemed to stick to them like pitch. But Kirby felt that in all space only she and he throbbed with life; dim atoms pulsing in the primal dark.

Suddenly she whispered:

"There's a light!"

A dim, watery gleam shone to the left, and, approaching it, they saw snow falling before a lighted window.

"Then there's one thing to do. We'll have to put up here," said Kirby.

Again she obeyed him silently; they felt the wheels bump as the car climbed on to the lawn.

Kirby leaped out and found a door, and knocked. It opened, and a tall, large-framed woman peered at him.

"We're caught in the storm," said Kirby. "Could we have shelter here till it's over?"

She seemed distrustful, but then spoke cheerfully:

"Come in."

Mary followed him. They entered a warm, low kitchen,

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with worn planks on the floor and the rafters showing bare above. A lamp was on the table, and in the shadows a kettle bubbled on the stove. The room had the purring comfort of a dozing cat.

"Oh, you came in an auto," said the woman, glancing at Mary. "Well, you'll never get to the valley in this."

"Yes," said Mary, "we were up on the Giant."

"Well, the men folk'll have to get the auto into the barn—that is, when they come back. They're out after the cows. I thought they were foolish to let the cattle out this morning," she laughed, "but there's no telling men. They've been after them a couple of hours, and I guess the snow caught them."

Mary reflected.

"Couldn't we run the car in the barn—if you show us where?"

The woman took a lantern, and they went out. Then she opened the barn doors and held the lantern high while Mary ran the car in. A heavy smell of dried hay, of cattle and pigs and horses, was in the place, warm, steamy, elemental.

As they came back to the house they heard shouts and a heavy trampling.

"They're coming," said the woman.

At once in the solid blackness a lantern gleamed, and they saw the coat of a man and the flash of a cow's flank and the shadows of heavy animals in the gloom. Now two large cow's eyes stared mysteriously, now the profile of a man's face flared and died. Kirby could hear the beasts breathing, and smelt the warm odor of cattle. It was all mysterious, and went back to the dim pastoral ages of the race.

They went in then, and were welcomed. It was very sweet to sit in the low dining-room, at the great table, Mary and he together, and the family about them. Colwyn was a Welsh farmer, with a wrinkled, but hardy skin, a spare, tall, smiling fellow; there were two

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big awkward sons, with fair faces and large hands, whose main quality seemed a ravening hunger; and then there were the two giggling girls who had fallen from the horse.

Mary seemed radiant with joy, and began questioning Colwyn, as the beef and beans and large cups of coffee and high stacks of home-made bread were set down by the mother. And Colwyn was the only one who spoke. The boys, addressed, blushed and stammered; the girls giggled nervously; the mother was busy.

"Yes," said Colwyn, "it's lonely up here, but it's the life I like—out in the open. He there"—he pointed his knife at his eldest son—"don't like it, though. He's like the rest; crazy to go to the city."

The son blushed and buried his fair face in a coffee-cup.

"Why doesn't he go?" asked Mary.

"Well, he's trying to. He's been down to the Commercial College last summer. But I'd hate to lose him. He's my best." Pride rang in his voice. "I've watched him among the stock."

Colwyn was all for spoiling the Giant by putting a summer hotel on the top of it.

"Oh," he said, in answer to Mary's protest, "I'm not strong on the scenery. I never notice it. When you live with a thing it's just work, and that's all."

Peace came at last to Kirby, a soft and wonderful tranquillity. It seemed to him that Mary showed at her best in these surroundings, that her simplicity and sincerity fitted into this warm family life, this primitive crudeness. She was tender, animated, sparkling. Something of the girlishness he had noticed four years ago returned to her. It seemed a woeful pity that wealth and position forced her into the artificial life of estates and cities.

Now and then she glanced at Kirby, sharing her joy with him. He laughed; he, too, sparkled; he entered into the talk with abandon. And when Colwyn lit his

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pipe, Kirby lit a cigar, and they had good gossip on hunting, and on the differences between the Western farms and the Eastern.

Colwyn spoke of agricultural colleges and the Department of Agriculture at Washington.

"This science," he said, "is changing the life of the farmer. I was brought up without it, but he there"—and he pointed his pipe toward his eldest son—"has taught me different. First thing you know we'll have a telephone, an automobile, a steam-plow, a harvester, a model dairy, chemistry of the soil, government tests, Burbank-business"—he gave a great laugh—"and heaven knows what."

That same science that had built up industrialism and the skyscraper city was reaching back to revolutionize the farm foundations of civilization—everywhere a drawing together, steam-and-steel bands of tightening progress. Not even the pastoral escaped the Jordan Watts'. Kirby was impressed by this rapid organization of the world, which harnessed forest and prairie, peak and sea, to the central cities. There was no way of escaping from civilization.

It seemed already midnight, when, in the hush of the snow, the clock struck nine. The tired boys were yawning. Colwyn arose.

"Seems to me," he murmured, "the wind's dropped."

He pushed aside the shade and peered out.

"Stopped," he said, "and there's moonlight."

"Then," said Mary, "we can make the valley."

The Colwyns were for keeping them overnight, but Mary was undissuadable. And so, wrapped warm, the family followed the pair in the intense stillness of the night. The snow was packed firm and crunched under foot.

"We can surely make it," said Mary. The words floated from her lips on faint steam; all the landscape was violet-shadowed with the immense expanse of snow; trees were laden; fences buried.

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Kirby paid Mrs. Colwyn, and that unsophisticated woman refused more than twenty-five cents each for the meal. Then Mary ran the lamp-bright car from the barn; Kirby climbed in; they exchanged good-bys; the wheels ground the snow, and the car curved into the road. The family waved and called, Kirby fluttered his handkerchief, Mary nodded and smiled, and they were off down the long, still slope.

Mary spoke with haunting wistfulness:

"Oh, if one could only stay here!"

Kirby looked at her; his heart was full; a vital moment seemed at hand. Again the night contained only these two, the speeded wheels, the light on snow ahead, the gleaming moon. The world grew still as if to hear them; Kirby felt that if he lifted his voice he could send his cry over the horizon; and he dreamt of ecstasy undying. All that he might say was, "I love you," and that surely he could not say.

And so neither spoke. The car flew; the cold grew intense, and there rose in the moonlight the faint wisps of their breath. Lower and lower sank the car until it speeded up the valley, turned in at the gate.

"We're here," breathed Mary.

That meant "It's all over." But it was not over yet; entering the fire-dancing hall, standing alone at the foot of the stairs, clasping hands over their good night, they still felt in the tugging tide of ineffable Romance.

"Good night!" they whispered.

"And aren't you glad," said Mary, "that you came to-day?"

He climbed the steps, getting a last glimpse of her upturned, radiant face; he sought his room; he laid him down in a world utterly hushed in snow. And he thought it would be sweet to take Mary to some low dwelling in some remote country and live all life with her against the warm heart of Nature.

XIX

THE RETURN

WHEN Kirby awoke the next morning the room was a splendor of sunlight. Then, as his breath steamed in the keen air, and he began to dress; the thought occurred to him that possibly Mary was dressing, too. This elemental and necessary ritual they were both engaged in under the same roof-tree seemed, more than anything else, to put them on the same footing; she was just a woman, he a man, putting on clothes. They were the same naked children of the earth. And somehow this homely proximity, this delightful arising together as if in the heart of a family, made him want to sing his joy.

It was the invasion of Kirby by that stranger—ecstasy; that up-welling of flaming music through all the body; that pure and soaring joy that puts the wings of the sunrise on commercial clay. He would have envied the woodcutters sawing between them an oak in the forest while they sang with clean, strong voices. He was like a cup overrunning with the wine of life. It was health, youth, the morning; and it was love.

Going down the steps with lusty tread he reached and opened the door and stepped out on the side porch. The day blinded him; the air was almost a fire of clear cold, and, blinking, he saw the world an undented whiteness, shimmering with sun, the trees cottoned over to the last twig, and the vast downward-sloping landscape one splendor of snow. A mile off he saw the pines in the forest, green shadows through white. The skies were a

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blazing and melting blue, and the air was thrice-washed, thrice-rinsed, and sparkingly transparent.

His lungs seemed to dance with the inrush of this living air, and he stood half dreaming that he and Mary had gone off to the heart of a forest, and that while she was gathering wood for a fire he was using hammer and saw to build a cabin out of pine, and that in the early light they were both singing together at their tasks. And while he was lost in this dream there came a light touch on his arm; turning, he saw her there, her cheeks mantled with red, her eyes flashing. She laughed from her heart, clearly.

"Good morning!" she said.

"Good morning!" he answered.

This was the ancient duet of human youth on the Earth; pity was they couldn't put it in song like the wood-thrushes.

"Did you sleep well?" she asked.

"Solid. And you?"

"All right."

What they meant was, "We glory in being alive." They leaned, in comrade silence, and gazed on the landscape.

"How I envy the Colwyns!" she said.

But he didn't; Mary at his side, he merely envied a moment that was passing and that wouldn't return.

They went in then, and in the bright room, alone together, they ate, like sound, healthy youngsters, a great breakfast. Afterward Mary took him to see the live stock. The spirit of adventure was still upon them. But wandering toward the house at eleven they heard behind them the approach of an automobile, and suddenly Mary said in her incisive way:

"There's the world coming back to us!"

And with those words the adventure was over; that Edenic interval of their primal companionship faded into those bright memories which seem of visions too wonder-

THE RETURN

ful to have existed. She was the king's daughter again, and he the Acting Business Manager of *Harrington's Magazine*.

In fact, the guests were upon them, and soon the house buzzed with strangers.

From then on Kirby's stay was a dreary nightmare. He was introduced to a senator, a judge, brokers, bankers, corporation heads, a couple of lawyers, and an assortment of vari-aged women. The successful men passed him over as negligible; a few of the women were attracted by his face and bearing, but they bored him raspingly with petty gossip; and Mary was lost in the center of a flattering circle. His one relief was that sharp Jordan Watts was not there.

Lunch over, there were sleighing-parties; supper over, they endured the music of some near-Paderewski imported from Bavaria; night over, they had late breakfasts and lounged or inspected the stables; dinner over, and Kirby departed.

But Mary took him out to the automobile, and in the soft, melting weather she stood and smiled; yes, almost smiled back Eden.

"It's good you came Friday," she said, and then paused as if wanting to say more. Finally she spoke in a changed voice: "Father and I are going West in a few days—a business trip for him; we won't be back till spring. As soon as I get back we must ride out again."

He saw the cloudy wistfulness in her strong face, and he felt as if the light of the world was out. West until spring! He could only murmur:

"I hope it will be a good trip."

He climbed into the car, and she leaned over the dashboard. Her voice was tremulous:

"Here," and she handed him a worn little book. It was the pocket Coleridge.

He gazed at her, unable to speak, merely smiled sadly and nodded.

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“Good-by!” she whispered, and, as the car sped, he turned and saw her standing there, unmoving, looking after him.

On the train he read “Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni,” and he said to himself, “What a fool I am! What a fool I am!” and he thought of the circle of flatterers that engulfed her. Yet she had given him Coleridge, “the man who was born with a star on his forehead.”

XX

SUCCESS

DURING the ensuing months Kirby's main occupation seemed to be waiting for the spring, killing time, pulling days off the calendar. January kept May eternities away and went at snail's pace; February went slower; March didn't seem to go at all.

And all this time was one of capricious moods. Now remembering the snow-storm and every little word and gesture of Mary, he would be insanely happy, come to work whistling, hum at his desk: then suddenly he would develop a dark languor, which might give to a tragic despair or a frenzied fit of temper.

In other words, Kirby found himself doing what he had heartily condemned in others. He had always said, "No man of common sense would do such things," and yet, at the pinch, he, notably a man of common sense, proved madder than the rest. For in the still watches of the night he made the horrible acquaintance of a queer and squirmy assortment of hobgoblins, demons, sprites, devils, and beasts, which all this time, like conspirators waiting the witching hour, had remained secreted in his skull, thoughtfully deposited there by an evolutionary process of a few hundred million years. In other words, Kirby was in the hands of his ancestors, the snake, the fish, the tiger, the dove, and the cave-man, and they seemed to delight in making a monkey of their descendant.

"Dance, son," they said, "crawl on your belly, howl, caper, cavort, climb trees, and make a spectacle of yourself. The ages are looking down on you."

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And while the ages watched, the Acting Business Manager joined the light-footed, cracked-brained host who lisp iambics in the face of the moon, the fantastic madmen who heave sighs, conjure the stars, abhor food, and become the bedfellows of bat-winged insomnia. It was that sweet insanity of being in love.

Myrtle alone understood the strange symptoms, and pitied him. But Allison made the comment:

"It's J. J. The old devil's got him at last. J. J.'s is a lunatic factory; they all go nutty over there."

And Brent felt that Kirby had a "swelled head," and was withdrawing from the vulgar herd, including himself.

For there were times—sometimes once a week—when Kirby was a pale, melancholy young man eating his supper as if he sat on the moon and was angling for lamb chops with a rod and line, he "wasn't there at all," he was distinctly "missing," and right after the meal he bolted for his room and locked himself in or rushed out of house to consort with the winds of the night and the complainings of the naked trees.

At such dark intervals he became involved in poetry, starting on the pocket Coleridge which he kept under his pillow. But Coleridge wasn't the real thing. He tried Kipling; Kipling was brutal. He tried Shakespeare, and seized by heart whole passages of Romeo and Juliet, mouthing blank verse along the lonely night roads, as:

But soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun;

or, better still, with modern improvements:

More validity,
More honorable state, more courtship lives
In carrion-flies than Kirby: they may seize
On the white wonder of dear Mary's hand
And steal immortal blessing from her lips.

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This Italian fervor palled in time, and he discovered Keats and St. Agnes Eve, "Ah, bitter chill it was!" And when this ceased to make sense he became the murderer in Tennyson's "Maud":

Then let come what come may,
What matter if I go mad,
I shall have had my day.

Or, "Come into the Garden, Maud," or, better still, "Courage, Poor Heart of Stone!"

And finally nothing would do but to write a poem himself. It was one of a March night, with winds buffeting the house, and he sat, half-dressed, at the lamp-lit table, with staring eyes that saw the rock cranny on the top of the Giant, the falling snow, and his love sitting beside him. Her eyes rested on his, her white hand lay on her lap, her lips trembled, and aching he reached nearer, drew her close, and in the ecstasy of that kiss he almost swooned. To almost every soul on the earth there come once, and once only, the four great things of life—birth, marriage, death, and a poem. And now came the poem to Kirby.

Perhaps the watching ages, unlike hard-hearted mortals, didn't even smile at his effort, knowing that when a Kirby bursts into verse the rocks themselves are uttering music. Even if he didn't have a Shakespeare's power of expression, he had, for that supreme moment, the mood and urge of a Shakespeare, and proved that the divine elixir moistens every lip of the race. He went to sleep glowing over the immortal fragment he had penned, but when he re-read it in the morning light he was vaguely reminded of lyrics impudently published in the newspapers in breach-of-promise suits when some hard-headed business man forgot himself in rhyme. It was Kirby's first and last poem, and he resolved to shun the solace of the poets for the medicinal virtues of bartenders and theatrical managers. But it relieved his feelings for a week.

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He became known now in the business for his silences and his smokes, his ups and downs. There were times when, buoyed up to an irresponsible pitch by the bright memories of the night at Colwyn's, he led the office a merry race of brilliant toil, and then other times when this gaiety was dashed to bits by sane and calm reflection.

"Don't let me fool myself," he told his heart, bitterly. He was nothing but a poor young man who at any moment might become a job-hunter in New York. Even if Mary loved him, even if she had the courage of those men and women who broke from their class and made low marriages, thereby getting a newspaper notoriety that put to shame incest, murder, and Presidential messages, as a decent fellow he could not consent to have her ruin herself. Worse than that, he could not consent to have her give up luxury and freedom and live such a life as Frances Ferguson had endured. Imagine Mary sweeping floors, washing dishes, drudging in a dreary suburb! It was impossible, no matter which way he looked at it. He must live it down, forget, bury himself in work.

At times he did this with some success. His drive at the office then would become bitter, relentless. He would be more savage than ever with his inferiors; he would concentrate with inhuman pressure on the tasks in hand. Pale, bright-eyed, haughty, he would speed up himself and the others, until they called him "the slave-driver."

J. J. was pleased. There had never been such a storm of energy in the factory before. But the staff inwardly raged with jealousy; they waited like a wolf-pack watching for the first slip.

And yet, withal, even at such times he carried about with him an air of bright attraction, so that the girls of the subscription department sighed and gazed after him. There was something wonderful in his desperate speed: the sky-flung scarf of a meteor that burns its way. And then came the intervals of lucidity and light sweet-hearted joy. At such times he saw lovers everywhere, and shared

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the thrill of eyes meeting and hands touching; and he was very good to women because Mary was a woman; and very gentle with children.

One noon he and Brent found a poor woman trying to drag home an impossible armful of gathered kindlings. "Here's a job for us," said Kirby, and he and Brent relieved the amazed woman, who followed them dumbly up the village street to her little house.

Another time Meggs told him that one of the girls was in a bad way.

"She loved a man that took advantage of her."

"She did it for love," thought Kirby and tenderly shielded this girl, and himself furnished the money to send her to a sanatorium.

And once, on a bright March day, he so convinced J. J. that he was allowed to arrange an outing for the girls and the pressmen in the woods, and he himself was the bright spirit of the undertaking, dancing with favored young women, helping to serve the ice-cream, the sandwiches and cakes, and proving himself the darling of the whole business. For, he reflected, there must be lovers among these men and women, and such a day meant paradise for them.

But such moments were rare enough, like the last feeble lightning-glances of a departing storm. More often his splendid unruly spirit was in a bitter plight; he found himself at odds with life, and ceased to care what happened. At such times it seemed to him that the main thing was to pull this barbed arrow of love from his heart even if he were killed. And he felt that he knew the slipperiness of achievement, the surge and sweep of primal forces that engulf human life and make of a man a little world of passing vision. To make one's way through life, he reflected, was to balance on one floating cake of ice after another, merely to be drowned in the end. He wanted to still the restless fever, the idiot dreams and doings of his brief hour.

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And so at such times J. J. and all his enterprises and schemes, and the gay, fat magazine that was scattered like a blaze of Roman candles over a drudging people, and all the rottenness of debt and routine and strenuous toil, seemed like the delirious images of a diseased mind. They had no meaning; they led nowhere. Dust to dust. Then it was only to keep himself from being lost in morbidity that he struggled fiercely, drove hard. Work was an anodyne.

As a result of all this pressure and the clashing divisions of his soul this powerful young man began now and then to exhibit strange lapses of temper, almost in the manner of J. J. It led him to understand that Captain of Industry; to know how great must be the stress, the pain, the weight of life to make a human being rave like a caged animal. For so in extreme moments he became himself. Twice he discharged on the spot erring office-boys, and no one, save himself, questioned his right to do so. But at length came a sharp trouble with Meggs.

He had given an order that Meggs install new addressing-machines which would do away with the labor of thirty girls. Meggs received it on a rainy April morning, when the woods were lost in mist and the open windows breathed with moist and blossom-scented air. Looking out on the world, which lay like a baby in its swaddling-clothes, a faint venture of new life softly wrapped by the musing mother, his heart was touched with pity and love. He felt the frail beauty of life which bluebirds on the telegraph wires were freshly uttering forth.

He turned and went through the empty center hall, which, hushed, was yet invaded by the wet, sweet air, and was restless with the quiver of awakening life.

"Surely," he thought, "he'll listen to reason on a day like this."

Timidly he knocked, and Kirby called:

"Come in."

He entered. Kirby sat at a center flat desk, the mild

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light of the windows back of him leaving his face in shadow. He did this on purpose. It threw the light on those who came to him, and hid him at the same time from their gaze; it gave him the advantage of reading expressions without showing any.

Meggs stood smiling, a little man with a knobby head, sunken eyes, and narrow jaw.

"What is it?" asked Kirby.

"This order about the new machines—"

"What about it?" Kirby broke in.

"I hear they don't work right—"

Kirby had the queer sensation of having no control of himself. It was as if he were a tool seized up by some great invisible hand.

"Snap judgment!" he said, sharply. "Just you leave that to me."

Meggs hesitated. He adored Kirby, but feared him also. Then he spoke in a quavering voice, that yet had a certain luminous courage in it.

"I was thinking this morning I've known these girls for years, Mr. Trask, and if they lose their jobs—"

Kirby felt himself rise, heard his lips speaking coldly:

"That's the argument that Labor has always used against the introduction of machinery. Don't sentimentalize, Meggs."

But Meggs persisted:

"I haven't the heart to fire those girls, I really haven't. Put yourself in their place."

Then Kirby, almost against his will, put the matter in a fatal way:

"You'll do it anyway," he commanded.

The phrase pitted the two against each other, and in a silence, broken only by the liquid lisp of the blue-birds mating out in the mist, they faced each other, man to man, in final and deadly antagonism. It was now one or the other; there could be no compromise.

Meggs was brave, though his voice trembled and

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sounded odd; for from a petty body and brain, a little dried-up drudge, proceeded something solemn and beautiful:

"If those girls leave, Mr. Trask, I go with them."

Kirby felt the grandeur of this, and winced. Then he said, hotly:

"Why, then you'll go, too."

Meggs was ghastly pale. He smiled.

"Ah, no, now; the girls can stay, can't they?"

"You're mistaken," said Kirby in a dreadful voice.

"For I discharge both them and you—*now*."

"Discharge?" breathed Meggs. "No, I spoke first. This is a sorry day for both of us, Mr. Trask."

And he went out and saw Martin. Martin had been waiting for just such an opportunity; it certainly put Kirby in a bad light.

"We'll see my father about this," he said. "Come on. I'll put a stop to this maniac."

Meggs shook his head, but they went up to the house together. Kirby, however, had preceded them. Without waiting to take coat and hat, and smiling bitterly, he went down the stairs and up the gravel path in the soft, sweet rain. His face was white, and his heart beat with amazing rapidity. Nature enfolded him in infantile loveliness, every tiny blade of grass, every touch of fresh green on glistening twig bringing news of the mating season, the birth season, the season of renewal and love.

And he knew that he liked Meggs, that J. J. liked him, and that this busy detail-man was one of the assets of the business. And he knew that he had handled the matter grossly. But he felt curiously impotent—like a man fallen into a cataract against which he cannot swim and which bears him fatally along. He had done a foul deed, he had committed the one unpardonable sin—that of breaking the erect spirit of a human being, that of trampling a living soul underfoot. He was ruining a straight man. He could dimly glimpse the cause of most crime,

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the process of months of brooding and scheming and bitterness at last heaping up a power that used the man like a mere mechanism to do an unnamable deed. He did not feel that it was himself at all.

Nevertheless, when J. J. called him into the large room, he went up rapidly and made his report of the incident.

"Isn't that a little hasty?" asked J. J.

"Hasty or not," said Kirby, "that's the way matters stand. It's a question of maintaining discipline now. If I give in on this my power over the men is broken."

Just then the door swung open, and Martin rushed in, followed by Meggs. Martin's face was a study in exultant hate.

"Father!" he cried. "See here!"

J. J. jumped up.

"What the devil's this?" he roared.

"What?" cried Martin. "Just this: Trask has gone a little too far, and I won't stand for it."

This was an unfortunate way of putting it; J. J. had been in a pacific mood, but now he exploded with rage:

"You won't, you damned pup? We'll see. Do you mean to say, Mr. Meggs, that you refuse to put in these machines?"

Meggs looked on the floor and spoke softly.

"I never thought it would come to this—"

"Then go and put in those machines, you dirty whipper-snapper."

Meggs said nothing, but Martin broke in:

"Now, see here, are you backing Trask in this?"

Kirby felt something snap in his brain. He'd show Martin, and all of them, the jealous fools! But the cold words amazed even himself before they were half spoken:

"He's got to go—or I've got to go."

There was a painful silence. J. J. stared at the rebel spirit he himself had evoked from the "vasty deeps." But he understood a man so much like himself, and he put

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Kirby before all the others. Nevertheless, he purposed to argue, when Martin exclaimed:

"It's time, then, that Trask got out of here."

J. J. became furious.

"Shut up, Martin! Mr. Meggs, you've heard what Mr. Trask has said. I can add nothing to it."

Meggs gave a whimpering "Yes, sir," and stood a moment paralyzed and dumb. It was all unbelievable; years of service frustrated at a blow; his future gone; his family to be informed. Then he smiled feebly, rubbed his hands, turned, and went out. Years older, too, with head bowed, another of the room's broken men.

But Martin almost shrieked his rage:

"You old fool, this is going too far. You're setting up Trask to be a little tin god. I won't stand for it. I won't have him strutting around here any more. He's just a common clerk, an upstart. He's worked you for all he's worth. I won't stand it—"

"You won't?" yelled this father to his dearly beloved son. "All right, you— Mr. Trask, after this you're Business Manager at five thousand a year. Now get the hell out of here, the whole lot of you."

Thus did Kirby reach the peak of success. He had made good, and over the body of a humble detail-man he stepped into power. But he did not exult. The moment of his triumph was bitter. He knew now that he held dark and terrible things in his nature; he knew how near a man is to crime and sin and infamy; and he was amazed at his own helplessness before these crushing powers. He had a dull desire to cry, to put his head on a woman's shoulder and weep his heart out. What would Mary say if she knew this secret Kirby? He felt now more than ever that he was unworthy of her—the muddy slime beneath her feet. And was it not strange that love which calls out of a man an angel and a god should at the same time evoke a devil and a beast? His remorse was overpowering for some time . . . a sweet thing to say of Kirby.

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And even when, a week later, the news, sent on to his sister in Chicago, was blazoned in the Trent newspapers with flaring headlines—"A Trent Young Man Rises to the Top," "Our Foremost Citizen in the East"—there was no sweetness in this fame. Having all, he had nothing. The business was a quicksand, Mary was unattainable, and he had forced himself up over a broken spirit. Besides, one of the home papers contained a crudely unfortunate phrase: "Mr. Trask," wrote the hasty reporter, "has gone right up like a skyrocket."

A skyrocket! Up like a skyrocket, down like a stick! How most inept!

Thus was his travail at the end of April. Spring at last was here, after an infinite winter. He did not know how he had lived through it, and he felt that he could not bear to wait longer. The strain was too much. Every night he looked toward the West and sent out a silent cry:

"Mary! Mary! Come! Come! I'm waiting."

XXI

THE RIVAL

ONE morning early in May Kirby's protracted fever fell from him like scales. For he held in his hand a little note—a fresh, sweet note:

DEAR MR. TRASK,—We are back—back at High Hill—and spring has come, too. Won't you come on Saturday? I've taken pains to limit father to two or three men and only two women. I remember the snow-storm and Coleridge and Colwyn's: what if we slip away and see how the Giant is in springtime?

Faithfully, MARY WATTS.

He got up, locked the office door, kissed the note, and wiped the tears from his eyes. The relief was blessed. He felt as if all tragedy and sordidness left him, as if he were a radiant youth again. It was divine; it was exquisite.

A soft gayness went into his manner. He was gentle with his inferiors, pleasant at the Allisons, faintly animated. They wondered at the change.

Then on Saturday, at eleven-forty-five, he got off the train at Pactic. Again the brown automobile and the big chauffeur waited. He got in, the car started with a jolt, crossed the tracks, made for open country.

"Spring weather!" said the chauffeur. He seemed desirous of expressing himself at this expressive season. "Late in coming, but now everything's green. Looks like business again. And mud! I spend hours cleaning the car after a run!"

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Kirby murmured a "yes" and sat back, lost in wonder. For the barrenness, the coldness, and melancholy of Earth had turned at the touch of the wand of May into a garden of enchantment. The breasts of the hills were patched with squares of vari-colored green, the woods were tinted with young foliage, the orchards snowy-white with frailest blossoms, and the far landscape lay steamy new under the soft blue heavens. The air was mild and fresh and full of the lures of little winds.

Every item of the scene, each motion and action of life had exquisite meaning. Here was glancing sun on puddles, here children shouting as they waded with bare feet in tinkling creeks, and here in the long pasture the mare whinnied, wheeled, and loped with her colt up the stony slope. Calves lay in the sun with the dreamy-eyed cattle, and up in the orchards whole choruses of mating birds sent sprays of melody on the flaming air.

Wondrous activities were afoot. Men were mending plows, sharpening tools at the grindstone, sluffing back and forth in the mud, carpenters were at work on a new house in a reverberant music of hammers and saws, and the pale farm-women were out with tubs of vegetables on the doorsteps. Kirby saw on the bright green of one lawn a baby in a wash-basket flinging up little hands and feet and cooing like a wild, tiny bird. Doors and windows were open.

Then, as the car sped, it passed a young girl, who stepped aside with the lithe grace of a fawn and, glancing up, met Kirby's eyes. Her own were a sparkling blue, her hair was light and filmy. She was the Spring, passing.

All at once he thrilled with the restless sweetness of the world, the miracles in process in bough and bird's heart and the new green earth. He thrilled; he heard the birds crying melodiously for their loves, he saw the chipmunks chasing each other, and the dogs' spring-running; and he knew that man, too, must hunt over the hills and through the woodlands for his mate.

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He was to see her; that was the supreme miracle among these divine splendors of the day—he was to see her. And he knew, at last, he knew the sweet glory of his young blood, the sweet glory of hers. Unashamed, he desired her—to press her to his heart; to go with her to the edge of the world; to spend the day on the new grass and under the sky watching the motions of her body and the sun-lit colors of her eyes, and listening to the light music of her speech and laughter. He could have spent hours babbling with her, two frisking colts in the pastures, two young thrushes fluttering in the green trees, two young eagles in mid-skies. It was the primal urge; now the sun clasped the earth in his skies and she gave birth to myriad life; now all life was as sun and earth clasping; now man sought woman, with the ecstasy of divine spring hurling the hunter and the hunted. Yes, he was a hunter, she, the hunted, both glorying in the chase.

Surely this fire that flowed through him must flow through her. For a while his unfaith died; he knew; he saw her soft eyes of welcome, soft eyes full of desiring dream, arms aching for him. Had they not been mere man and woman up on the Giant? Before this miracle wealth and the world fell clattering, leaving them revealed to each other, equals, and more; one soul divided and yearning to reunite. The birds, the beasts, did not put questions as to respectability and propriety; they felt the rapture of their sex and followed—followed; they met and built their nests and their lairs. Why should human beings, the divinest of animals, not do likewise, letting the world crumble if need be?

Their blood was young and pure and ran sweetly for each other's sake; surely the heavens would smile on such a mating.

And as the wooing bird puts on fresh plumage in the spring, so ardent beauty came to Kirby's face—a light in his eyes, a color in his cheeks, and curves of strength in arch of neck and poise of head. Mud splashed under

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the running wheels and a spring-music strewed garlands on the gliding car; hum of honey-bees, tinkle of sheep-bell, pleasant barnyard noise of clucking hens and downy chicks, the crash of a boy through the roadside briers, the jog-jog of a country cart with the lazy farmer dreaming, and the push of the plow after the great-flanked horse and before the muscular hired man up the gleaming furrow.

"Mary, I am coming!" was the meaning of all this music, and it seemed then that all nature was merely the setting for the love-story of man; for that mating that makes of Earth the dream, the vision, and the wonder of the skies.

The car went through the gateway. "In a few moments I shall see her!" beat Kirby's heart. It went past ancient woods, the old women trees holding little green babies in their arms. "She is waiting!" sang his pulses. It sped past the stables, where the boys were airing the nimble trotters. A whirl of fire began to spin in Kirby's breast, up and up, until he lost breath, and flame was in his eyes. "Mary! Mary!" sang the heavens and the earth.

And then glancing aside he saw a little old man talking with a gardener at the road-end of a new-plowed field. As the car passed, the little man looked up and nodded; Kirby nodded back. It was Jordan Watts.

"He loves to get out in the mud," said the chauffeur, "and set things to work. And he knows this business from the ground up."

Kirby had a sudden feeling of exhaustion—like a sponge squeezed dry—he felt weak. What had Jordan Watts to do with the spring and with Mary? All the glory gave to moroseness and irritation.

"This weather is enervating," he thought. "It fools you; puffs you up and then sticks a pin in."

The car stopped before the house, the door opened and Kirby was led to the same room. The house felt cool and airy, but Kirby ached with fatigue and unpleasant desire. Mary was not in sight. Up in his room, through the open

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windows, came the little winds, and he saw the restless landscape. He lay on the bed, worn out.

"I guess I need some sarsaparilla," was his immediate thought.

Then finally, much perturbed, he went down to the hall again. Four men stood at the open door, three of them smoking cigarettes; the fourth was Jordan Watts. Kirby advanced, and before he came into earshot he saw that Jordan Watts was talking terrifically, pounding fist in hand, and he noticed again the sharp, probing eyes, the big bulky forehead, and the grim mouth only half hidden in the little white beard.

Kirby joined the group, but they paid no attention to him; old Watts didn't seem to see him at all, and all at once he felt unnerved. Should he step aside or stay? Was he intruding, or would it be insulting to leave once he had joined? So he trembled back and forth in a twilight zone, enervated, unhinged.

"The export trade this year has surpassed all records. This country is on the upward curve of a wave of prosperity that will put it first among the commercial nations. Take steel, for instance, our basic trade. . . ."

Just then there was the swish of skirts in the cool air and three women came along the hall, and Kirby, glancing, saw Mary and two stout ladies who seemed stuffed in their corsets like the luggage of a large family in a small trunk. He had visions of sweating man and wife and several children standing and jumping on the lid to slam it shut.

Then he saw Mary; she seemed a little oppressed, and did not recognize him in the faint light. He was struck by the fact that her eyes were so like her father's. And then looking closer she seemed strange to him; it was possibly the dress, olive-colored and lacy, which did not become her as well as black. He had a flash of doubt about his love for her; had he not been indulging in smoky visions?

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Then she saw him, and her face lit up, her eyes sparkled. He felt the bite of something wonderful in his heart, but it died as soon as it was evoked, and he began to go through the motions and trance of a somnambulist. For Mary had gone up to the men, and murmured "Father," whereupon talk ceased, and he heard her calling his name:

"You remember Mr. Trask."

Again he felt the limp and fishy hand, and at once he heard "Senator Cullom," and saw a stout, big-headed man with side-whiskers who grunted at him; "Rev. Dr. Banks," a lean and black individual with a smirking manner; "Mr. Henry Pendleton." At this point Kirby had an unpleasant shock. He felt instinctively that he had met an enemy.

This Henry Pendleton was a superb young man; he might have posed for a magazine cover or passed as a *matinée* idol; he had broad shoulders, he was built like a model foot-ball player, muscular and graceful, and he had a mighty head. His unusually large eyes were a marine blue, his nose was straight, his lips curled richly, and his chin was large and rounded. About this smooth-shaved, well-fed, well-kept animal was an air of distinctive success, of easy dominance, of brisk power. Beside him Kirby felt messy and futile, over-emotional, under-developed. He had the feeling that he had better shun this man's society; that merely standing next to him put him in a bad light, and that Mary could not help but notice the difference.

Then he saw the glance that this fellow gave Mary—a glance that seemed to Kirby's disordered mind to say plainly, "Hello! my woman!" And he was amazed to feel an unreasoning rage possess him, a desire to leap at Pendleton's throat and roll him choking around the floor.

He was called off, however, for now the fat ladies joined the group, and he was introduced to Mrs. Cullom and Mrs. Banks.

Mary now murmured to him:

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"Perhaps we can run off for a little spin after lunch."

But within he was still boiling so hotly that he merely grinned inanely, and before he could speak Pendleton took Mary's arm.

"Let me take you in, Miss Watts!" said that domineering fellow, and off Mary went. Kirby could have torn out his own hair; what an ass he was! He had had the chance to do the same thing, and now this easy master of women had gobbled her up.

"And the worst of it is," he thought, "women like just that kind of man. They eat out of the hands of a brutal master!"

In swept the group, brushing by Kirby as if he were a servant, and all he could do was to wish himself anywhere but here, and go stumbling over Mrs. Banks' dress. The trains were long that year.

He found the only vacant chair between the reverend and the senator, and right opposite sat Mary and his disgusting rival. Conversation cleverly slanted away from him or flew past over the table; Mary was absorbed by the keen-voiced young corporation lawyer, and Kirby was left desperately alone to eat the sourest and bitterest meal of his existence. He was in a cold sweat.

Then suddenly his hair felt like jumping off his head, for the Steel Magnate, who had seemed oblivious of his dark young life, now crushed through him with a spearing question:

"Do you play golf, Mr. Trask?"

The truth was out before he knew it, before he had time to read Mary's appealing glance.

"Yes," he said.

"Good!" said old Watts. "Then we'll get out early, two pairs—I and the Doctor, you and Senator Cullom."

Kirby froze; he was caught in a trap. He saw his rival smiling.

"Then I," said Pendleton, "shall stay with the ladies. I don't know golf from hara-kiri."

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“Ha!” thought Kirby, “you liar! You do know golf, but you’re just plotting to keep Mary from me!” The spin up to the top of the Giant was gone, and the visit ruined. And that young devil would so completely absorb her that he couldn’t come near. Or if he did come near the contrast would be vivid; every moment of this visit was making him smaller and pettier in Mary’s eyes. He loathed himself for coming, and for the whole business. Served him right for meddling with a millionaire’s daughter! Of course he did not admit to himself that such a vulgar thing as jealousy was gouging him; he was only for meeting Pendleton in personal combat and blowing his brilliant brains out.

“Lord, wouldn’t he look pretty,” he thought, “kicking the dust.”

Lunch over, he found his way to Mary barred by big shoulders, and next, like a colt that is broken in and hatefully ridden by its master, he was trotted out to the golf-links. The pairs matched, and Kirby and the senator led off.

There was still perfection in the rolling green slopes and the blue dip of skies; birds were still busy in the trees; gardeners were running lawn-mowers over the smooth sward; but all this loveliness sounded like a vain tinkle in Kirby’s ears. He played poorly and slowly, and the stout senator was vexed.

“Take it easy—the easy stroke—it’s all in the wrist, the twist.”

“It’s all in your fat belly,” thought Kirby, and caught the earth a good round whack, wishing viciously that it was the senator’s red ear.

The minister and Jordan Watts pressed close behind them, and, after interminable ages, the two pairs came together. They stood about waiting for Kirby to play. At this point the hole was near a tangled woods.

Kirby, in a funk before these watchers, struck viciously, and the ball shot up, made a wild curve, and fell in the

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woods. It would take possibly twenty minutes to find it. He turned to the caddy.

"Let's have another," he muttered.

Jordan Watts turned to him sharply:

"Aren't you going to look for that ball?"

"No," said Kirby.

"Young man," said the multi-millionaire, "that ball must have cost seventy-five cents."

Kirby felt hot in the head; he pierced the old man with his gray eyes.

"Mr. Watts," he said, coldly, "when I have as much money as you perhaps I can afford to waste the time looking for a golf-ball."

The senator and the reverend unexpectedly smothered giggles, but old Watts looked black; such extravagance was bad enough, such an insult was bad enough, but, after all, it wasn't Kirby's ball, it was Watts' ball. Yet somehow Kirby had shut him up.

Whereupon Kirby made the shot of his life, playing like an expert in a tournament. And he thought exultantly: "Now I've done it—made a life enemy of Mary's father; this improves my chances."

And as he and the senator went on, he muttered, savagely:

"I'm not using any of his money, and I needn't be nice to him."

The senator was threatened with apoplexy.

"You're impulsive, young man," he murmured. But the stout man enjoyed the rest of the game very blithely; he was framing up the story to tell at the club. A new Jordan Watts story!

It was almost dinner-time when the game was over and they trudged back to the house. The women had gone to their rooms to dress, but young Pendleton, already in his evening clothes, sat on the porch, puffing at a pipe, and looking insolent.

"He sits here," thought savage Kirby, "to show me he's had a good time."

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The men tramped up to their rooms, too. Kirby rushed his dressing, almost crushing his stiff shirt in the effort to button on the collar; then tore down-stairs to intercept Pendleton. But he was too late—the brute had Mary in a corner, and soon led her to dinner.

At the table he was a nonentity again, and the way Jordan Watts ignored him was perceptible. At one point, just as he was seeing red and breathing blood because Mary laughed at one of Pendleton's jokes, he heard these words of wisdom from the Steel Magnate:

"But I say that the young man of this time has just as many chances as I did—that is, if he has big vision, the direct drive, unfaltering courage, and—*is thrifty*. Thrift! Save your pennies and they grow to dollars! I myself hesitate to this day to invest in a new hat."

"Thanks for the sermon," thought Kirby, "you damned old miser. And I bet you have so much money you can't count it. Golf-balls! As for Pendleton, some day I'll mash him to a pulp. There he goes again!"

They trooped out to the fire-lit hall, Mary and Pendleton just behind him. Then an amazing thing happened—he heard Mary's incisive voice:

"Just pardon me, Mr. Pendleton, I want to see Mr. Trask a moment."

"Certainly," said Pendleton, in a tone that meant (to Kirby) "Run off and amuse yourself with the pretty thing; I can spare you a moment."

But what divine courage, divine womanliness. She confronted him:

"So," she said, ruefully, "our ride was spoiled."

"Yes," he smiled, childishly happy, a rush of dreamy bliss pouring through him. "And it was my fault. I hate golf."

"Oh, these people!" said Mary. "But I know. We can take a row together—now."

And she cleverly led the company out into the cool night, and along the shadowy walks. She and Kirby

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walked in advance; and she spoke like an eager conspirator.

“You’ll have to do it quick to escape them. I’ll jump in, you give the boat a push, and off we’ll go.”

This was heavenly; he throbbed with a sudden rapture, and when they came to the lake and found, on the dim, pebbly shore the light Canadian skiff, Mary leaped in, he gave it a shove, stepped over the stern and almost foundered it as it hit the water and swam out.

Mary laughed excitedly; he stepped past her and took the oars, fitted them, and pulled hard. They faced each other.

“Free!” cried Mary. “Free at last! The villains are foiled!”

It was exactly as if they were eloping together.

The stars were restless and lustrous in the serene skies, as if their glistening hearts were white with the mating-passion, and over the dark bulk of the trees lay a sliver of new moon. Beneath this beauty, the waters, girdled with woods, were so tranquil that moon and stars gave them heavenly depth; they heard the liquid gush around the prow, the cool drip of the oars, the straining of the oar-locks, and there glided past a pair of ducks, one swimming after the other.

It was a night in Spring; one could almost hear buds opening and the forest floor heaving before the push of life; and from those stars down through the Earth to the stars beneath it everything seemed touched with throbbing life. The whole universe was drenched with this divine awakening—the call of the Spring, the call of love.

Kirby glanced up. In the faint dark she sat there like a sweet shadow of rounded shoulders and upturned face. He saw the tremulous outline of her hair, little wisps floating. He seemed to hear her deep breath. And again he felt that they had left the world, that they were man and woman—the pair in Eden, and yet with a difference. Life had become intenser; they were enfolded in it;

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their hearts throbbed exquisitely with the throb of the Earth and the trembling of the stars. Ecstasy came to him; it seemed as if they must rush together like risen Spring waters dashing down rocks. He wanted to sing to her, and to hear her woman's voice echoing back music under the living night. The great moment was at hand; the moment he had awaited through all the winter; the moment denied him this afternoon. She had come back to him from the remote West, their young blood was in tune, and in the symphony of the Spring they were struck together like a final melting chord of music.

He rested on the oars, leaning forward. His voice trembled:

"This is something like the Giant," was all he could say.

She, too, leaned forward, speaking with trembling wistfulness:

"What a night that was. And yet it seems only yesterday."

He grew bold; he had come like a hunter over the hills. And then, like mud falling, came a voice:

"Mary! Mary!"

"That's father," she said. "Shall I answer?"

"No," he commanded.

"Mary!" The voice pulsed harsh.

This was tragic; this was agonizing.

"Aren't you in that boat out there?"

"Yes, father."

"We've been looking for you."

"I'm coming."

Kirby rowed back to shore, Mary was gobbled up, and he trod after, the blackest heart in the night.

The next afternoon, after a fierce repetition of Pendleton, Pendleton, and Pendleton, Kirby left. Pendleton very gallantly came with Mary to say good-by.

All he had then was her cloudy, wistful gaze as the car bore him away in a weather of dust and wind and clouds.

It was as if winter were returning. Spring lay dead.

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And Kirby cursed the fates that had given him human birth. He felt that he was disillusioned—that between Jordan Watts, Pendleton, wealth, position, and society he was a mere outcast.

“Fool to aim so high. Yes,” he told himself, “I’m the original skyrocket.”

And he resolved to live down this ruining passion.

XXII

QUICKSANDS

FOR a little while, whenever the days of Spring had fresh and restless beauty, Kirby had the strange feeling of the world passing, a golden cloud fading, and all the lovers on Earth fading with it. A light stole from his heart and transformed all things, touching them with a dying radiance. In that light he saw the swift faces of the finger-busy girls at the long tables, or the emergence and vanishing gleam where the shadowy presses clanked and spewed their shining sheets, or the rush and smoky flash of the locomotive—the green woods, the blue skies, the busy life. Surely some Aladdin in a deep sunset-wondrous gorge of the Arabian Nights had rubbed his lamp, and called into being this world of magic and him and this shadow-play of business and love.

Business and love! What else was there in this dream of being born and of dying?

And sometimes when he saw J. J. these days, noising his way through the visionary world like a meaningless dusty storm, he thought that J. J. was an Aladdin himself. For where men were idle and the ground barren, freight-trains empty and farms and slums untouched by brilliant dream, this bulky creature had come along and rubbed that invisible lamp—his brain—and at once the factories smoked, men labored, artists and authors brought gifts, the trains were filled, and bright imaginings entered in remote doorways. He had evoked a cloud-metropolis; he had performed a modern miracle. The wires sang of

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him, the wheels bore his dreams, the newsman scattered his enchantments, marriages were made because of him, children were born, men raised among the mighty or sent down among the dead. Or so it seemed to Kirby.

But the lamp was losing its power. Though J. J. rubbed and rubbed, the cloud-metropolis faded from around him in the last of the light, the turrets crumbled, the faces dimmed, the dreams were scattered on the wind. The amazed magician rubbed desperately, cried to the heavens; he had thought he was a god, but he was merely one of these children that wawl when they come hither and pass into darkness.

And Kirby was like a shining soap-bubble blown from the lips of youth and floating upward through that cloud and to the top, only to vanish in the gathering night.

It was unbelievable, but it was true. It was the way of all things human. Here was an American civilization surging tempestuously on a breast of earth between two oceans, and out of the fierce grind of drudges arose these dreamers and schemers building their worlds of men; the waves rose from the sea, flashed and foamed in the sun, and sank back to the engulfing deeps again. Did they rise of themselves or did the sea lift them?

If, then, the brief moment in the sun held not the love of man and woman, what was it worth? Those bluebirds out there knew, those butterflies knew, and boy and girl walking in the fields knew.

But these spasms of unreality passed with languid weather; when rain fell, or dust rose, Kirby felt the harshness and red bitterness of the solid world.

J. J. called a meeting of the staff in his office and spoke, almost in tears:

“By heavens, we must make a last desperate rally. Do you want to see the whole thing go? I tell you, you don't know how bad things are. Where's the money to come from? There's only the hope of every one of us sweating our blood—cheapening the magazine, increasing

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circulation, and hustling for ads. We must retrench, drop every needless expense, every needless employee."

So two editors were dropped, and men and women struck out here and there all through the place. Much of this work of economy and campaigning fell to Kirby. He had to overhaul each department, cut out waste, systematize, stint. He had to evolve new publicity schemes, he had to fight off creditors. It was his suggestion that closed the other factory and sent to the scrap-heap battery cars that refused to run³ and air-ships that refused to fly.

Worst of all, the new head of the subscription department, a fat Falstaffian fellow named Rouse, showed himself jovially incompetent. He dramatized his irksome job by making the girls giggle, drawing cartoons on pad-paper, and devising pleasant advertisements, such as, "Can't You Sleep? Try *Harrington's*."

Hence Kirby had to shoulder much of the fat man's work, and he was swamped with crowding occupations. Lunch-time found him smoking, dictating, rushing around; supper was a mere bite, and then back to his desk in his shirt-sleeves under the electric drop-light till the midnight train shrilled in his brain, and he looked up at the strange walls and felt the ghostly emptiness of the black building. Then he would slip his feet along to the stairs, hurry down, and out into the intense and starless dark.

In bed he lay awake with cold, clammy feet and beating brain, or slept with dreams of dancing arithmetic and jumble of systems.

He looked pitiable these days—a bright-eyed wreck, sometimes with growth of beard on his face and clothes unbrushed. He was forced into J. J.'s last desperate rally, and the worst of the pressure came on him.

This in a way was lucky, however. It gave neither the time nor energy to brood over Mary. He was a mere protoplasmic machine, turning out his day's work, and then snatching sleep and food for a new stretch of toil.

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It was like Napoleon's retreat from Moscow; a routed army beating back terrifically to escape. And Kirby was one of the haggard captains, hustling his men.

Then a change came for the worse. Kirby, now no longer secretary, was entirely detached from J. J. and saw little of him. Naturally he ceased gradually to be in the counsels of the great man. It was an eventuality he had not figured on, the effect of such a separation on J. J.

And next, Loughlin, who had been transferred from the factory to the house, was discharged and a new secretary secured. At first Kirby laughed secretly over this new man, and from his haughty heights looked down with disgust, almost hatred. For Cropsey was a stumpy, sawed-off fellow, stout, dwarfish, lame, who dressed fastidiously, dangled a heavy gold watch-chain, flashed rings on his reddish fingers, and was barbered to perfection. He had a mustache at which he loved to pull. All this was a red rag to bullish Kirby; but, monstrous and culminating outrage, the man stank. It was something musky, Eastern, clinging.

"And it must be something cheap," thought Kirby. "Greases his hair, slops his handkerchief, anoints his vest, drinks it."

One could tell that he was coming before he hove into sight—the invisible advance agent preceded him. And so this bright smell went gaily wandering up and down the factory, and Kirby did not see the dramatic grandeur of it. It was man triumphing over the elements; for out of his fierce infirmities, his shriveled legs and bended back, Cropsey wrought with a few drops of essence a victory of unspoiled and lush laughter, rushing activity, and perfect self-assurance. It was as if he said:

"You can't notice me plain, so I've discovered the perfume that makes a dwarf a giant, whereby I stink you all down."

Sprinkled with greatness, he went then, odious, odorous, and obvious. He escaped littleness through a smell.

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The girls called him "Mr. Peewee," after a cartoon character in the Sunday papers. Kirby called him worse names than that.

"But he won't last a week," thought Kirby. "J. J. can't stand it."

What was his amazement, then, to hear rumors that Cropsey was becoming a favorite.

"Kirby," said honest Brent, "Cropsey's the next one."

Kirby could not believe it; it meant that he was following the long line downward; another Boyd; another favorite on the wane. That his success implied immediate failure was monstrous; he fought against the idea. But the proofs grew on him.

First came the typed statement that hereafter all orders would come through Cropsey, and all communications for J. J. ascend by Cropsey; then Cropsey came around to investigate Kirby's office.

The bitterness of this was ghastly. Not so long ago Kirby had exulted in watching men broken; it was so good to be strong, to use power, to trample. Now he suddenly felt stripped of authority and had to endure what he had made others endure.

Cropsey seemed to delight in showing Kirby the new status. He would break into the room, smell and all, sit on Kirby's desk, lean, lay his hand on the quivering Business Manager, poke him in the ribs, laugh in his face.

"Say, J. J.'s great, eh? The old devil! Did you ever get thick with him, like me? Think of it—he likes me; I'm his alter ego, or *vice versa*. Latin's Greek to me. Give me the sly kind; J. J.'s sly; you ain't an idea how he spies on the bunch of you. I'm his right eye. Ha! ha! I'm watching you!"

"Not interested," said Kirby, coldly, "and I'm a bit busy."

Cropsey winked.

"Don't bluff, Trask. You ought to see the report I made on you. J. J. saw little red devils."

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Kirby rose.

"You'd better cut that short," he said.

"Oh, come now, come now!" laughed Cropsey. "All's fun between friends. Did I ever tell you of my prospects? Well, I've got a widow in Weehawken stuck on me; I'm her little man, and she's got a bunch of the coin. Let J. J. smash, let the magazine blow up, there's a big woman to pull me out of the wreck. How about you, Trask? What'll you do if you're out in the cold?"

He was out in the cold already. He raged over the fact; he stormed through his heavy work. How could J. J. be such an ingrate; how forget so cruelly? And, bitterest of all, his enemies, hitherto subdued by fear, now saw him stripped of power and immediately joined in the fun of kicking the man who was going down. Any one could defy him now, for what strength had he save the power of his voice? And with this feeling of breakage within and without him, how could he muster up enough self-confidence to command others?

He could of course leave, but to leave in disfavor was practically to be blacklisted, to find all doors shut. He could only get some poor job as a stenographer, and join the ever-present and bright failures at Atwood's. It is in the nature of man, too, to disbelieve in a sudden change of fortune for the worse. Kirby desperately clung to the idea that this was a passing phase, that to-morrow or the next day conditions would revert. Cropsey might be forced out, or the business, pulling through by some swift miracle, might turn successful and soften J. J.

But if Kirby remained, if he fought it out to the last ditch—and his bull-headedness made him blindly go on and on unflinching—then he must endure the worst. A man in power can resist insult, calumny, degradation; a man out of power must uncomplainingly receive the kicks. To complain meant to be dropped altogether. And now that his grip was being loosened, his position, his waning authority seemed very sweet to him. To tremble with

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fear, to feel punishment, to know the heart-break and self-depreciation of being trampled on began to be Kirby's portion, and his whole nature cried out on the injustice and savagery of the world. It was a snarl and clawing of wolves; let but the strongest fall and the whole pack exultantly devoured him. Kirby was sick of life, and yet never had life seemed so fatally sweet.

And so he had fits of his old shyness and speechlessness; he wanted somewhere to lay his head, to escape this gathering disgrace. Up like a skyrocket, down like a stick—how bitter this phrase had become to him. He remembered his experience with the Army of the Unemployed, and he felt his kinship to those souls that gnashed teeth, and wailed, and begged in the outer darkness. This, then, was life—the brief glory of a few, the cry of the multitude. And he had had his brief glory and now they were beating his head down in the bitter floods. Surely some devil, some divine vivisector, had created the world.

Then one morning the office-boy came in and said:

“J. J. wants to see yer at once.”

Kirby went out; he saw the rest of the staff marching grimly up the gravel path, and suddenly he remembered his first day with J. J. and the seven men he had considered mere dogs. It was ironical to join this procession of mongrels, and to have in his heart the throbbing fear of the others. He felt positively sick; he glimpsed the notion that this morning would publicly symbolize his broken power.

The day was sticky and warm, unpleasantly humid, and a glare of light gushed through the searching atmosphere; the railroad tracks shimmered with heat, the grass swarmed with buzzing insects, mosquitoes sang in his ears, and he felt itchy all over.

Up the cool stairs the staff climbed silently, Kirby with them. Then they knocked on the door. Kirby's heart began to pound, his temples to throb.

“Come,” cried J. J. They entered. Cropsey was sit-

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ting facing them, grinning maliciously, and Kirby wondered how often the staff had seen him (Kirby) doing the same thing and longed to strangle him just as he longed to strangle Mr. Peewee.

And just as on that first morning, J. J. was bent over reports, muttering. The staff made the old semicircle behind their master and stood, silent. Through the open window came the noise of a passing train and the lazy hum of flies and the shrilling of crickets.

Then Kirby seemed to be an actor in an old dream, something that had happened ages before.

"Is this Trask's report?" thundered J. J.

Kirby craned his neck.

"Yes," he murmured.

J. J. swiveled round, his eyes flashing insanely, flecks of saliva on his lips.

"Now you young son-of-a-gun," he roared, "you whirligig of slush, is this what you give me after all my work with you? Pick that up!"

The report lay on the floor, and Kirby hesitated. The world danced round him, a swirl of red; a lunatic rage tore through his brain; he was ripe for murder at that instant. J. J. curse him? He, too, one of these dogs?

"Pick that up!" shouted J. J.

A long moment passed. Then Kirby turned and walked from the room.

By that act he narrowly saved himself from a complete breakdown; yet he felt that he had somehow bent if not surrendered his erect spirit; he was broken; he was trampled. Publicly, too. He knew it, but what could he do? One word would have lost him his position. And to lose that now seemed equivalent to suicide. Irony of life! What a difference to sit in the secretary's chair, feeling the tiger-joy of seeing men stepped upon, and to stand here, in the same room, in the same drama, and be one of the trampled!

And Cropsey had grinned maliciously.

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In this way, then, Kirby went up, went down. Down, but not out yet. No. Now he would fight on, just as his predecessors had done, to the last gasp. It was, of course, merely because he was being forced out that this position began to loom so large, to be so sweet to him. But large and sweet it was, and to endure curses, to belong to the herd that was profanely used, seemed less important than once it was. He had not picked up the report, but nevertheless he had not resigned his position.

And now in these mid-days of May, Mary and the Giant and high finance seemed far away and unreal. Kirby was making a fight for his life; it was the instinct of self-preservation, even more elemental than that of sex.

XXIII

PENDLETON

[T was the next morning that Kirby received a note from Mary.

DEAR MR. TRASK,—We must try once more. Would this week-end do? I am going to spend a week at Cameron Bay, Maine. Maine is wonderful in June, and there are cliffs along the sea.

It is a long journey, but possibly you can come.

Faithfully,

M. W.

And Kirby, reading this, was amazed that he had ever thought love so important. Engrossed in his work, the interference of a woman was annoying; the interference of Mary was almost tragic. Easy enough for her to run him about the country, but to be away four days was physically impossible; and even if he were free to go it would only deepen his troubles. He was in no mood for love-making; he was nervous and broken; he would only be a bother to have around; he could not brook meeting any more Pendletons, and, besides, he had given up Mary. He had no more right to aspire to her than as if he had tuberculosis or insanity. Completely disillusioned, fighting for his very existence, he stared the brute facts in the face, and he concluded that the matter must end. He was, in truth, in a neurotic condition, and saw life black.

So he wrote:

MY DEAR MISS WATTS,—It is kind of you to invite me. I am sorry that it is impossible for me to come.

Yours sincerely,

KIRBY TRASK.

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He little knew, of course, where this javelin, hurled in the dark, was going to land; nor did he in any way guess what had prompted Mary's letter.

She had given the New York address, and it was here, for the time being, that she was living. Her father was here, too. Both were exceedingly busy.

Jordan Watts was in his down-town office most of the day. He was just engaged in the joyous occupation of creating rivalries and jealousies among underlings, managers, and partners in New York, Pittsburgh, and Chicago; by such a method he divided the powers of the business into fractions which he could easily control; they never could coalesce against his authority. Besides, every few months, after a period of absence, he reveled in checking up the work of each department and then writing post-cards brutally slashing his people right and left.

"Let 'em know the Big Eye is on them," he said.

That, however, was not the major part of his day's work. He was financing new enterprises through Wall Street combinations, and he was likewise involved in a campaign for fame and in politico-social schemes for greater power. So he dashed off articles and lectures and after-dinner speeches and he attended dinners and went to opera and concert and meeting, to foregather with all the legislators, judges, scientists, and other outstanding people that he could, thereby strengthening his grasp.

Mary was equally busy; they were as obverse and reverse sides of the same coin.

"I make," said old Watts; "she spends."

To do this wisely she had a private secretary, a woman who at one time had worked for the Charity Organization Society. Daily came hundreds of begging letters from societies, schools, universities, libraries, and individuals; daily there were a dozen projects to consider. And, besides, Mary worked in a Settlement; went down several times a week and managed a club of girls, and was also on the board of trustees. Down there she was slightly

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feared, for she asked piercing questions, and drew sharp conclusions much in the manner of her father.

Then, in a way, she supervised the house, checked up accounts, O.K.'d large orders. In addition, there was often shopping to do.

But what she liked least and had to submit to most was a ceaseless round of social engagements—this and that dinner or dance, theater-party or public meeting, and she had a number of young women friends for afternoon calls and outings.

Thinking back, she could not remember a time when she had not met almost daily people of power or position. As a girl she remembered sitting at table, at home, on shipboard, in private car, in Europe or New York or the West, with all sorts of imposing personalities. And her father was constantly bringing a fresh supply. He had an eye out for rising and risen men in all walks of life, pounced upon them, and brought them home in his jaws.

She was so used to it that it was as natural to her as dressing in the morning, and her father was such an excellent talker that she had early disposed of any native constraint. The process left her quite natural, unspoilt; she had never ceased being her simple and sincere self. In fact, she had a reputation for saying unconventional things, for talking with uncomfortable directness, for being unpleasantly honest.

This social intercourse brought one excellent result—she got to know men; she could size and assort them with swift certainty; they could not baffle her. And time and again she sent some suitor about his business.

Naturally she was the bright star for the gilded and half-gilded or half-tarnished youth of America. Foreigners, too, approached her, many *via* her father. Climbers, adventurers, successful men of every stamp buzzed about her. As one of Pendleton's friends put it to that wealthy corporation lawyer:

“She's the best match in America.”

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The result of this ferocious cloud of males ascending the heavens toward their queen bee was that at times old Watts believed that Mary would never marry. She was twenty-six and had turned down a regiment already.

"You're getting," said her father, "so that a man makes you suspicious."

She laughed; but there was truth in this. She suspected a crude motivation and was wary. Besides, she almost never met a man who appealed to her imagination, none "with a star on his forehead," as she had said of Coleridge. The neurasthenic young idlers who had valets dress them in the morning, and spent money so fast that it flowed after them like a comet's tail, and who, weary of existing methods of dissipating, invented new orgies, landing finally in the insane asylum or the sanatorium, hardly struck her as coming up to any honest ideal.

Neither was she taken up with "hard-headed business men." She was one herself, and knew the limitations of the type. Nor did luscious senators and amiable judges excite her; neither was she stirred by the author of the last novel that sold two hundred thousand copies.

Kirby stood out from this masculine lock-step like a camp-fire on the side of a mountain. His first coming, the poor lad, shy and passionately speechless, the awkwardness and sudden splendid temper, was remembered. Even then she divined in him a thousand magic possibilities. He came, she felt, near to being a genius, and on the mountain-top she thought of Kirby as much as of her father when she quoted:

Dreamer devout by vision led.

The way, too, that he had met her at Harrington's stirred her imagination. She had had the sudden desire then to seize on him and project him—almost a maternal instinct. It meant adventure, risk, the unexpected—Kirby was so undependable. She knew these other men;

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they were as like as peas, year after year; their reactions could be predicted as the astronomer predicts an eclipse. They were law-bound. Kirby, she felt, was lawless. He might end in anything—greatness or obscurity. In short, he was desperately interesting, and to follow him meant real risks. She, like her father, loved risk. Better pain, defeat, death, she thought, than the gliding smoothness of the beaten road.

Then on the top of the Giant her feeling for Kirby had developed to a new point. She felt the man in him there, the powerful young mate. His gray eyes, his trembling voice, the strength with which he had taken charge of her, were all thrilling; pervaded her with a mood she had never before known. And that whole adventure was a new element in her life; never before had she been thrown into such personal intimate contact with a man.

At the moment she had felt willing to follow where he led, to cast aside the world and go with him, two comrades, man and woman, in the wilderness; to be to him what her mother had been to her father.

And finally, in the interrupted row in the skiff out on the dark lake, she had been moved almost to tears by beauty and wonder.

There was no way of reasoning what it all meant. Kirby in many ways was raw, crude, untried; he was clumsy and unmannered; he was, comparatively speaking, unsuccessful. Not one big thing had he done. She knew his weaknesses, too; glimpsed his ambitions, his false pride, his unfounded haughtiness. He was even ignorant of poetry; probably even more ignorant of the other arts; woefully ignorant of the world.

All this she knew. Why, then, did her heart throb under his influence? Why did she seem to be more alive? Why was she so happy to be alone with him? Was there something primal in him that called out something primal in her? They seemed to set fire to each other.

The memory of the snow-storm was ineffaceable. It re-

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turned to her mind time and again like a rush of music. What had made it so sweet? Why did she feel so young, so free, so much of a woman, recalling his eyes or his voice or his gestures?

And then she forgot his faults and thought of him in the light of possibilities.

"Oh," she told herself, "he's somehow the greatest man I've met. He has it in him to rule the world. All he needs is the chance. If I wanted to," she thought—and what a wealth of the woman was in the phrase!—"I could make him a great man."

That was the temptation. Just as her father had gloried in developing Steel, so she could have gloried in developing Kirby.

"Day-dreams!" she told herself. Her practical head was at odds with her instincts. Pooh! how could she marry a man so much beneath her? It was too much like charity; it went against the social conventions; it would be opposed on all sides; and then there was her father. *He* would not hear of such a thing.

"Yes," said a little voice, "but it's been done before. There's the millionaire who married an East Side Jewess, the rich woman who ran off with her chauffeur. It's happening all the time; it's the theme of half of the romances of the world."

"Ah," she replied, "but the newspaper notoriety, the social ruin. True, I have stocks in my own name; but would a man live on me like that? And could I, with my lack of training, live on his level?"

The thought made her cheeks burn. What a wild adventure it would be! All the grooves, the ruts of her life smashed open. It would make all life a ride in a snow-storm! And, after all, this is the true romance of life—to reverse all the conditions: if poor, to be rich; if rich, to be poor.

"But I don't really love him," she told herself. "I'm merely fascinated."

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If this was so it put another young man in a favorable light. This young man was Pendleton. Mary had to admit that he fascinated her. She knew beyond doubt that he was trying to make a brilliant match; and yet Kirby might, in bad moments, not be above such a wild thought.

It was Pendleton's easy power, overwhelming masculinity, poise, and finish that attracted her.

"He's finished; Kirby unfinished," she reflected, thereby making Kirby appear all the more entrancing. A finished product has no future; a crude Kirby is so interesting!

But Pendleton would make a mighty husband. Between them they would flash in the round world at the very pinnacle of society. And she could exult in the domineering man, the big polished brute, the careless master of women and men.

It was a match, too, that would be strongly endorsed by her father. He liked Pendleton, overlooked even the fact that he didn't play golf. And Pendleton already had great power, was the mainstay of several gigantic corporations, and could easily become one of the masters of Steel if Watts opened the door. In short, Pendleton would make a good heir when Watts died. For the sake of the business and the inheritance, was not Mary bound to consider his suit?

Not that she feared her father's interference. Hitherto, on such matters, she had treated the old man as if she were his wife or mother, not his child. And when he indignantly said, "Then I suppose you'll never marry!" she replied, "Why should I? I'm independent. It's only the dependent woman who has to marry. An independent American woman can live the best sort of life without having an unpleasant man in it."

But one rainy May night her father called her into the library. In the deep quiet he sat there in his leather armchair, the low light of the electrolier shining in his musing

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eyes. She came in and sat on the chair arm and put an arm about him.

"Um, Meg! Meg!" he muttered, and rubbed his crumpled bearded cheek against her cheek. She hugged him tighter. They were very fond of each other, these two hard-headed people.

"So," he said. "Sit over there. I'm going to talk to you, Mary, like a father—not a toy."

She took the seat near him, never dreaming what was coming. He drew some papers toward him.

"Mary," he said, looking at her sharply, "who's this fellow Trask, anyway?"

Her heart gave a jerk, her cheeks warmed, but she met his gaze unflinching.

"He's Business Manager at Harrington's."

"What do you think of him?"

Mary began to get better control of herself.

"He has possibilities."

"What sort?"

"Business—social."

He leaned toward her, and his words seemed to slash her heart.

"Enough to warrant a night's outing and secret rides on the lake?"

Her eyes blazed, and she leaned toward him; their faces were near together.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Why, Mary, do you do such things?"

"If," she said, with sharp anger, "you think it necessary to spy on me, why, that ends it. I won't have anything more to do with you."

"Just a moment," he said, and picked up a typewritten sheet. "Listen to this:

REPORT ON MR. KIRBY TRASK

On investigation, through Mr. Harrington, Atwood's Agency, and people at the address furnished by the latter (a cheap

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boarding-house on West Twenty-sixth Street), I find that Mr. Trask came from Trent, Iowa, where he was an unsuccessful newspaper reporter. After coming here he worked for less than a week as a sort of office-boy at Marshall's, and then for two years was a clerk at the Continental Express Company. He left this position without formal notice.

He studied shorthand at the Guthrie School and became private secretary to Mr. Harrington. On the day of his arrival at Inwood he engaged a room and took lunch in a workman's boarding-house, but found another place the same day, and never paid for the lunch.

At Harrington's he was raised rapidly and finally became Business Manager. But Mr. Harrington tells me that Mr. Trask proved very disappointing. A case of conceit, of authority without training. Without cause, and in a fit of temper, he discharged the head of the subscription department, a man of standing and of long experience—an invaluable employee. And now he is proving unfit in every way.

Among his faults are: heavy drinking and smoking, dissipating, overbearing manners, insolence to inferiors, ruthlessness.

There was some rumor among the clerks of an affair with a clerk's wife; also at Marshall's, a floor-walker told me of an affair with a shop-girl.

Mary was overwhelmed. In this brutal light Kirby was revealed as something crass and horrible. She felt as if a knife had been run through her heart.

She sat stunned, speechless, in pain.

"You ask me why I question you, Mary," said old Watts, in a kindly voice. "Do you wonder now?"

Her face was very pale. She could barely speak.

"But is it true? I can't believe it."

"Yes," he said, dryly, "the Pinkertons get the truth—as I've found in the mills."

Then she leaned forward again.

"Do you mean you set a detective on him?"

"Naturally—after seeing him with you at High Hill. I think enough of my daughter to protect her from adventurers."

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"Why," she said, "it's really setting a detective on me, too." Her color rose. "I think I can take care of myself, father. Good night."

And out she went. But Jordan Watts was satisfied. Her immediate reaction didn't matter. He knew, master of two hundred thousand men, how to stab the soul.

And it was really so. Mary lay that night unable to sleep, one revelation after another flooding her mind. Why had Kirby interviewed her that time instead of leaving it to Mansfield? But how could she be so mistaken? Never before had she been misled by a man. Why, she asked herself, should such a devil be so beautiful, so stormily attractive?

So finally, with all her strength, she shut her heart to him. She decided to squeeze him out of her mind, and this could only be done by concentrating on something else. That something else, in this juncture, was Pendleton, corporation lawyer.

She told herself she was terribly angry with her father. There was something snaky in using a spy. It was an insult to her, a humiliation. And yet this anger melted in her grief and shock over Kirby. Never before had she appeared before her father and herself as a weak fool. Had she known how to cry, she would have that night. But Mary never cried.

That next day she quite feared to face her father; she felt shamed and abased. Luckily he was away, did not even come home for supper. Then that evening, sitting in one of the upper parlors, she had brought to her Pendleton's card.

She grew strangely excited.

"Show him into the music-room," she said, and then waited.

Her feeling was that the crisis of her life was upon her, and that she was curiously weak and emotional. She felt as if she had no control of herself, could not concentrate her thoughts, could not abate her excitement.

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"I can't go to him—not to-night," she told herself, and rose at once to do it.

She had been proposed to many times; it was a painful matter, but one she could handle with assurance. Why, then, this disconcertedness to-night? Why did it seem to her that she was changing her whole existence by merely walking to the music-room?

All at once Pendleton seemed close to her, personal, absorbing her. She was responsible for him, for herself. Her one word would unite them for all time, would end her single life, end Kirby, end all. But Kirby had to be ended—the sooner the better. A "Yes" from her would free her of the impudent adventurer. His affairs with clerk's wives and shop-girls! The shame of it!

But as she stepped along the softly lighted hall she told herself she couldn't speak to Pendleton. Why didn't he leave her alone to-night? She made a desperate effort to collect, control herself, and failed miserably. It was as if she were drugged.

"I'm going to my fate!" was her thought.

For a woman such an occasion is tragically vital; it means uprooting life and transplanting it to a strange soil. It is terrifying, even when it is glorious and uplifted by love.

And so she stepped through the parlor, walking firmly, her pale face uplifted, her large, brown eyes full of doubt and dread. She entered the music-room. The window was open, and all the mildness of the May night entered, with the noises of the city. Intimations stole in of the dark cross-streets, the enchanted avenues, and the secret undercurrent of romance beneath the lights. Mating everywhere in the crowded city; shy laughter of girls and boys; ardent glances of men and women.

Pendleton was sitting in a chair, fingers of both hands touching as if in a thwarted attempt at prayer, legs crossed, and face also pale. And as she entered both seemed caught in an atmosphere of flame, and both acted as if in a trance.

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"Good evening," he murmured, rising.

"Good evening," she said, at once sitting down. He re-seated himself.

There was a dreadful moment of silence. Then in measured tones Pendleton began:

"I came for one thing, Miss Watts—just like lots of others."

She caught his burning glance and looked away. Her heart leaped.

He leaned forward.

"I want you to be my wife."

There was a whirl of fire in her head. She half saw him moving a little toward her. Then she was amazed at what she said:

"Oh, I'm sorry, deeply sorry." She rose, trembling fearfully. "So sorry. Forgive me, Mr. Pendleton."

And looking neither to right nor left she hurried from the room. And she never found out what happened to Pendleton, whether he wept or laughed, sneaked out or held his head high.

She made straight for her room, locked the door, went to her mirror, and looked in. Her face was white.

"Now, why in the world did I do that?" she asked of her image.

But happy! she had never been so happy in all her life. She laughed herself to sleep. It was glorious; it was a ride in a snow-storm.

It was a foolish, an unreasonable happiness.

"Is Kirby a scoundrel?" she asked herself in the morning. "Well, then, he *is* a scoundrel. Father, I'm going to give you a new job for your Pinkerton man."

And she sat down and invited Kirby to come to Maine. When the reply came she went up to her room, locked herself in, and began to sing. She almost danced, too. Such a foolish joy had never been in that house; her father must think her mad.

And why was she so happy? She could not have told

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herself then, as she held that unopened envelope and studied his handwriting.

“So, you come from the scoundrel!” she said, her cheeks flushed. “All right, scoundrel, what have you to say to me?”

And she tore it open and read:

MY DEAR MISS WATTS,—It is kind of you to invite me. I am sorry that it is impossible for me to come.

Yours sincerely,

KIRBY TRASK.

She read it twice before she realized. Then she felt as if she had been lashed across the face by a whip. She went white, and crumpled up on the bed. And the truth was hers at last—she loved Kirby Trask!

XXIV

THE SKYROCKET

MEANTIME the "scoundrel" had troubles of his own. For if the Harrington business had seemed to him before like a routed army retreating, it now suggested a last desperate stand, with the darkness descending through the bloody smoke. There was a mad last rush of work, a new and terrific speeding-up, a going and coming of messengers and heads. For several nights the whole building rocked with labor up to eleven o'clock, and even after that in the lighted editorial rooms the coatless staff perspired and toiled.

Men shook their heads, meeting each other.

"Looks bad!" was the comment.

"J. J.'s Waterloo," said Brent, in a poetic mood. "He wrought an empire, and now he is losing it. He's like one of his own favorites, only he was a favorite of the gods. Heaven must have found a Mr. Peewee to replace him."

"Yes," said husky Hank, of the press-room, "but he won't never starve. What's to become of the bunch of us? Them girls up-stairs; these men of mine?"

It was as if the toilers were caught in a ship that was sinking: they must sink with it; there was no escape. Many of them saw no future; they had builded their lives on great J. J., and what they thought was solid rock was merely quicksand.

As Hank put it: "Take a job from a workman and you take his life."

Some of these girls would doubtless sink into the under-

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world; some of these men, in their enforced idleness, doubtless become drunkards and vagrants.

And there was the great sorrow of a family breaking up. They were all used to the routine, the particular machine or desk, window-view and slant of light, and the comrade faces so familiar. Now they were about to be exiled from each other, they had to part for lonely pilgrimages in the outer dark.

Not until this was apparent did they realize their attachment to their failing and fighting captain; he had oppressed and driven them, he had been cruel and foolish, but they had followed him too long to remember these things. They felt that he had been the force that held them together, and now he was saying farewell to them and leaving them to the chaos of the world. The bright, stormy leader was vanishing from their lives.

But dominating these mingled emotions was the sharp terror of unemployment—the scurry of beggars clamoring for a place in the world, the empty cupboard at home, the unpaid rent, the gloom and pitiable struggle of an impoverished family. The little savings would vanish, the ambitious plans of slow years be dropped, the boy in school be pulled out and set to work, the burden of the drudging wife swiften the coming of old age. Many of these men grew pale and bleak when they thought of the future. Now they knew that business is merely a form of war—that it has its victories, but also its defeats, and that in these men are wounded and killed as surely as if bullets pierced them.

And it seemed to Kirby that it was a strange world where the destinies of so many souls were tied up in the delirious dance of a J. J. Did J. J., he wondered, ever realize how these lives were woven in with his own, so that his every joy, every anger, every success and failure, went through them as through the nerves of his own body?

He saw practically nothing of J. J. these days, but he heard a rumor that there were daily conferences up at the

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house between the Captain of Industry and three big New-Yorkers.

"He's making a last play for a loan," was Kirby's comment.

And on Wednesday afternoon he had a glimpse of J. J. hurrying to the station, satchel in hand. He noticed the face of the bulky Napoleon, discolored, sleepless, perplexed, and he was not comforted. It was maddening, this wild work, this assurance of failure, this despairing fight for life. He could think of nothing save the swift approach of that moment when the pillars would be pulled out and the house fall over his head. And what then?

It seemed impossible that so much effort could come to such an end; that his years of clerking and his splendid rise could lead only to this annihilation. Already he was stripped of power; he went through all the motions, but the life had departed. It was like a frog's leg kicking after it is amputated, or half of a snake's body writhing in the grass.

It was bitter enough to be a drudge with no future, but it was far more bitter to get a taste of power, to escape for a moment to the free heights, and then be thrust back to the dungeon below.

Then on Thursday morning a strange change was apparent in the factory. As if the battle were already over, and the silent night gathering over the slain. There was a stillness, a lull, and Kirby saw Edgar and Martin going about like ghosts of themselves. Somehow they had become silent and gentle. They spoke in low voices; they spoke sympathetically. There might have been some one dead in the house. It was curious to see these snarling young men transformed, as if for the first time they were aware that they, too, were subject to the ills and misfortunes of life; that they, too, were merely these human things that pass and die and are no more.

A hushed expectation fell on the factory; the heavy pressure was suddenly eased, and the pale-faced men asked each other;

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"Have you heard anything?"

"No, but we'll hear before night."

Kirby felt that he was enduring an endless trance; the moments were all too slow for him.

"If it must come," he thought, "let it come quickly."

But it did not come that day.

Friday broke cloudy and gray, with the air still and melancholy. Brent and Kirby had breakfast together.

"Mark my word," said Brent, "the ax falls this A.M."

"Oh," muttered Kirby, "perhaps he's got the loan."

"Tut," laughed Brent. "Loan nothing. In a day or two I'll be going back to Atwood's."

They said no more. A dull pain was in Kirby's heart, a heavy expectation; his skin felt like warm wool, and his lids hurt his eyes.

Then they stepped out into the maple-blooming lane; but a few birds twittered feebly in the drooping boughs, and as they stepped down the hushed street, past the gloomy stores and boarding-houses, and then past the station and up along the lawn, they had the sensation of taking this walk for the last time.

There stood the factory with a few men entering the doorway, and a thin smoke curling from the chimney; it stood steeped in the searching sadness of the gray weather. They passed under the portico, up the steps, gained the empty and shadowy hall, made for their rooms.

Kirby opened the windows, and was bathed in warm, wood-flavored air. Then he turned to his desk and sat down. He had no desire to begin on those stacks of black-marked papers. His despair made him impotent. What was the use?

He heard and felt the faint rumble of the presses starting in the basement; now and then footsteps echoed in the hall; a boy along the railroad embankment whistled and passed; and he remembered that first day when he had seen the dusty sunlight streaming from open doors and had interviewed the lazy office-boy who was counting up words

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in a manuscript. That seemed ages ago—a happy time. And he had thought, then, that he had seized on success and that henceforth life was to be dazzling achievement and dizzying power.

He smiled grimly and fingered his papers; tried to busy himself. It was useless. He felt that he lacked even the energy to smoke a cigar. So he arose and glanced from the window and looked on the gray-tinged woods and the ashes between the railroad ties. It seemed to him that his own life was ashes.

An office-boy now entered.

“Mr. Trask—”

He turned as to a dreaded summons.

“J. J. wants to see you up at the house.”

So it had come. Well and good. He took his hat and went out. His heart was beating dully, and he felt a little smothered.

Up the gravel path he went, and others were walking there, too—a motley, silent company, like mourners following the dead. Hank was there, Cropsey and Rouse, the editors, the photographer, the art-man, the proof-reader, the advertising manager, the head office-boy, the chief compositor, the head bookkeeper, the engineer, and the janitor.

Awe seemed to hush them. There was something majestic and mighty in this last council of the doomed host; these human beings aware that, though the iron skies cared little for the fate of man, yet man could meet his own passing with solemn grandeur, and thus as ever put to scorn the supernal powers.

They filed through the open doorway and up the stairs into the room. Edgar and Martin were there, one leaning against a revolving cabinet, the other stooping over a chair-back. Both nodded to the men; the men nodded back. This unexpected kindness, this sudden discovery of human equality, touched the moment with something ineffable and somber.

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They stood about awkwardly. Then Kirby saw that J. J. was looking out the east window, his shoulders stooped a little, his hands clasped behind his back. . . . It was Napoleon at St. Helena, brooding on vanished empire the illimitable waters between him and the Eagles of the irrevocable Past.

In the stillness Kirby heard push of shoe, strain of chair, slip of hand, and looking on these faces he saw that they were composed and tranquil. He thought of a courtroom where the jury had brought in a verdict of guilty and the judge was about to pronounce sentence—the grave moment when a human being disposes of the destiny of a human being.

Now the man at the window turned and faced them; they looked at him, stricken. For the face that had flashed and been convulsed with dream and scheme and tempest was now frozen with grief and despair. It was a terrible spectacle, a soul showing naked, the one unendurable sight for men. And the man they had looked upon as a demi-god was, after all, by this showing, a poor, weak human being who knew the bitter taste of misadventure.

He spoke in a low, changed voice:

“You know why I brought you here. I’ve made an end of things. I’ve had to sell out the business to Boswell, of New York, and he will move it to the city. He has, as you know, a plant of his own, and not many of you can go with him. I wish I could have arranged it differently; I wish I could have provided for you, but I am a ruined man myself.”

He paused; the silence grew intense. Then he went on in a breaking voice:

“Some day you may understand how I was driven and harried these past six years, and then perhaps you will temper your harsh judgment of me with a little mercy. Possibly I was a victim of this enterprise as well as you. If matters had gone otherwise you would have found me a different man.”

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Thus was a quivering soul laid bare; and now they could look no longer at him, for tears were trickling on his cheeks.

His voice had its purest melodic quality.

"You know I pioneered a tremendous enterprise for the people; now I must drop my work, now at the moment when others will come in and gather the harvests I have sown. I must relinquish my power and begin all over. You will not hear of me again."

He paused; then he continued:

"And you—you I must leave without recompensing your bare service, without lighting a little your hazardous future. You will not believe me, I can't ask you to, but this is the hardest to bear."

He turned back to the window then, overcome. Not a word was said; many were smothering sobs. Then slowly one by one they turned and filed out. They knew the worst; the period of waiting was over; now each went forth to fight out a lonely destiny. . . .

Kirby, deeply moved and entirely forgetting himself, hurried from the house and struck out along a lonely dusty road. He wanted to get away, to be under the skies, where there was breathing and thinking space. And so he walked on, the soft dust rising in clouds and a moist grayness settling over the fields at either side.

He only knew that his emotions were profound; he was not thinking at all. Then large drops of rain began to fall, boring tiny wells in the dust, and he held out his hand and felt the cool splatter. Next he took off his hat and let the pure rain heal him.

He walked faster; mist crawled along the fields and the fences, and suddenly the landscape was sheeted with gray, the arrowy tempest dancing over the slopes and drenching him to the skin. The burnt smell of the moistened dust, the sharp, wet odor of the grass, were exquisite in his nostrils.

All at once he had a sense of release, a feeling of quiet joy.

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"I've lost my job," he thought, "but I've found myself."

It was true. Dominion over employees and printed sheets was gone, but in its stead he felt a new dominion over that larger empire—self. It was as if a world had slid from his stooped shoulders; he could stride erect again, without cringing or being sworn at or being entangled in hate and jealousy and peril.

The tragedy of the fall of the house of Harrington seemed less bitter.

"J. J. won't stay down," he thought. "He's bound to bob up later elsewhere. Of course some of the men, the girls will go down. Most will get other jobs. But it's all life."

He could not have explained why his unsuccess meant so little to him; in that phrase, "It's all life," he showed, however, a larger maturity. Not that injustice was less in the world, but that he, Kirby, could stand it as well as others, that he had that growing imperviousness to events which is the fiber of manhood. And this new hardihood had been acquired only by fighting to the bitter end, by allowing those trainers of men—work, pain, humiliation, fear—to develop day by day his thews and sinews.

They had only seemed to hurt and humble him; now suddenly he stood forth with a mantle of strength. And he seemed to have new insight, too, to be able really to understand J. J. at last. Surely, thought Kirby, J. J. had never been a free Aladdin conjuring worlds into existence, but an adventurer who leaped into the river of business and thought he was generating the tides, whereas he was merely being swept out by them, until the undertow caught him and dragged him down. At best, like the fish that jets a protective black fluid, J. J. had ejected a series of scarlet spurts, discoloring the waters about him.

"It's *he*," thought Kirby, "that is the skyrocket."

And so he was, leaping up in a fire that consumed men,

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dropping charred through the dark on wastes of lonely sand. But he was not alone; all over America these bright rockets were rising daily, a perpetual Fourth of July. Some were mere swindles, get-rich-quick sluicing of the savings of the drudges into the night-whiteness of Broadway. But constantly from the multitudes there was the rise of wild-cat business attempting the great leap to the Olympian heights. Of such was J. J.—one of the guerrillas of business. The real generals with their trained armies tarried above on the secure heights; up there sat the Jordan Watts', the real masters of the machinery of civilization. How could the J. J.'s, alone, unorganized, forced to be financed by these same masters, break through the walls of the gigantic and unified industries?

So thought Kirby, and with that thought came another—he would prefer to go to Oklahoma rather than work for a skyrocket or be a drudge.

“I'll stand on my own two feet hereafter,” he told himself.

And he knew, too, that the Jordan Watts' were inaccessible folk.

Now the rain ceased, a few far arrows glancing in sudden sun. The blue, widening rifts of sky were freshly washed, the wide grass sparkled and glittered, the muddy road steamed, and the whole world rose from the rain like a dog from a brook, shaking himself and panting with freshness. In the sharp light women came out on doorsteps, looking about them, and excited children tested the puddles with their feet. A flock of ducks went quacking over the road.

Kirby paused at a little bridge and looked down over the rail at the muddy waters; on either side willows with pendant raindrops leaned glitteringly. His clinging clothes began to steam, and from his matted hair drops rolled down his freshened face. And all at once a sweet intensity of painful glory came to his heart. How he loved Mary Watts!

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He had not thought of her for weeks, it seemed; he had been submerged in the growing process; but now with the pressure gone and the rainy earth breathing with June, and with wood-violets, buttercups, and daisies about, how could he help but think of Mary?

And all at once he knew that he was going to see her. There was no future for him; he had lost everything; he had a bare five hundred saved up; and Mary was worlds above him. No matter; he would go to her once more and for the last time; he would clear that matter as he had cleared the matter of his job; he would tell her honestly what had happened and that he loved her, and hence that his relationship with her could not continue.

For he argued that he was wrong in breaking with her without an explanation. She was undoubtedly good to him, even a little fond of him; then was it not a wrong to her to run off without a reason?

Thus he argued, remembering that she was in Maine, and that it would take a visible slice of his savings to see her. Thus he argued, but all the time his fully aroused love was driving him. There is always a "once more" for a lover.

XXV

THE CLIFFS

IT was not the happiest of young men who took the five-thirty Fall River boat that afternoon; he stood there in the open sun, hand on rail of the topmost deck, powerful enough, with set and certain face. So may John Brown have looked when he led his men into Harper's Ferry.

And yet a tingling fluid of expectancy ran up and down him; he was like a starved cat offered a saucer of milk; there was only one night between him and Mary. He could see her, perhaps take a ride with her, perhaps be happy with her, then say nothing, come back, with the way open for another visit. Why not? That was all that was left him in the world. He belonged to the unemployed; he had no real friends; no real home; and yet had he had all these things he would have sacrificed them for Mary. Why then give up this one poor joy of seeing her?

A few weeks, at most a month or two, would bring the J. J. business to an end, close up the unfinished work, shut the factory. After that, the deluge. Luckily, for a day or two, the confusion and disorganization of the working force allowed Kirby to get away, but then, coming back, he would have the twofold work of winding things up and of finding a new position. In the mean time, Mary.

He had felt that afternoon, walking along rain-washed Broadway, that the city was a radiant young girl floating in the wild, fresh light and the glory of the sun. She was

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like that Mary in the morning after the snow-storm; and all at once he had become faint with yearning. If in them flowed the same young blood, if they were attuned to each other, two natural mates, why should an artificial civilization keep them apart?

But as the mighty white triple-decked boat, with flags streaming, band playing, and whistle roaring, detached itself from New York, and with one tremor following another met rush of sea-wind and dazzling sun in mid-stream, and rounded the Bay at the south, Kirby's agitation increased. He almost wished himself on land again; but now resistlessly he was borne along, while the crowded shores looked on the wide waters overrun with shipped humanity, and the city rose like sky-hung cliffs in the sun, no longer a young girl, but a strange woman of the nights with hair full of stars, hallooing her lovers in the shining air.

Kirby clung to the rail, wind-blown, and his heart pounded with excitement. On went the boat up the East River, hemmed in by the two great climbing cities who leaned toward each other and joined hands of bridges above the swimming monster, and Manhattan stood to the west, a giant shouldering an urn of sunset from which gushed gold on the waters. And the long city, flushed with sunset, unrolled, swarming with human life, until it passed like a vision in gray twilight on the floods of the limitless Sound.

It passed; it was gone; only remote green islands now, and fading fields, and twinkling lights on the lost headlands. And with it went clamor and the modern world, the red cyclone of the drudges roaring with its J. J.'s and Jordan Watts', dying to the south a mere point of troubled light on the profound breast of the Earth.

It seemed a fateful passage to Kirby; a journey of the soul again through the infinite, from mystery to mystery. And after supper, leaning in the darkness, he heard the lush cool, half-echoing break of waters, sweep after sweep,

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along the shipside, and saw the far ray of the lightship wheel, blink, vanish—wheel, blink, vanish—under a heaven of watchful stars.

Untroubled, and with long breaths of trembling, the great boat held on; but right beside Kirby, against the rail, a man and a woman, soft shadows in the night, girdled each other, whispered, pressed their lips together. And he thought:

“I am going straight to her; she is mine, but I cannot have her.”

But why—why not? Here were these two, born of the Earth, to mate; and he heard those whispers that sounded of the destined coming together, that rippled the deathless music of the planet, that wafted the sharp glory of human mating out to the expectant stars, and he knew that this glory had come to him.

Somewhere under this night she breathed and lived; the whole woman was there, and through the night he was being carried to her. He stood, aching, trembling with his passion; he felt that man, the hunter, must go forth and break through a civilization, if need be, to seize on his mate.

“Why not do it?” he asked himself. “She is mine; why not demand her?”

It was his new honesty that hindered him. Looking back on his relationship with Mary he was disturbed to recall his Machiavellian scheme to meet her, his cold-blooded fortune-hunting; and he could not be sure that at least unconsciously he had not been a fortune-hunter ever since.

“Did I not have a secret hope of getting her?” he asked himself.

There was revealed now the lurid evil of the Harrington business. It was this that had worked upon him, made him a trampler and a schemer, so that he was ready to make a profit out of sacred things. But now, freed of this influence, he could be honest again; he could measure by other standards,

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There was only one manly thing to do—to square himself with Mary, to tell her all from the very beginning, to mislead her no longer.

“She has always been honest with me; and what is this love of mine worth if it does not make me honest with her?”

That was it—to act in the open. She must know that he was ruined; that he was not a fortune-hunter; yes, and that he loved her. And that, first of all, he could not stoop to take advantage of her interest in him, her evident fondness for him. Even if by some miracle she loved him, it was for him to renounce her, not drag her down to his own level.

But why tell her of his love? Because, said his heart, she must know why he could never come to her again.

And why not come to her again?

His body trembled, he felt faint with love. He felt that even seeing her the next day was a peril that might ruin him. He remembered the skiff on the lake, and how he had leaned toward the shadowy head and shoulders, about to do something unbelievable—attempt a word of love, a kiss, maybe. Surely if he saw her alone again all his brave resolves would go up in smoke. He might do that which he would wish undone.

But surely she was not alone. Fat corset-squeezed ladies, juicy senators, and insolent Pendletons were probably at this moment darkening, like moths, his light. He raged for a moment with insane jealousy. If that Pendleton pup were there—well, there were cliffs in Maine. He might hand the brilliant beauty over a convenient one and snicker while he heard the bones break below.

He was amazed at this feeling. He had thought himself freed by the J. J. collapse of all that was evil in him. And yet the old demon was there.

At once he lost his nerve, his confidence gave. He should never have come; he was plunging straight into a

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shameful crisis. He knew now he could not reckon on himself—that he would do the unexpected.

“Why,” he said, “I don’t think I have the courage to speak to her.”

And lying in his berth, with the wrench of the engines making him like a pulsation in a blood-vessel, he could not sleep with misery and desire. What was there in love that made it at times so evil a thing? And yet the boat was bearing him to her—there was no doubt of that; it was inevitable that he should see her now. And the thought made him shudder with swift joy and starved expectancy.

In the morning he was calmer, but felt fatigued and disillusioned. Gulping hot, insipid coffee at the railroad station, chewing tough and lardy fried eggs, he kept reassuring himself that this visit would prove like the last—a busy, gossiping house, a game of golf, a Pendleton that belittled him. That ride on the Giant was a lucky accident; such circumstances would not group themselves again.

In the gray mist of the cool New England morning he took the train for Boston. The boy went through it crying the Providence and New York papers, and sleepy people lounged against the plush cushions. Kirby went through Boston bitterly; in glancing sun the toilers were hurrying to work—here, too, a city arousing itself like the metropolis to the south; but Kirby, trolleying to the North Station, felt chilled and tired and emotionally exhausted. He had written her he couldn’t come; he should have stuck to his word.

It was about half past one when, stiff, crass, and in an ugly mood, he stepped off the train at Cameron Bay. He half expected to see the brown car and the big chauffeur; but they were not there. No automobiles were there; only a broken-down buggy and a low-headed horse and a grizzle-bearded native, whip in hand.

Beyond the station was a row of stores and a commercial hotel, all badly weathered, rusty and old.

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"Can you drive me out to the Watts' place?" asked Kirby.

"Sure pop," said the native.

"How much?"

"Fifty cents a head."

So he bore down on the step and swung in, the buggy creaking under him. The driver took the seat beside him, wrapped about him a blanket, produced a squeazy sound with puckered lips, flicked the whip, and set the horse jogging. Kirby smelt the stable-odor of carriage and animal—not unpleasant, mixed as it was with breath of clover and the sea.

They passed down the elm-shaded street of the sleeping New England village, with its immaculate green-and-white houses, and out along the board-walk of Cameron Bay. The blue waters were breaking white on the firm crescent of beach, and alongside them stood overgrown gardens and shut mansions, waiting for the summer rush from the city. Here and there a great hotel looked down on the sea.

"Little early yet," said the driver. "You'd oughter come a month later; see high life. Parties and automobiles, and bathing and sailing, and motor-boats and carnivals."

They left the Bay then and went along an old seaward road, flanked by lovely fields of blowing daisies, flaming old-fashioned gardens full of hardy blooms, and snug vine-clad farm-houses, and right and left, in the distance, woods of pine.

And all at once Kirby was aware of the Maine weather—the brilliant, shining air, the blazing blue sky, the salt winds blowing up out of the ocean and snatching on the way the sweetness of the grass, the clover, and the pine—an intoxicating mixture. The hardy gusts stung Kirby's cheeks into color, and putting his hand to his lips he tasted the sun-flavored salt.

The great weather, the tough sea-country, the tang of

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the sea gave him a feeling of masculinity and of hope. Then this hope was dashed by an appalling doubt. Curiously he had not thought of it before. But was Mary here after all? Could she not have altered her plans, as he altered his? His insides seemed to drop together, leaving him blank and hollow.

"Do you happen to know if Miss Watts is here?" he asked, tremblingly, of the driver.

"Miss Watts?" The native gave his beard a pull. "Now come to think of it—I don't know. She come all right; but she's a great one on disappearing. A regular woman, all right."

This was harrowing. A hard excitement pervaded him.

"By God!" he burst out, amazingly, "that horse of yours is slow."

The driver was justly indignant.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, tartly; "she's as good as any in these parts. Of course she warn't brought up to be a darned *race-horse*."

A strained silence fell between them. Kirby was on the point of getting out and walking. Sitting still in a joggling, crawling buggy was making him wild.

But before the strain reached this point the horse swerved and passed through a stone gateway and went down an avenue of stunted pines; almost at once the pines gave to a cleared space, overshadowed with tall hemlocks, in the center of which, shadowy through the pine boughs and above the reddish-brown, needle-carpeted ground, stood the house. It was commodious, two-story, covered with weather-gray shingles, and it seemed tight in the plunging sea-weather. The overpowering smell of the pines was searching and delicious.

Kirby got down, paid his fare, strode round to the front door on the little porch. He listened; he looked. Not a soul in sight, not a sign of life; only below the hemlock slopes a stretch of open marsh, a tumble and welter of rust-red rocks, a boat-house, and beyond all the blue, dark

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sea under the bright-blue sky. In the hush he heard the boom of the breakers, and, all at once, the whole pine-lost place was steeped in a magic enchantment.

He rang the bell. Was the house empty? If Mary was not here he felt he would do something desperate. Then suddenly the door opened, and a maid confronted him.

"Miss Watts in?" he asked, in an unnatural voice.

This pleasant-faced young woman, he felt, could strike him down with a word.

"No, sir," she replied; "she's gone out for a walk by herself. You can wait for her."

He grinned at this lovely person who poured the horn of plenty for him. He could have kissed her for lunatic, unreasoning bliss.

"Which way does she walk?"

"Oh, lately," said the maid, "she does nothing but sit on the rocks alone."

He grew bold with mounting hope.

"Isn't there any company here?"

"Only her father and a minister. But they're out, too."

He laughed wildly. He had lost his wits.

"I don't care. Where are the rocks?"

"Right down there."

"I'll go look for her."

"Leave your satchel here?"

"Yes. Thank you. Thank you."

He turned then and plunged along on the needles. Wild bursts of sunshine swayed about with the blowing pines, and, eyes on the sea, he broke his way. No one else here—the old man didn't count, of course! Had she meant, then, to have him alone? Was that what she meant when she wrote, "We'll try again"? And she had spoken of cliffs—that meant the snow-storm ride! A music seemed to go singing here and there like an uneven chorus in heart and brain and along his blood. A fire rose in him and swept his breast.

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Now, looking on the rocks, he saw a woman climbing over them, leaning, her cape and uncovered hair blowing in wind. Could it be she? The woman reached the marsh, straightened, came swaying toward him; he advanced in the same stride toward her. Yes, it was Mary. On and on she came, on and on he went; and all at once the great rhythm of their drawing together was set up in him; an increasing glory, flame running toward flame, leaping into one—a surge and mounting in the air. He was hidden by the pines, she out in the free sunshine; he saw her; she did not see him.

Closer and closer they drew, nearer and nearer, and at every step the quickening of the rhythm, the mounting of the flame, as if a soaring rush of music was swinging them together. They seemed in tune, the meeting was inevitable, and Kirby felt that nothing could stop her from leaping into his arms.

And then he saw her near, and coming nearer; saw that her face was tanned with the sun and salt, that her eyes were darker, as if she were a sea-wife watching sails, that she swung with a lovely outdoor suppleness. She seemed more alive, lusty, earthly beautiful than he had ever beheld her, as if the grace and stretched strength of a sloping wave had gone into her. Wind blew her dark hair into sun-lit strands about her face, and she was desperately near, a woman of the coasts, a sea-woman with wistful and sea-weary eyes.

He wanted to shout her name, but how could his rapture give voice to a "Miss Watts"? The word Mary was beating on his lips. And now the music and fire reached their dizzying climax, and he stepped out of the shadow into the sun.

She was not fifteen feet away; she saw him; stopped short, with a stricken motion; gave a low cry. Pain and wild joy were in that cry.

"But you weren't coming!" she gasped.

Was it intensity of happiness or intensity of displeasure?

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He could not tell. But all at once the music and flame died in him; he felt somehow that she was reading something evil in him.

"I came, anyway," he murmured, limply.

He saw that her eyes were filled with tears, and that she flushed with shame. Was it joy or pain? He had not dreamt that Mary was capable of such passion; she seemed to be struggling with herself.

Then she said, in a cold yet uneven voice:

"Let's go up to the house."

They turned and walked back in silence. Never was lover more perplexed. Misery overcame him. He could have torn out his heart to understand. He was speechless with despair.

The walk seemed long, and all through it he felt that she was secretly upbraiding—but was it him or herself? She opened the door for him, and he had a glimpse of lovely face quivering with reproach and relief, and puzzling him the more.

"What have I done?" he asked himself. "Or what has she done? Oh, what's the matter?"

In they went; the large, wide hall had a second-story gallery running around it, with room-doors showing above, and from the middle of the right side a wide stairway curved up to it. A piano stood in a corner, a writing-table in the center, and lounge and chairs were grouped about a great, open fireplace. The light in here was dim, with now and then a wave of sunlight from blown boughs. The whole house partook of the elemental qualities of the sea and the pines, wild-flavored, as it were. Kirby wanted to hug Mary close, warm in the bluster and the draught.

They stood a moment in silence. Then Mary spoke coldly again:

"You'll want to go up to your room—the one up there."

He picked up his bag and started up the stairs. "She hates me," he thought, darkly.

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Then all at once she called after him:

"Have you had any lunch?"

He looked back; her face was tremulous with tenderness.

"All I wanted," he said, miserably.

"Oh," she said, in a voice full of anxiety. "You must be starved. But, go on up."

He went; the unpainted wooden room looked out of low windows on pine boughs and the sunlit sea; and the smell of the walls was rude and good. But, washing himself, he was aware of a tumult of mixed emotions.

"Lord!" he ejaculated. "Women! women!"

When he came down he found himself alone in the hall, but suddenly Mary emerged from a side room.

Her voice was commanding, even a little harsh.

"There's some lunch for you in here."

As if she said, "Why should I bother about you?"

He feared to say anything, lest she get worse. Lively he followed her, sat down, and under her watchful scrutiny ate deliberately, though every mouthful was bitter and uninteresting. She sat at right angles with him. He felt like a naughty boy whose mother allows him to eat but waits, watching, so that she can spank him after the last mouthful.

"She's queer; she's a terror," he thought. He was most unhappy, black with misery, gulping dry mouthfuls. She did not even seem to notice how unconventional it was to sit there, frozen, watching her guest eat.

Suddenly she spoke simply, almost sweetly:

"One lump—or two?"

"Two," he muttered, hardly believing his ears.

She mused, gazing at him, as if this matter of sugar-lumps were of the profoundest importance. Then she sighed.

"I only take one."

"Well, what of it?" was on his tongue. He was beginning to get angry. She was playing with him.

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He finished his cup; together they rose and, without a word, went into the center hall.

‡ She spoke almost sharply:

“Well, what do you want to do now?”

“Anything you say,” he answered with just a flicker of temper.

“Oh,” she said, carelessly, “anything *you* say!”

Could this be Mary, the strong, the tranquil, the worldly wise? Why was she acting this way, anyway? Why didn't she tell him what was the matter?

“You wrote about cliffs,” he said.

“I did.” Her voice was colorless.

He was almost rude.

“Then I'd like to see them.”

She shrugged her shoulders, opened a side door, called in, “Fred, bring the car round!” and came back, slipping on her coat before Kirby had a chance to help her.

Rather confused, he put on his own. Suddenly she came to him and felt of it.

“It's not warm enough, motoring,” she said in a strange voice. “Wait! I'll get you my father's.”

“Oh, I don't want it—anyway—” he tried to detain her. “Let *me* go!”

But she flew up the stairs like a girl, and looked down at him from the top almost mischievously. Then she disappeared through a doorway. The poor man was now totally out of his mind; she was caring for him so perfectly, and she hated him so completely. Yet he could not help but feel that it was wildly sweet to be with her in this house.

Now she came down, sagging with a fur coat under her arm and looking beside herself with anger.

“Here,” she said, “turn round!” And she helped him in.

He felt monstrously swollen, and, turning, met her laughing eyes.

“You look like a polar bear,” she said, ruefully. “Father will kill you if he sees you in it.”

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This last had not occurred to him; he was amazed at her audacity.

"Come on," she said.

"Aren't you going to cover your head?" he asked.

"No," she replied, "I'll let it blow off. Come ahead now."

She led the way in the rush of wind, they sat side by side in the low, red racing-car, and at once she let out speed, dashed down the pine road, out, and to the right through the open country. It was a mad ride; Kirby expected every moment to be flung into the heavens or hear the last blood-curdling yell of some innocent passer-by. Never had a young woman treated her lover so shamefully.

"What is she taking out of me, anyway?" he asked, clutching his new slouch hat and the door of the racer.

He experienced almost fear of this wild creature, and, glancing at her, he was appalled by her face, which looked straight ahead, and was passionate with a blend of joy and pain. One mood after another wavered over it—now breathless ecstasy, now struggling despair, now shame, now triumph. One thing was sure—she was divided against herself.

The mad woman now shot the car down a seaward road, a lonely road, with wide marshes on either side, then ran it, without diminishing the speed a whit, right straight over a sandy, grassy rise, up and up. The car stopped so suddenly that Kirby doubled and felt seasick.

"We're here," said Mary.

She was out before him; he could only follow, glad that he was alive. The sandy tract gave to a long field blooming with tall grass and white daisies; at its edge were great rusty rocks, and only the heavens beyond.

The untrammelled sea wind blew upon them, gulls wheeled over the cliffs and were blown away, and the unclouded blue skies rose immense and brilliant above them, the westering sun pouring a dazzling light through the

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stirring air. Something glorious was released in Kirby; he saw Mary swinging on through the daisies, treading them down, her skirts brushed together, her cape flying, her hair blowing wildly, and she seemed like a goddess of the coasts on the free heights, moving triumphantly against the skies. His desire now forgot everything else—her moods, her suspicions, her caprices. She was the glory here of the sun, the sea,^f and the wind.

They reached the rocks, clambered from one to the other, and again Mary seemed to have a favorite cranny. She sat in a little seat, entirely shut away from the field, several feet below the level of the cliff.

Kirby sat beside her. He was a little dizzy, for the precipice fell sheer at least seventy feet to the sea. They were in an eyrie, with the blue deeps below them, the blue deeps above them. The ocean was one huge semicircle of brilliant blue, that broke, near by, into one great roller after another, pounding on the rocks, smashing, swirling a snow, and receding. The boom and roar rose to them, the music of ten million years uttered in unvarying repetition.

And out over the glorious eastward-shining seas a little smoke-plumed steamer was sinking over the horizon.

Sun streamed on their bare heads, the gales blew, a daring blue swallow skimmed beneath, gulls circled, and they were alone again in the whole world. He had his mate now with him up in the cliffs above the sea; he had her; the moment was his.

His mood mounted and he gained courage. This was the supreme moment to speak. He looked at her; she was leaning over, cheek on hand, lips parted, breathless, as if about to fling herself down.

Kirby spoke close to her:

“I want to tell you—why—why I came up here.”

She turned, looked at him sharply, almost with fear.

“Why?” she gasped.

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"To tell you some things. The Harrington business has smashed up."

"Smashed up!" she echoed. Her eagerness was terrible.

"Yes," he smiled, miserably. "I belong to the Army of the Unemployed."

"Surely?"

"Utterly. He's sold out; we're sold out with him."

She gave him a lovely glance, almost of protection.

"And what will you do now?"

"Hunt for work."

"Nothing in view?"

"Nothing."

She looked out to sea again, and he saw her shoulders trembling.

He had to muster up sublime courage then. Only by forcing his lips to speak could he go on to sacrifice himself. Her brief pity would be demolished at a word, and his visit ended. The sea seemed to roar in his ears, but he nerved himself, thinking, "Only thus can I show my love for her."

His voice was harsh, strange.

"There are some other things. I—I want to make a clean breast."

She glanced at him with quick suspicion.

"Other things? What?"

He looked away, muttering:

"I—I shouldn't have met you that first time. I arranged it on purpose. I thought getting to know you and your father would give me a chance."

It was done; he sat, crumpled, wishing himself dead. He had doubtless struck her a fearful blow.

There was a silence, then her voice, frozen:

"So it's true."

What true? Had she suspected this all along?

There was another silence. Dimly he saw Mary's hand pulling at a stone that was caught in a cranny. Her voice was cold and even.

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"Now tell me about the rest."

He spoke in a low, agonized tone:

"I will. I came here to say it. I told you that other, to be honest with you, so you'd know me before I left you." He paused. "I came here to say good-by; I'm not going to see you any more after this; I have no right to."

In the bitter pause he hardly heard her whisper:

"Why not?"

He looked away.

"Because—because—I—I care for you too much."

She had dislodged the stone; now she flung it into the sea.

Her voice seemed like a smothered ecstasy.

"And you're out of work?"

"Yes."

"And everything's against you?"

"Yes."

"Why, then," she murmured, "you need me more than ever."

Flame and music swept through him again; swept away all scruples, all plans, all doubts. He turned; her hands were on his shoulder, her strong face close to his.

"Kirby," she cried, "I love you."

He drew her close, closer; their lips met; and now the whole heaven shone on this Edenic pair, on these young-blooded mates, clasping above the booming sea. It was unbelievable yet natural—all too natural. Civilization with its layers, its conventions, broke about them; she was a woman, he a man, both young, both attuned to each other; like healthy young animals they found each other. The hunter had come over the hills and found his mate.

And to Kirby it seemed as if he were starting life all over again, as if he understood now this mystery—woman; and he breathed the exquisite, salty tan of her cheeks, and tasted the sea on her lips, while his whole being was rocked in tides of tearful glory.

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"Mary! Mary!" A sob broke from him.

"Oh," she said, "I'm so glad you told me that. Now there's nothing between us. I was wild with joy when you came, but I—I suspected such things." Woman-like she didn't say what, though the words "My scoundrel" were on her lips. Instead, her laugh was cool and exquisite. "And I've treated you—treated you vilely. Mine, Kirby, you're mine!"

Was it the maternal instinct roused that brought her surrender? Was it because she saw that Kirby was ruined and needed her? She looked at the sea beneath her.

"Why," she laughed, with sudden realization, "we almost fell off the cliff!"

XXVI

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HE helped her up over the rocks in a protective way, though she was well able to scramble up herself. But it was sweet for both of them; one to help, the other to be helped. Then out in the blowing daisy field they stood close together, the only bits of human life in the world. They saw the road in the distance lost in the shadow-waving woods; they saw the marsh and the daisies at their feet. The rest was blue sky and passing sun, with three young swallows circling them.

They mused, holding each other's hands, on the mystery which was theirs. It was as if there had been poured into them a life richer than their own, a brilliant intensity of life, reddening the blood, suffusing the emotions, clarifying thought. They could think with wonderful clearness, joyful lucidity, and in the passing moments they bathed the world in their own light. Each little thing caught rays from these twin stars; they could watch the swallows skim and see in those winged curves the rhythm of the suns. It was as if they had extra senses.

Was it not the flood of the race, dammed up in each one of them, now beginning to flow from one to the other, Nature opening a new channel for a new generation? Bathed in this flood, they reached their perfect human bloom, their final radiance, and had in a brief hour that glow of body which is spiritual, that sense of being raised from the deeps to create in a world of enchantment, a world of reality, that glow that brought clear laughter and swift words and a weaving harmony between them.

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They looked about and saw themselves alone and embraced clumsily enough. But how natural to clasp hands and watch each other's eyes and laugh in each other's faces, and know that the world reached a moment of perfection in them.

"For us the world has sown the generations, through us the world reaches the rich harvest." It was this they felt.

All the cumulating drive of the last months, wherein they had felt that this could not be, fell away, and now this miracle was, and they shared it as a natural thing, theirs from birth. Their talk was merely a music, the words nothing, the intimations divine. It was a dwelling on each other's name and on the word love and on tiny personal things, as:

"Kirby, your hands are cold!"

"Your head this way, Mary. Do you know, in the sun, your eyes get gradually black toward the center?"

"Let me see yours!" She laughed and kissed him. "I see two of myself in them."

"I see one of you; that's enough."

Such gossip is heard when new stars are launched in the skies.

They picked daisies and she made a wreath and crowned her hero; so he twined red clover in her hair. Then, lying at her feet, he told her how she had set him to reading poetry, confessed to the poem he had indited, and they laughed nearly to tears when he recited it:

"Thou, my heart, my soul, my love."

"And you loved me all this time!" she said. "My poor boy!"

The sinking sun cast shadows over this human duet; the grass became a forest of ruddy-lit aisles, each daisy rose as from a sea of light, and the ocean beneath sounded more clearly. They stood up, and the world claimed them again.

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"We must go home," she sighed.

Home! That meant father; that meant a civilization that mates by measure and not by nature. The very thought put something between them and made them conscious of each other. She again became a daughter of Steel, and he one of the waifs of the street. Their elemental equality on cliffs and in daisy fields melted in the hard light of the human world.

Kirby was the first to feel it, to "come to his senses," as he would have phrased it. Or, more accurately, to return to conventions. A blackness poured through him; he seized her hands, drew her close.

"Mary!"

"What is it?" She felt the impending trouble.

"Can't you see," he burst out, "this whole thing"—he laughed with sudden bitterness—"why, it's impossible!"

"Why?" she asked with ardent tenderness. "What's impossible about it, Kirby? Don't we love each other?"

He seemed to change, to become harder.

"It's this crazy social difference. I can't ask you to marry me. I haven't a thing in the world."

She voiced her deep and amazing faith:

"You're not afraid of our love—that it isn't bigger than everything else?"

"But I can't ask it of you."

"Ask what?" And she spoke as women in love speak in their total surrender. "Kirby, if you asked me to come and live in a tenement with you I would. It would be sweet to make the struggle with you, to win our own way. I'll go off to a new country with you."

"Follow you, my lord, through all the world," was in the rhythm of her voice.

Then she reasoned with him, in her old incisive way:

"You're out of work and it's no shame to work for the Steel Trust. If you didn't know me you wouldn't hesitate to ask father for a position. Well, he shall give it to you. It's your chance, Kirby. I know you, I've known

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you all along; you can become a great man; if father only knew it you could take over his work when he is through—be at the head of all. I'm going to stand by you, Kirby, keep you to it, and make you great."

It was the maternal in her; it was also her father's passion for developing raw material. She gloried in seizing on this young man and making him.

"Mary," he said, "I told you why I first met you. Won't your father think just that of me?"

She was as obstinate as he, wilful American woman!

"I don't care what he thinks—or you." She laughed. "I'll have to knock your heads together and pound in a little sense."

He laughed weakly.

"It would raise a storm all over the country."

"Oh," she said, roughly, quoting her father, "the public be damned! Come on home; I won't listen to you. Dear Kirby"—she suddenly took his head in her hands and kissed him—"you can't get rid of me so easily. I'm a very determined person."

He knew that the decisive moment had come, that if he persisted now he could have his way, and yet he let it slip by, and followed her to the racing-car. It was his natural weakness when his own interests were at stake; and as they glided along past the farm-land, with the west a smoky, purple-tinged red and the world standing against the low sun with sharp shadows, the lover in Kirby, the angelic being which only women called out in him, shrank back, and the ambitious worldling emerged. He could not rid himself of the unbidden but thrilling thought that he was being wheeled up the slopes of Olympus, that he was to take his seat among the American gods. It was a miracle, this woman's hand that reached down to the dust and sweat of the drudges, just as he was sinking back among them, and lifted him at one sweep to the highest heights. Kirby's luck! When had he ever set his heart on a thing without getting it? Surely it came in ways

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unexpected, and sometimes after weary intervals of struggle; but come it did. He could easily forgive himself, laying the blame on destiny. That was it. He was a man of destiny, a genius discovered first by Janice Hadden, and moved irresistibly and swiftly to the kingship of a world.

All things excused and prompted him: he had told Mary candidly of his sordid purpose; he had bravely renounced her; now could he break her heart by resisting? She loved him, after all. For her sake he ought to accept her help. Besides, what wrong was there in getting a job from Jordan Watts? Watts needed just such young men; it would be a service to the old magnate. And, after all, why kowtow to stupid conventions? They loved each other—that was the supreme thing.

Perhaps it is in the nature of the man to know a briefer rapture than the woman. Her suffused glow persists, coloring daily life; his ceases when he has seized on what he wants, and now he puts it to practical use.

The miracle of it all intoxicated him, too: the crude and penniless young man looking out of the train and seeing the flames of the steel mill, and dreaming that some day those fires should blazon his name in the night; and now the consummation of that quixotic adventure. Was he the same Kirby that had entered New York with breaking heart? And yet life is dotted with such miracles—President and magnate, artist and scientist—the long list of the great—were they not most of them just such obscure Kirbys?

He looked at Mary beside him, and spoke with sudden animation:

“You didn’t put your father’s coat on me for nothing.” She laughed.

“Wait till he catches you!”

The mantle of the god had fallen upon him; it was a symbol of the miracle.

They both became strangely excited; Mary’s eyes

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flashed, her strong jaw was set, her powerful forehead seemed like a battering-ram of purpose. She was preparing to fight for her man, her mate, as the lioness for her cubs. And her sublime love blinded her to Kirby's new manner; it seemed right and natural that he should accept her protection. She exulted to think that she could do him such service.

How would her father take it? She did not care. She thought she knew that "dreamer devout by vision led." Yet neither Kirby nor she had an inkling of the real man.

What was he, and what could be predicted of him?

All that Kirby knew of Jordan Watts was that his life-story was the American fairy tale—messenger-boy to millionaire.

He did not know, however, the details of that life story; neither did Mary. She knew the brilliant master-moments, and had given these in her interview with Kirby; she suspected dark and hidden things, but she had no knowledge of the round of the daily hours. Yet it was in these that the secret of Jordan Watts' supremacy lay.

He was born at a time in America when the doctrine was perfectly true that if a man had ability, was "practical," and was willing to work he could succeed; he could break his way out of the wage-earning class, have his own business, his own property, his independence. This was our bright individualistic democracy.

At the time of Jordan's birth the Watts family lived in Pittsburgh, then a little town in the two-pronged fork of the Ohio River. They were very poor, the father working in a glass factory, the mother taking in washing and mending shoes at night for a nearby cobbler. Jordan had a taste of public school, but when he was thirteen his father died and he had to go to work. He became a messenger, a news-runner in blue bright-buttoned uniform, a thin, little, big-headed boy, wonderfully quick, attractive, shrewd. And thus, at a few dollars a week,

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without education, and in the clutches of obscure poverty, one of the American dynasts began his career.

He learned to telegraph, he became an excellent operator, he was transferred to a railroad, he rose by swift leaps through clerkships to a superintendency. And he became the darling of his superiors.

From this experience he culled the maxim, "Do more than your job calls for, thereby creating a bigger job."

At the same time he would walk miles to a little library, sped by a passion for knowledge; here he absorbed Shakespeare, the writer he loved best. Here he read history and science. He took no time for recreation, for the light-hearted side of life. Work, study, save, were his disciplinary self-mandates.

He did save, and through his superintendency and the favor of friends he made little investments here and there and acquired a small capital. But he was shrewd; his rule, in his own words, "Pioneering don't pay," making him wait till others had made the costly initial experiments, had caught themselves wrecked at the moment of promised success, and then letting him step in and gather the harvests.

Then came the Civil War, and when the smokes cleared the moment of industrial expansion for America was at hand. It was a wonderful moment; America turned away from Europe and began to gauge and use her own resources. These were stupendous; chains of mountains rich with ores, oil gushing from the ground, tracts of prairie awaiting the plow and the herd, primeval forests of seemingly limitless lumber, and a push of population into new areas, demanding the building of new cities, new railroads, new telegraph lines. Besides, Science was daily releasing some new force, or some new method of harnessing an old force; all the mechanical and investigative genius of the nineteenth century was at work: new processes, new machines, new inventions. It was literally as if gold lay on the ground for the picking up. A young

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man could easily borrow a little capital, or expand his own, and be the first, or among the first, in a new field.

As for Jordan Watts, he hardly knew which particular opportunity to take; Fortune kept knocking at his door every other day with a persistence that would have amazed the author of "There is a tide in the affairs of men."

He could have gone in for Oil—an oil-farm was offered cheap; he could have gone in for Beef. There was Lumber, Transportation, and a dozen other enterprises. Accidentally he went into Iron. Two partners, one of them a blacksmith, had a little forge; they quarreled and called in Jordan as peacemaker. He cleverly made peace by ousting one of them and getting control himself. At that time the inventory of the business was simple:

"One frame building; 1 steam engine; 2 hammers; 1 furnace, sundry tools and merchandise; 1 small frame house and lot."

Jordan at once turned over the orders of his railroad to the business, and it grew under him while he held his job of superintendent. Other partners came in, most of them already with some corporation that needed iron. The railroads, for instance, were beginning to build iron bridges; Jordan got the orders; built new plants, put in new machines. Yet all the time he held the dominant interest; it was here that his wonderful ability showed itself—the manipulating of men against each other and into his own hands. His rule was, "No business for me unless I control it."

Then came the Bessemer process of converting iron into steel; one of Jordan's managers compelled him to instal it, and all at once, by wondrous strides, the business grew to ungraspable size; there was a string of new mills; Pittsburgh was enmeshed by the smokes of a thousand pipes, the flames of a thousand furnaces.

Yet, curiously enough, Jordan tried to sell out time and again; it seemed to him that steel-making was "pioneer-

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ing," and hence too hazardous. Accident alone kept him in.

There were lean years to reckon with, when the expenditures for new machines and buildings outran the profits. Sometimes even wages had to be held up, and so often did the treasurer have to go for loans that he could not drive his buggy down the business street without the mare stopping of her own accord at each bank. But these lean years passed, the golden flood began, and, as the surplus overflowed again and again, Jordan could only invest it in other plants or other industries, and before long he had his hand in railroad and bank and real estate and a dozen other activities.

Then came the day of forced amalgamation. Competition, now no longer the nearly equal chance of young men in a land of unused riches, but the throat-cutting of huge corporations, was found too costly, and there were huge combinations. One of these was in Steel, and, as the Watts interest was the largest, Jordan became the real head of the Trust.

That, briefly, was the secret of Jordan's rise, but not the only secret. In a large way, as he himself said, it was as much the pressure of circumstances as foresight or shrewdness. There was now this thing to do, now that, one measure after another; he would have called it being practical. Another would have called it industrial evolution.

But his real genius was the genius of using men—both inside and outside the business. Of course he never worked in the mills, never mastered the processes, never even directed a department of the work, but he was clever in gathering about him what he called "young geniuses" who installed new methods, who invented machines, who imported laborers from Europe more tractable and trainable than independent Americans, and who finally started what has come to be known as Scientific Management. That is, each machine, each process, each material, and

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each man was closely watched and studied, waste cut out, effort economized, the laborer and the tool speeded up, the product improved. No item was too small for this scrutiny, and the result was the creation of a tremendous smooth-running machine, the brains of which met weekly as a Board of Managers.

This was inside the business. Outside Jordan was the star publicity man and salesman. He frisked about Europe and America in a growing fame that brought him in contact with the men he could utilize—politicians, financiers, corporation heads, public people—and he became involved in politics, dickering, trading, and tricking. Tip off a legislator on a profitable investment, and will he not naturally vote for his benefactor? Put a judge in right and is it not natural to expect wise decisions?

Jordan's genius over men was amazing. At one time there was a strike in a rival mill. Jordan rushed to Pittsburgh and invited all the heads and master workmen to come to his own new mill. Thus he secured one of the best working forces in the country.

Part of this power came through what he would have called democratic manners, as, addressing his associates by their first names, patting them on the back, listening to their advice, letting them at times overrule him. He also thought he was democratic with his employees, and one of his favorite pastimes was writing articles on the dignity of labor and the fortunate lot of the toiler, whose honest life was preferable to the state of kings and the worries of emperors. Here, too, he patted men on the back, devised wise schemes for making them loyal, as, accident funds, gifts for unusual work, and company's stock at par value. But he did not flinch to work them twelve hours a day, and many of them seven days a week; he did not hesitate to smash their union and break their strikes with troops and imported labor; to set spies on them; to dictate politics; to let the accident list swell yearly to the proportions of a battle. Nor did he object

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to giving the employees as small wages as possible, while he and his partners took yearly out of the business sums so enormous that they had to seek new investment.

His was the American dual personality in all its perfection: the business man, no better and no worse than the rest, using an ethics which found "All's fair in love and war—and business." It was industrial warfare, a host of tribes fighting each other. If one could gain control of a railroad and give himself cheaper rates than he gave his competitor, thereby forcing the competitor to the wall, so much the better. Shrewdness, ruthlessness, the willingness to trample on others were necessary American qualities. Jordan Watts possessed them all.

But on the other hand he was that "dreamer devout" that Mary knew. As the Steel enterprise grew into the "basic trade" of the world, the builder of Cities and Communication and Machinery, Jordan Watts began to see it large. He began to vision "the commercial supremacy of America," "the American conquest." He saw the growth of American business much as Napoleon saw the unrolling series of victories and the new glory of France. And he felt that he had done much to make America great. He began to dream of a great brotherhood of business, world-wide organization, a machine running rhythmically from continent to continent, with the masters in one council and the workmen cheerfully at the wheels. Why not? In such a brotherhood the humblest man could work to the top, as he himself had.

More glorious was his twofold vision of universal peace and universal education. Millions of his money went into these causes. And he even dreamed of the abolition of disease in the world through his benefactions.

On the one hand the crass business man, on the other a new Providence come to the world scattering Peace and Truth and Medicine and Advice to the hungry and oppressed generations. He was that wonderful American—the millionaire philanthropist. Out of the chaos of a

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slowly organizing civilization he rose to the top, with the power to make or mar life.

And yet he had no clear notion of this power, nor even the extent of his wealth. A king has a visible throne and a map. A Watts has an office, a safe full of stocks and bonds, and a Board of Managers he can bully. He knew approximately the worth of his holdings, which ran up into the hundred millions, but long ago his brain had balked at any image of such a monstrosity. He simply couldn't think so big.

Of course he was using power all along, but he did not see its direct effects. Napoleon, razing a town or massacring ten thousand, could see with his own eyes what he could do; but Watts, squeezing railroad rates an eighth of a cent, could get no conception of the human misery ensuing, the smash of enterprise, the pressure of an increased cost of living. Taking a rebate when his competitor got none was very simple; so was the sudden suicide of that competitor.

His philanthropies, however, were more satisfying proofs of his empire. Much of this work he turned over to Mary, and her chances were puzzling.

She could dot the world with new educational centers; she could start scientific researches that might abolish pain; she could endow splendid universities for the training of American youth; she could set aside old-age pensions for the company's employees; she could search for and develop timid genius, feed the starving, clothe the naked, heal the sick.

As a matter of fact she was a careful spender. But what king's daughter ever had such opportunities for remolding the world nearer to the heart's desire?

She saw mainly this splendid front of her father; she saw little of the background. She knew that where some of his associates had been so stunned by their sudden wealth and power that they had become insane or degenerates, wreaking themselves on extravagance and

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women, her father had remained the same simple, forceful man, the same terrific toiler, the same lover of literature and music, the same dreamer and benefactor. The fact that to this day he would debate as to whether he ought to buy a new pair of shoes or not seemed to her a proof of his genuine greatness.

So, here he was, a small, slight man, nearly sixty, way-laid at every step by sycophants and flatterers, by newspaper reporters and fortune-hunters, receiving the homage of kings abroad, dominating politics and society, neither drinking nor smoking, and in the full flush of his fame—one of the real rulers of America.

He frankly loved publicity. He was glad to be known as the Great Steel Magnate, the Great Philanthropist; he was glad to stand as a model for American youth, the self-made man; he was glad to give advice on how to succeed. And he thought what he had done others could do.

And here was a Kirby Trask of a new generation who found the way up only through luck and chance position and the love of a woman. Between him and Kirby was all the difference between the old and the new America—the America of riches lying loose, the America of rigid organization with the masters in control.

And now the two generations were to meet face to face, the master who was a wonder of the world and the pride of his nation, the young man who was nobody in particular—just you or me.

XXVII

THREE HARD HEADS

IN the last of the light they made the gateway, and as the car went slowly grating along the enclosed road they heard a great sea-roar go from pine to pine, wild rushing gusts of ocean music, boughs clashing, needles showering. The weather had turned piercing cold, and Kirby felt grateful for the seemingly needless fur coat. In the wind Mary's unprotected hair began to fly wild.

She laughed with excitement and exhilaration.

"I'm raining down hair-pins and turning into a Mænad."

Kirby had forgotten what a Mænad was, but seeing that burst of hair over her head and shoulders in the gray-tinged twilight it seemed to him that she was the modern spirit of Speed, the spirit of the wheels. However, all he said was:

"You shouldn't have come without your veil."

This little incident was like that moment of relief while the dentist is fitting a new drill to the machine that has just been boring through a tooth. With all their might and main they were merry for those few seconds; but at once they reached the garage, Kirby stepped out, ducked, and fought the gale, opened the double doors, and in rolled the car.

Mary stood beside him in an instant, pinning her hair up as best she could. The little building shielded them from the wind. Her face was daubed here and there with the glistening gray of the twilight, but he saw the fire in her eyes, the snap of her jaw. She drew him close, as if he were her child.

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"Kirby," she said, thrillingly, "we've got to fight shoulder to shoulder now. Don't fail me; I won't fail you. Remember, I'm fighting for all I have in the world; oh, for my whole life. It's you, Kirby; you're mine, you're mine!"

If there was any last doubt in his mind it now dissolved. He was awed at this revelation of the woman-grandeur of her love; this eternal woman-soul that engulfs the hard-set compactness of a man's life; this primal unreasonable flame that consumes conventions and practicality until the world is led by it to new levels. It was the ancient miracle of woman following love though it meant destruction and misery. He was awed, thrilled; he became more than a man, flooded with her feminine greatness. Hands on her shoulder, face close to her face, and the ocean leaping, as it were, on the land through the pines, he felt holy with sublime love.

"Mary," he said, "trust to me. And if all fails I'll take you away, and we'll fight our fight together!"

They sealed this oath with a kiss, and grew pale before the life-and-death sacredness of this bond. It was as if they were married at this moment. They felt completely one; their lives now interwoven with network of nerves, the two-hearted, the perfect human being. What father could cut down between them now without killing both?

She was breathing hard, clutching him closer. "Come, then," she whispered. "Nothing matters now." They turned. Between the waving boughs they saw the gleam of the hall windows; inside, doubtless, the great Steel Magnate was waiting; in a moment they would break in on him. His last mention of Kirby had been the reading of the detective's report. Doubtless their reception would be warm.

Then, in spite of their high-keyed emotion, hardly had they taken a step when overwhelming fear descended on them like a poisonous gas. It was silly, but it was so. Mary took Kirby's hand, and like the Babes in the Wood

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they tried to cheer each other; but they were merely two naughty scared children going home. If there is any terror in this world beyond that of facing a parent in such a predicament it is yet to be discovered.

They said not a word, but their breathing was short, their steps uncertain. Both felt icy cold. The fearful thought came that possibly the old man wouldn't be alone; that a strange and church-empowered minister would sit beside the judge. This was followed by the even more fearful thought that he might be alone.

They stepped up on the porch and paused at the door. Then, evidently thinking that to wait a moment longer would completely unnerve them, Mary turned, gave Kirby a little kiss, pushed the door open, and they entered, staggered, one behind the other. Kirby forced the door shut with his back, and a gust of wind smote the lamp and made it flicker and rattled the hangings.

Now, Jordan Watts had heard of Kirby's coming from the servants; he was not unprepared; he had sent the minister to his room, and he sat by the flaming fireplace in a little low arm-chair, hands folded. But he also had been searching feverishly for his coat, and so when he saw the twofold apparition of his coat and Kirby all in one he was divided between love of his child and love of his property.

He stood up, and his sharp eyes were little steel gimlets that bored swift holes through the last shreds of Kirby's self-possession. At this supreme moment in the lives of three this was the remark he uttered:

"I'd thank you to take off my coat."

The two stricken children looked pained, and stood silent. Wise little Watts! With one commonplace remark he threw the grandeur of love and marriage out of doors, and he pinned these young persons to so practical an issue that they could only feel submissively guilty. It is by such strokes that a Watts manipulates men.

In the silence he repeated his request sharply.

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"I'd thank you, I say, if you'd take off my coat."

Was this standing by Mary or failing her? Kirby didn't know. He took off the coat and laid it tremblingly over a chair. At once he felt as if he had taken off his armor. But Mary was taking off her coat, too.

"Now," said Jordan Watts, incisively, "sit down."

They preferred to stand; sitting meant bending the knee—a sure sign of submission. But sit they did, Mary on a rocker, Kirby on a backless stool that made him squirm with discomfort. But under those eyes the first chair handy was a heavenly haven.

Then Jordan seated himself, looked in the fire, brought his hands together with the fingers touching.

He spoke in a low, purring voice, as a king might speak when he contemplates beheading a man.

"Mary," he said, "I'd thank you to tell me the whole truth in this matter."

Kirby glanced at Mary; her face, half washed by fire-light and rich with flowing colors of the hearth and the shadows of the room, looked desperate.

"Yes," she whispered, "we're engaged to be married."

Jordan gave her a strange, swift look, as if for a moment the father peered through his face. Then calmly he took out his watch and gazed at it steadily, using it as a focus to gather his dizzied thoughts. There was something terrible in this silent, unshaken power; so the sergeant, wounded to death, could stand serene and make a report of the battle to Napoleon.

When next he spoke his voice was thin and cool.

"Granting that for the sake of argument, how do you propose to *live*?"

Her eyes seemed to beg him for mercy.

"Any way Kirby does."

That "Kirby" was a fresh stab, but the pierced man merely studied his watch again.

"And what if this fellow is out of a job?" asked Jordan.

Kirby was stung into quivering speech.

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"I am, already. The Harrington business is sold out."

Jordan ignored Kirby, but not what Kirby said.

"Then that's why the fellow has come here." An almost imperceptible tremor of awful passion went into his voice. "Mary, have you lost your senses?"

Her eyes flashed dangerously; so did Kirby's. Three bull-heads were now gathered together. Mary rose, the fierce lioness again.

"Father," she said with splendid anger, "Kirby and I love each other and we're going to marry. Now make the most of it."

Human nature could not endure this; Jordan rose precipitously, a little old father crushed by his ungrateful child. Serenity had vanished.

"Mary"—his voice broke—"you know what this means." He gave a bitter, whining laugh. "Tut! after all these years of trusting in you. And I thought myself a successful man."

He was discovering that fathers, whether paupers or princes, are failures all. The spectacle was terrible, the world's superman seemingly above the frailties of the flesh, the master of multitudes, the smiling Providence of America, shaking there like an agonized little vagrant.

Kirby felt abashed; Mary was frightened.

"You forget," he went on in a whisper, his face twitching, "that I only have you. And I had such plans for you. You could have had the greatest, the highest." He tried to master himself, aghast at his own breakdown. "Think once again—yes, before we are done with each other."

Suddenly he sank back in his chair and shook with silent, wrenching sobs.

Mary's face was tragic with grief and love. She turned, and with one hand on the mantel looked into the fire. In the silence they heard the sizzling of sap in the flames, the dull dropping of charred wood, and the blows of the sea-wind on straining doors and windows.

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Kirby felt now that all was lost; that he had better take his things and go. He had not dreamt that Jordan loved Mary so overwhelmingly, and he realized now that this proposal of a low marriage would seem to the father like the ruining of his life. Was it that this man had built up his towering life-work just to set Mary on the top, and that he found now that he had only the meaningless pedestal? Was there no satisfaction in worldly success, then, save in wrapping it up in some personal love—in carrying it over to a wife or a child? Was all vanity, then, save love?

Jordan was suddenly stung into a new outbreak.

"Our years together, our work—they mean nothing to you? The trust I put in you—it means nothing? Why do you stand there? Have you nothing to say?"

Then she spoke in a melancholy, lovely, low voice:

"You have never really trusted me, father. When have I judged of men wrongly? You are not trusting me now. I have learned from Kirby's own lips his faults—worse than any you told me. But not so bad, my father, as your own."

This well-balanced thrust hardened his anguish into anger; he spoke brusksly:

"His faults! What of it? Look at him—unsuccessful, penniless, a mere clerk. Why, it's shameful that I must argue this thing with you!"

Mary's eyes flashed again. She looked up.

"A clerk? And what am I, then? Kirby is the son of a school principal; I am the daughter of a messenger-boy."

This master-stroke made him glare, struck speechless. It was as if his daughter were himself striking back at himself.

She went on, incisively:

"When you were twenty-eight you had a little money, but you were just beginning. Kirby in four years has done wonderfully. And I know what he could do if he had the chance. If you were wise you would trust me, father,

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and give him a position. He and I would see to it that he made good. You know me. And you have no son to carry on your work. I am bringing you one, father, one that I believe in more than in these fat and disillusioned men you seem to favor." She paused, then she said, convincingly, in a voice that meant that her decision was irrevocable: "However, I won't force you to argue. Kirby and I are ready to go our way alone."

He sat there knitting his brows, as if his father-passion was dwindling in this hard Watts atmosphere. Her methods were so like his own, and so telling, that he bristled with his business temper.

"I see," he said, keenly, making mere slits of his eyes; "so you think you could live in poverty—you?"

She seemed to change almost into a man then; her face hard, her powerful forehead drawn with thought, her eyes glittering. And she used a bludgeon, after the manner of the Watts.

"Come, come, father, why do we waste time in fine talk? You know the truth of this matter. So far as I'm concerned, I own a hundred thousand in stock, and I own this house. We won't starve. And as for you, the plain fact is that you can't disown me. Why, if people knew that you objected to my loving a poor man what would become of your fame as a philanthropist and a democrat?"

He was cornered, no doubt of that. He had never had any real authority over her, and now the matter was completely out of his hands. He could not help but know that he was beaten. But there was the strained silence of a deadlock.

In this silence Kirby was feeling a new excitement. This heated argument had crystallized the issue for him and had taken it out of the realm of his love for Mary. It was just a hard fight between hard-headed people. Swiftly he saw the matter as his one supreme chance—the final opportunity. The stakes were an empire; at one stroke he could force himself to the very top, seize on

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dominion, attain greatness and power and wealth. There was nothing beautiful in this mood of his; neither, perhaps, was there anything beautiful in this wrangle between father and daughter. It was the old property fight: the issue that divides families and lovers and comrades; that goes back to the battle of wolves over a carcass—the hunger instinct, as opposed to the love instinct.

And as a great issue always educed from Kirby his full strength, he began to feel power, crushing might; he felt himself a match for Jordan Watts or any other. Fully roused, he now stood up. His powerful head was erect, his gray eyes sharp.

“Mary,” he said, “would you mind leaving us? I want to speak to your father.”

Jordan turned on him; had revealed to him the other Kirby; caught the direct glance of the eyes; quivered with a new realization. Could Mary, after all, be right about this young fellow? Jordan was quick to appreciate power in men.

As for Mary, she turned, gave the two men a proud look, as if to say, “See! There’s your man!” then spoke firmly:

“No, I shall stay here. But you needn’t mind me; say everything, Kirby.”

He understood; all three were too fully roused now to be delicate with one another. So Kirby plunged in as if Mary were not there. He drew the rocker close to Jordan and sat down, facing him. It was the two generations locking horns—the tried and successful man, getting a little old, soon to pass; the youth, fresh, harsh, determined to dispute dominion, to break his way in and inherit the empire. Jordan could only listen to him as to an equal—such was Kirby’s power.

“Mr. Watts,” said Kirby, “you and I have got to speak with each other. I have some rights in this matter, and if I wanted to I could take advantage of your daughter’s love. But I am going to lay the whole matter before you, as I see it, and you can judge for yourself.”

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With clear and convincing candor, then, he told of his coming to the city with Janice Hadden's letter; of his hopes; of the evening at the Fifth Avenue house; of his struggle; of his rise at Harrington's; finally, frankly, of his plan to break into the Watts business.

"It wasn't a pretty thing, Mr. Watts, and I make no excuses. But you may understand me; for, doubtless, you, a successful business man, have used similar methods yourself."

Finally he wound up:

"Now, what is there for me to do? I admit I want, with all my heart and soul, to rise, to have power. What of it? So did you in your time. You won't blame me for that. But when it comes to your daughter, this is the simple fact—she loves me; I love her. In this my motive and hers is as clear and honest as your love for her as a father. We love each other; the best reason, I take it, for a marriage. I know I can make her happy; I know that she won't starve. Now what, as a man, can I do? Because I'm ambitious shall I give her up? You wouldn't do such a thing yourself."

Jordan had been watching closely; he was impressed; he was forced to believe, forced to realize that Kirby had a tremendous future. Yet his dilemma was painful: as a father he wanted to give Mary her way, as a magnate he desired to use her as a flag to set atop his skyscraping steel.

Through all this Mary watched the two, as a woman watches her lover in a duel; her face was pale and set, and blazed now and then with triumphant admiration for Kirby. What a man he was! How he responded to her trust in him, came up to her expectations! How proud she was to be loved by him, how proud to be able to help make him, evoke his greatness, put him in his natural position in the world! At the moment she had no pity for her father.

She met Kirby's eyes when he finished, flashed him a

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"Well done! Splendid! You have stood by me!" But just then the minister came down the stairs.

Jordan rose stiff, fatigued, care-worn.

"I'll think of what we said and tell you later."

It was the declaration of a truce, and first Mary and then Kirby went up-stairs to make ready for supper. They met again in the hall just as Jordan and the minister started for the dining-room.

Mary pressed Kirby's hand.

"We must make him decide to-night," she said.

At the table there was constraint and silence. The minister, glancing with puzzled expression from one to the other of these three obstinate people, tried now and then to begin conversation. No one noticed him. Jordan was in a black study, now and then a tremor of pain in his face; Mary seemed suddenly tired and desperate, as if the glory of the day had somehow vanished; Kirby had a hard, tremendous excitement. He did not know what he was eating, and overate with unpleasant speed; his cheeks were flushed, his temples throbbing. A dozen magnificent possibilities danced in his brain, and he felt that it was impossible to wait for Jordan's decision. Now he saw himself one of the heads of a world business; now he saw himself taking Mary away for an obscure existence wherein their love might break down. All his future was bound up behind the sharp eyes of the little man at the head of the table. He longed to read the thought in that brooding face.

He thought of other things, too—that Mary had a hundred thousand dollars, that she owned this house. But then, could he bring himself to touch her money? He tried to push the dreadful thought from his mind. Property! Up on the Giant, out on the lake, sitting on the sea-cliff, he and Mary were merely two human beings, divine and young. Nothing sordid there; no crass considerations; love was everything. But as soon as they came back to the human world civilization touched them

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with its Midas-hand and put a hard gilding on their passion; made them calculating, base, lustful. It brought the rude excitement of the gambling-table, the cockpit, the prize-fight.

But the miracle in it all fired his imagination—the poor boy coming from Trent to take the metropolis by storm, and already seizing on its chief hostage, its Helen of Troy, and using her involuntarily as a means of breaking down the gates. Either way he had Mary; and Mary was an only child; had money and property of her own already.

Supper over, Jordan calmly took the minister to a lamp-lit corner of the room and played checkers. Mary and Kirby could only sit down before the open fire, facing it, legs stretched and feet crossed. They gazed at that fire like dogs at the day's end after the chase. This gazing at fire is one of the rituals of the human race, coming up from the days of the cave-man until it was cut off by hot-air furnaces and steam radiators. And some of the dream-heritage of the long ancestry comes back at such a moment, rousing the primitive again.

They had barely passed a word together, both feeling that their love was somehow tarnished; but now, as they watched the blue rise into red and gold, saw the white heart of the fagots, beheld the rearrangement of cinder-dropping logs, heard the blaze and draught of the chimney, and the bluster of the sea about the house, they drew closer again, a man and woman come into their cave from the howling night to dream sleepily together before the flames.

They looked at each other and smiled sweetly.

"Ah, Kirby," whispered Mary, "we shall have a lifetime of this."

A rhythm of loving content was set up in them; a strange home comfort; the richness and sweetness of a lonely fireside. Now and then they heard the low voices of the checker-players, a hum in their ears.

Then through their tranquil expectancy ran the quiver

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of the event; they straightened, their hearts leaped. For the minister was saying good night and passing up the stairs.

In the silence Jordan came shuffling over, stood looking at the fire, drew up a chair between them. Glancing at him apprehensively, they saw something pathetic and broken in his mien, something new in his posture, as if he was suddenly aware that he was an old man.

He talked quietly, as from his heart:

"I shall never be able to hold my head quite high again. You have brought me to a pretty pass, Mary; you have humiliated your father. For though personally I might approve of your choice, you and I have little right to our personal happiness; we are public people; everything we do is in the glare of publicity, and this step of yours will blaze from coast to coast, a red notoriety. It is a spot on me I can't ever erase. There, they will say, goes one of the richest men in the world, yet his daughter married out of her station. Pardon me, Mr. Trask, if I am candid; this matter is too momentous for politeness."

He paused; Kirby and Mary were children, chided, gazing downward. Then he continued:

"It might be just as well to disavow you altogether. Yet this I don't propose to do. I am sane enough to see that no good would come of it. After all, you are all that I have."

He was forced for a moment to stop; then he went on:

"At the same time you can't expect me to rejoice and celebrate and pour riches over you. You can't expect a handsome wedding, a present of a few estates, and a vice-presidency for your husband. No; if you persist, if nothing can make you reconsider your rash action, why, you will have to go on short rations. Think it over well. Mr. Trask will have to work for me just as if he were any outsider. He has been getting five thousand a year. I'd be willing to try him on a Pittsburgh job at that salary and give him a chance to make good. If he fails he will

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have to expect a cut in wages, a reduction in rank. If he succeeds, something better may offer. And you, who have been used to a golden flood of money, will have to share your husband's lot. This is unalterable. Think it over."

Again he paused; then ended:

"You have amazed me, Mary. You have made me feel like an old man. I was unprepared for such things. But I see I never understood you; I ranked you too high; I made the mistake that every parent makes—thought my child was different from all others. You have brought me only ingratitude and bitterness. But then a father has no right to expect anything else of his children . . . I ask you once more to think well."

Kirby felt stricken by this ancient failure of fatherhood; Mary's lips twitched. Then, after a painful silence, she said:

"I am sorry. But there is nothing I can do."

"Very well," said Jordan, and rose. "Good night, then."

And without the nightly kiss he turned and went slowly up the stairs. He seemed bowed and broken.

Kirby and Mary arose then, and in a tearful silence clasped each other tenderly.

"Oh, my Kirby," said Mary, "you mustn't fail me in this world now."

"I won't," he whispered, "I won't."

They kissed; went to their rooms. And as Kirby sat on the bed in the dark listening to the wind he felt a strange oppression. Felt now that he had undertaken a staggering responsibility; felt almost as if he had committed some unspeakable crime. He was awed and humbled.

Why was it that success, when it came, held so little sweetness for him?

And there was Mary—a wonderful woman who had fought for him and won him. How could he ever be worthy of her? How make up to her this break in her

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life, this sacrifice of the world? Godhood almost was demanded of him, and he knew that he was merely a weak and bullish young man.

He felt prayerful; he felt like going on his knees and communing with some power greater than his own. Finally he swore that he would protect and love her to the end of his days, and do the utmost in his power to prove worthy in her eyes.

XXVIII

FAME

WHEN Mary came down the stairs the next morning she felt younger than she had in years; she felt like singing and dancing, and sharing her joy with others. Her light-heartedness made her light-footed—she wanted to take a five-mile run in the open air along the beach. All her life seemed in transition; her early womanhood was over and her marriage had not yet begun, so she felt free of all bonds, and yet excitedly expectant. The change about to take place was a revolution; every habit and responsibility, even her heart, her brain, and her very body, were to be subjected to mysterious things. She was on the threshold of the inner temple of a woman's life. No wonder her exhilaration had something breathless and fearful about it, a transiency of beauty, a feeling that she would not live to see her dreams realized.

Like all sound women she craved the rich and tragic experiences of her lot, but it seemed to her that her love was too exquisite to last, and the thought of death made her tremble.

"Some day Kirby must die; some day I must die; one of us will be left alone."

The sadness of this made the world beautiful and precious; made Kirby and her love so precious that she hated to spare a moment from him. And yet, through all, bubbled this sparkling, care-free exhilaration, this laughing light-heartedness.

Two thoughts were in her mind—to find Kirby and kiss

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him good morning, to dispel with a caress any last doubts he might harbor, and then find her father and be very good to him, soothe him, fondle him, and coerce him to share her overflowing happiness.

In the bright early light of the clear Sunday morning the maid was dusting about the hall. Mary felt like embracing the young woman; she, too, was human and knew love.

"Mr. Trask down?" she asked.

"Yes, and gone for a walk," said the maid, coming up. She handed Mary a note. "Mr. Watts told me to give this to you."

Mary looked at the envelope, her forehead wrinkled. A fear clutched her heart. Then she read:

DEAR MARY,—I find it necessary to go back to New York, so Dr. Weston and I are catching the early train. I take it for granted, of course, that Mr. Trask leaves at noon to-day to make the night-boat. Let me know when you return.

Hastily,

J. W.

Then she really understood what a terrible blow she had inflicted on her father. He had not felt able to face her and Kirby; beaten and broken, he had run away. A tragic blackness engulfed her; stunned, she groped through the doorway and started off under the pines.

In the intense silence, wherein no twig stirred, she heard bird-notes and the soft booming of the sea; the heavens were a mild, silvery blue, the ocean even more silvery, and the air was fragrant and balmy. Then she saw Kirby climbing over the rocks and ran toward him, her heart bursting.

He saw her, waved, shouted "Mary," and ran also. They met in the marsh, and he drew her close.

"Oh," she panted, "I'm so glad—glad you're here."

She handed him the letter, and he read it, one arm still protecting her. She felt as if she were a child finding shelter on his breast.

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"I see," he said, and turned and kissed her. She clung to him.

"Kirby," she whispered, "Kirby."

And suddenly joy overflowed in her again. They laughed with each other. Impossible that her father was badly hurt; impossible that any tragedy existed in this love-rich world.

"He'll come round," said Kirby.

"I know he will!" she exclaimed.

At once thought of her father was blotted out; their youth was too glorious to see beyond itself.

They went back to the house and had breakfast alone together. It was wonderful.

"Our own house," said Mary.

They were playing house; the fresh strawberries were delicious; the eggs mellow; the coffee pungent. Then Kirby refused more than one lump of sugar. She demurred over this sacrifice.

"No," he said, "we must both have the same."

They walked about the beach all morning, picking shells, digging in the sand, and finally sat on the rocks together and looked out on the shimmering sea. And Mary planned and planned. Woman-like she worked out a million details as carefully as a bridge-builder, and wrought a practical future. Man-like he listened amusedly, wondering why a bridge couldn't be crossed when they came to it.

She decided for early August for the wedding. As it was to be small, and as her father would only be pained the more by crowds of friends, August was an ideal time. "Everybody" was away; the city deserted; their engagement would not be made unpleasant by callers and calls and social functions; Kirby would be spared these unaccustomed details; and besides, they would thus have a summer vacation together before the new job began.

"We've a place in the Adirondacks," she said, "where

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we can go camping—live in a tent. Isn't that the ideal honeymoon? Miles from every one—just you and I and the wilderness. Ever since we were on the Giant I've wanted to go off like that."

"With me?" asked Kirby.

She looked dreaming at the sea, then at him.

"I wonder," she murmured, "I wonder . . . maybe—maybe I loved you even then and didn't know it."

"I knew I loved you," he said.

"I'm glad we *can't* have a big wedding," she mused; "I'm glad all the red-tape is to be cut out. Imagine *you* involved in such things!" She laughed merrily. "My big savage!" And she whispered, pulling back his hair with one hand, "Do you love the messenger's daughter?"

It was romantic to pretend that she was a poor girl and was marrying a great five-thousand-a-year man who was going to make her mistress of a real house in Pittsburgh. What an adventure!

"Shall I have a servant?" she asked.

"Two, if you like."

"And will you take me to theaters once a month? And buy me candy on my birthday?"

Then she kissed away every shadow of mockery, and said:

"If you knew what it meant to me to go out there with you, and know I must really work, and that we must struggle! I've been craving this all my days—real life; to feel and do what most people feel and do—to do what my mother did—to grow with you, and not be stopped the way I have been!"

She seemed to realize that engagement and marriage are the woman's time of life; Kirby's emotions paled beside hers.

Then after dinner, after she had motored him to the little station, they stood, with precious last words. She was to write or telegraph him when she left for New York,

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and he was to come to supper the evening she arrived. He was to write her the moment he reached Inwood.

The train loomed nearer.

"Oh, Kirby," she whispered, looking almost pale for a moment, "please don't die—please be careful of yourself!"

He mounted the rear platform and they waved each other out of sight. He was excited and carefree himself, and had the singular notion that he would never know again what pain and misery were like. It appeared that all he needed to keep him happy was Mary, and it was just a question of how to kill the next few days until he should see her.

Again Fortune had overwhelmed him with favors—Mary, a splendid position, and a future as great as he could make it. What more in the world could a young man ask? There was only one word to describe his condition—bliss. Kirby was blissful.

So when he appeared in the office on Monday morning he was a radiant, benevolent, healthy young man, in a golden humor. He ceased to have enemies; he even went in and asked Mr. Peewee how the widow woman was coming along.

"Oh," said Cropsey, "we'll be spliced in a week or two."

"Lucky man!" cried Kirby, and to himself he added later: "After all, this fellow isn't so bad. Suppose he does use cheap cologne? He's a hard-working, cheerful, industrious man; he doesn't mope because he's a dwarf; and he's going to marry and probably have a family."

This last thought gave him pause. A family! What would it be like to be a father, to have a child of his own? A chill ran over him. All at once the masculine notion that he was giving up a free life and putting his head in a yoke pervaded him. Frightful responsibilities loomed ahead.

Besides, he had still to "make good." In a sense, he was on probation; what if he flunked in the Pittsburgh

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job? Old Watts was enough of a Nero to give him something impossibly hard.

He might have been troubled a bit had he not received a letter from Mary—the first love-letter. He read it a hundred times, approximately, and was enchanted with her use of English.

And so for four days golden peace brooded on the Business Manager. Then on the fourth a perplexed office-boy entered.

“There’s six men out here to see you.”

Kirby was amazed.

“All together, or each alone?”

“All together.”

“Show ’em in.”

In they came, bright-eyed youths. A spokesman advanced.

“We’re reporters from the New York papers. We understand that you are reported engaged to Miss Mary Watts.”

Notoriety—Fame! How had it happened? Who had dropped the word in the ear of that monster—Publicity? He had a vision of eighty million people throbbing with feverish concern over his young life. He felt suddenly in the sky with America under him, the population gazing raptly up at this new star. “You’re a great man, Kirby,” cried his heart, and he became a little drunk, his chest expanded several inches, and he was proud and insolent.

He almost babbled the truth, with a sudden desire to take the loving public into his confidence. What an adventure to share his joy with the expectant millions, to know that on the morrow black head-lines would be printed on newspapers all over the continent, and many a bleak breakfast made bright by descriptions of gray eyes, powerful head, strong jaw, the man who would inherit the Watts millions!

Kirby rose.

“I have nothing to say,” he remarked in a tone that

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indicated that he knew they knew, and they knew he knew.

"That means you *are*, then," prompted the spokesman.

"Nothing to say," smiled Kirby; "I can't speak for publication."

Of course not to say no meant yes, and the six went out with fired imaginations.

Kirby was up before the newsman the next morning and rushed to the station to catch the first sheet. He tucked it under his arm and went into the woods. Then he feasted on the food of the gods.

"Miss Watts Reported Engaged"—on the front page, at that—"A Romance in High Life—Millionaire's Daughter to Marry Poor Young Man—Jordan Watts Refuses to See Reporters."

The greatest excitement prevails in New York society circles over the announcement that the beautiful daughter of the Steel Magnate is to marry against her father's wishes a man of comparative poverty. This romance is considered the greatest sensation in recent years, and is the outcome of a remarkable love-story. The young man has held a position with Harrington's defunct magazine and is believed to be without resources. His name is Kirby Trask, and he is twenty-eight years old. When seen he did not deny the reported alliance.

So it went, and then:

Mr. Watts refused to see the interviewer, but one might surmise from his care-worn expression as he passed out to his automobile that he does not relish this match. It is as yet too early to say whether he will disown his daughter or not.

And there was Kirby's own history in full—the debate, the reportership, clerkship, secretaryship. Joyous American journalism! Industrious reporters! Surely the nation would not die for want of mirth and the playful fiction of reported facts!

Now, if Kirby had been in his senses he would have raged and spit blood. But he was not. He bought as many

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other papers as he could and gorged himself on his name in print. There it was—"Kirby Trask." At one bound he had leaped into the ages and belonged to history!

"That Kirby Trask you are writing about," he told invisible reporters, "shall *make* history, too. Wait! Watch!"

And was it possible that he had once walked the streets of New York in search of work and been denied right and left? Why, these very newspapers that celebrated him had once turned him down. If they only knew, how they would kick themselves!

The only sobering thought was that old Watts would now be madder than ever—and it even struck him that Mary, used to publicity, might wince over these personalities.

But when he returned to the office he knew that he was really great. The staff came round and congratulated him, flattered him, every one who passed the door ogled in, wide-eyed with wondrous curiosity. He had been raised to the seats of the mighty. Even J. J. stepped in to shake hands:

"My young men always rise," said J. J. "I am proud to have met you, Mr. Trask. I am only sorry our connection must end."

Kirby bore it all with remarkable patience. In fact, he was wreathed in smiles. This notoriety was fame to him.

And a debauch in journalism followed; day after day whole columns of gossip and conjecture, of affirmation and denial, with a lurid climax on Sunday, when he saw his beloved and himself pictured on half a page with a Cupid beneath piercing a money-bag, and old Watts looking sour on top. He never forgot the green-and-red headline: "Cupid Unites the Rich and Poor: An American Romance."

A paragraph in one of Mary's letters gave him pause: "Isn't it unspeakable? Why can't they leave us alone?"

F A M E

What business is it of theirs? Our press is the shame of the world. But remember that our love is worth it all; we can endure even this. How you must suffer by it, poor Kirby!"

For a sufferer Kirby had carried it off pretty well. Neither appetite nor sleep had failed him. He had been pretty well inflated with his new station in life. But now suddenly he saw himself in a new light, and felt slightly nauseated. He had been cheap, conceited, a cad. For a while he was profoundly ashamed of himself, and ceased to watch the papers. And he could never afterward explain why the notoriety had charmed him, had intoxicated him.

XXIX

KIRBY YES-AND-NO

DURING the two months that followed Kirby divided his time between Inwood and New York. Luckily for him, the business wound up slowly, and he was allowed to retain his position under an easy pressure that permitted him to come and go as he pleased. Thus, at least, his days were filled and passed rapidly. And for the sake of the nights, and because he began to feel too keenly the social distinction between his changing self and the Allisons and Brent, he took two rooms in a small bachelors' apartment-house up a side street near the Watts.

As for Mary and her father, they came and vanished like summer storms—now away for a week, now off for a night or two; and Mary's excuse for these absences, and in fact for all the actions Kirby disliked, was:

"This is the first summer we haven't been abroad; you see, you and I have forced my father to stay home. And as he doesn't like me to be in the city at all the least I can do is to compromise, and come and go."

As a result there were times when Kirby saw nothing of Mary. Then the nights were dull; he could go up on a roof-garden to snatch a little breeze, see the stars over the city, watch a dreamy whirl of color and light on the stage, listen to music, and drink and smoke. Or he could tramp the glittering streets, with the city like a ringing in his ears, and the people eddying around the lights or fanning themselves on shadowy stoops beneath a hot moon. Or, with perspiring effort, he could play cards—a game he detested—with an amiable young lawyer in the house.

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But there were other times when he saw much of Mary—feverish times, to his amazement. He had expected the natural intimacy and freedom they had known on the cliffs; instead, it seemed, as a rule, impossible to be alone with her. In spite of her assertion that the city would be “deserted” there seemed, not counting the negligible millions, abundant curious people who broke in if only to eye these three notorious persons, to study the mystery of this triangle, to anticipate the next move, and to watch the bold young adventurer who had stormed Olympus.

Such people, and many others, paid no attention to Jordan’s attitude, but invited Mary and Kirby together to week-ends, house-parties, fêtes, and sports, and they began to accept these invitations, motoring out to near-by places in all directions. Kirby demurred at first; he thought he was wanted merely as a freak, and he felt raw among these people; manners were an impossible acquisition for him, but Mary coerced him. It was for her father’s sake, and, she said, laughingly, “You might as well begin now; it’s part of the price of marrying me. You can’t escape altogether.”

So he went, involved in a new whirl of life. This terrific drive made his relationship with Mary feverish and excited; the glory of their love seemed tarnished by this speeding-up and publicity. It seemed as if a civilization of steam and steel and electricity was annihilating intimacy and sweetness and love. But the freedom of this scurrying about was wonderful—motors skimming the hills, motors glancing along the waters, the dance of pony-polo, the blare and glare of the carnival; these people were like beetles darting over water. There was the shock of stimulation at each moment—the tasting of this and that, the sipping of experiences, as if they thought they could have the cream of life without the milk beneath.

A new world for Kirby; he had seen it in slanting glimpses at High Hill; but then he was preoccupied with Mary. Now he became part of it—a curio in a corner,

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with apathetic men and babbling women getting "his views," as if his naïveté were a new sport. In short, he now moved about at the top of the social pyramid of America, and while in many houses he met a High Hill crowd, business and professional men, the leaders in thought, the really great in various walks of life—and there were many such—at others he saw an admixture of types he had only read of in newspapers. Gradually he thought he understood.

This society at the top, then, seemed to him like a network of sharp nerves laid over the raw flesh of the race: down there muscle and sluggish blood; up here sensation, speed. Down there the toiling thews; up here the guiding brain. Jordan Watts was a very nerve-center in this network, with radiations of fine nerves enmeshing a whole city like Pittsburgh in one ganglion, and darting here and there to tips in all parts of the world—a fact brought home to Kirby when, toward the end of July, wedding-presents began to arrive from kings and nobles, statesmen and professional men, financiers and artists in remote corners of the globe. The nations paid tribute to the American dynast.

And just as at the bottom he had seen our industrial civilization break down into sex-abandon and vagrancy because of want, so here at the top he saw the same breakdown because of excess. What difference between Mrs. Costigan and the orgies at her house, the sex-dance and drunkenness, and Bess with her gentlemen friends and the dance-hall, or between the vagrant on the park bench and the gilded vagrant who never soiled his hands with work or his brains with humanness? The idle poor, the idle rich—parasites both.

And in the average life of rich and poor there was the same contrasting similarity; the poor dulled by monotony, the rich made neurasthenic by too fierce a variety. At the bottom an Edward Ferguson, at the top the man who overworked, overworried, labored stupendously to run

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enormous industries and pile up power and wealth. And the wives of both were dissatisfied, neither seeing much of the husband, both left idle and obscure.

The social cleavage he now began to glimpse was monstrous. Here was a financier buying an old master for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Here was he hesitating over a ten-cent cigar. There was himself a few years back extravagant when he bought a five-cent package of cigarettes or paid a quarter for his lunch. And his ten or five cents was more in proportion to his income than the one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to the financier. What lunatic arrangement of the world was this? Millions of weak bipeds scrambling for a bite, and here and there some big man corralling the others, seizing on huge slices of the general wealth, and by this wealth able to buy power, able to turn these others into employees, and coasting about the world above them like the cloud-borne gods of Greece. And yet these gods were human; after all there was a limit to natural expenditures, as housing, food, clothes, and amusements. Part of their rush, part of the reason for their sipping at a thing and dropping it for another, like a child with too many toys, was then the mere need of finding new outlets for their wealth.

And such folk set the pace for all others, so that it seemed, looked at from this angle, as if the whole United States was money-mad, a million-rush for money.

But this vision, instead of steadying him, made him the more eager to rush after money himself. He knew what it meant to be a drudge; he might as well be among the high. Besides, he belonged here; he could doubt no longer that he was out of the ordinary; that his power over others was remarkable; that his foresight, shrewdness, and luck were extraordinary. And as a Machiavelian scheme had brought him to these heights he concluded that Machiavellianism paid; he, too, could use the unclean tools of success.

So he adapted himself swiftly to this upper world.

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Walking the same streets now that had once seen him shy and poor, atomic in his insignificance, he felt the gulf between himself and the nameless population; he believed that this rush of humanity would soon be subject to him, albeit they knew it not, and that he was the heir-apparent walking incognito in his capital city. Finally, walking seemed a bit plebeian; he got in the habit of taking taxicabs instead of street-cars, of wearing expensive clothes, smoking expensive cigars. He must live up to his new station in life.

Yet all this time Jordan and Mary remained the same simple people they were. Kirby, the new-comer, was more aristocratic than they. Mary smiled at him, understood, thought of it as natural in an initiation; and knew his power and strength too well to do more than let him indulge himself. So a mother watches her son's antics in the adolescent period.

There was another marked change in him; his sensitive exterior needed some sort of protective shell, and as it was impossible for him to acquire "manners," he acquired a manner. This was his remarkable habit of silence, of moving about erect, alert, but speechless, giving a yes or no to a question with the impression of immense reserves of power.

Butlers, waiters, and other flunkies served eagerly this well-dressed successful man, who passed them as if he were unaware of their existence. And this manner was the making of him in the drawing-room. Not graced in small talk, he stood about grim, straight, and preoccupied, as if he were lost in gigantic thought.

"Did you see 'Tristan und Isolde' last season?" a young woman might ask.

"No," said Kirby, and that "no" implied that a man of such stupendous affairs had no time to trifle with music. The lady would be much impressed.

"He's terrible," she said. "He'll break in Mary yet. She's found her match."

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And she half wished she was Mary herself.

The men saw power in him. "He'll gobble up the business," was their impression. Watts saw this, too, but his grim thought was, "He's got to show me first."

Mary was pleased, if anything; she did not have to feel ashamed in taking him anywhere. It would be evident to any one that she had picked the most powerful man she knew.

"My Kirby yes-and-no," she called him.

There were times, however, in the publicity and excited rush of these days, when it seemed to Kirby that Mary had her doubts, that she possibly thought her love was a fancy of other times, that she might have been wrong in opposing her father. But if such doubts existed they vanished on the rare evenings and afternoons when the two were alone with each other. Then each became the old self, the man and woman who had stood in the blowing daisy-field, purified and holy with their passion.

On one such evening Mary grew very intimate, as if they were already married, and showed him a new dress, a frail affair of blue and gold, holding it up at arm's length for his inspection.

"Well, my master, how do you like it?"

He was puzzled.

"I can't tell till I see it on you," he said.

So she flew to her room and came back dressed in it, smiling with radiant expectation.

He regarded it critically.

"Shall I tell you the truth?" he asked.

Her smile faded.

"Of course."

"Well, I—I don't care for the flouncy thing over the shoulder."

"Oh, you haven't any taste," she said, ruefully.

She never wore the dress again, and he was dumfounded to think that she cared so much for clothes. She was more feminine than he had imagined.

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Another night there was an amazing occurrence. Mary had been at the old planning pad on lap, pencil in hand.

"But what," she mused, "if our money gives out?"

This was a serious question; he was beginning to know the slippery quality of money. Though he still drew his salary he spent every cent, and his savings with it. But he answered, promptly:

"We mustn't let it."

She drew closer, took his hand in both of hers, gave him her tender gaze, and spoke beautifully, as if she wanted him to know how totally she was his.

"There's my money, Kirby. After this it's yours."

There was nothing base in Kirby at the moment, so he replied quickly:

"No, no—I couldn't think of that."

"But I want you to, dear."

"I couldn't, Mary; really, I couldn't."

"Why not?"

Why did she insist? Couldn't she understand? He was vexed. His thought was clear enough, but he expressed it crudely:

"A man oughtn't to take money from a woman."

She was hurt; began to tremble.

"That's an old-fashioned notion."

"Well, it's mine," he said, bruskiy.

At once she rose, a woman of direct power; jaw set, eyes flashing.

"Why, you put me to shame, Kirby. I thought we were equals; you make an inferior of me."

He rose, too, hot all over. He spoke without thinking.

"Why in the world do you take it that way? Can't you see?"

Her face grew hard.

"Why? Am I simply to take from you, and you never to take from me? I won't be a parasite, Kirby."

"Just like a woman!" he thought.

"Call it anything you like!" he snapped.

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There they stood, two stubborn people, suddenly glimpsing in their relationship abysmal depths full of terrible things. It was inexpressibly shocking, as if their souls stood naked before each other, raw with hate. What was this divine love that yet evoked the snarling tiger in them? What sort of a marriage would be theirs?

She became pale, as if her heart were broken.

"It's not too late, Kirby, you know."

"Yes, I know," he said.

There was a silence. Then she gave him an anguished glance.

"Good night," she murmured, and walked out unsteadily. He rushed for his hat, and went through the streets like a madman. It was all over, he felt, and he had broken her heart, trampled out the light of the world. Remorse consumed him; he writhed in it; could not sleep, could not eat the next day, and finally, in the afternoon, could not stay away from her.

Then when she came into the sitting-room, looking broken and sick and sleepless, and stood glancing at the floor, he muttered in an agonized voice:

"Mary! Mary!"

"What?" she asked low. "What more, now?"

He almost wept.

"For heaven's sake, forgive me! I'll do as you say."

"No," she murmured; "forgive me. I shall never ask such a thing of you again."

It was the last surrender of her free spirit, as if she knew that her reason was beaten down by this overmastering love. He drew near, held out his arms, and they rushed together, clinging to each other in despairing love.

"Kirby, Kirby," she whispered, "never quarrel with me again. It degrades us both."

Their love became wonderful then; they shone before each other in a whiteness of light that transfigured them. They touched a height of passion new to them. But thereafter their natural candor was slightly blunted; they

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knew that they walked together on the thin crust of a crater. Curiously enough, this made their love more precious; like the thought of life's brevity and the death that would rob one of the other, this peril made intensely sweet the time that was granted them.

And so, as the day of the wedding drew near, their love mounted and mounted until it became a glorious and terrible thing. There were moments when they hardly dared kiss each other, when they stood breathless and trembling, when it seemed that they would never be married, that this love was too exquisite to last—a flame that wrapped them together and passed, leaving ashes of their lives.

Now they began to really realize that soon their two lives, coming out of the diverse past, were to mingle in an awful intimacy of body and soul, and go on inextricably interwoven, each pain and joy inevitably visiting both. It meant a new birth, a new life, a new world. Never would they be these same two people again. And so the minutes grew long.

"Five more days, four more nights," Mary counted with him.

An age elapsed. Then, "Four more days, three more nights." So it went. They now stayed at home. Kirby wound up his work. There were no more outings, no more functions. It was a sacred preparation for each other.

It seemed to Kirby at this time that he was hounded by reporters and magazine writers; the newspapers were full again with the "romance of millions"; but by now he had an aristocratic contempt for publicity. He shared Jordan Watts' decision—"The public be damned," also "This is *my* business." He was annoyed, too, by an increasing number of letters from cranks and charities, as if they thought he already was a member of the Watts family. Other letters came, too—letters, as it were, out of the past, making him pinch himself to see if he were still Kirby Trask. One came from Mrs. Waverley, a

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placid and tender "good-by" note, saying he was "fit for any station," but must remember what splendid traits he had shown her; one from Frances, who "knew he was out of the ordinary," but seemed more anxious to tell him of a lovely girl-baby and the growth of Edward's business; one grandiose letter came from Bradslay in behalf of the tariff department; and finally one from Janicé:

"The Professor and I are in wild raptures. You surpassed my dreams of you. But did I not know? 'I give you ten years,' I told you. Why, it's only four. To think that my letter to Mr. Watts brought such a result. Give my love to darling Mary. . . ."

"Social climber!" muttered a rather forgetful social climber. But he was entranced with the mysterious changes of life. Ghosts of the past! With these people he once lived and suffered, obscure as they, but swiftly the miracle was being consummated, the absurd dreams of youth realized, and the waif Aladdin was being wafted to his palace. Now, all this dark past seemed ages ago, a blackness behind this radiance of the present. He was on the eve of his dominion over love and power.

Almost exhausted with expectancy he took supper with father and daughter on that last night, that night of August 2d. Because of the throbbing and sultry heat the windows were wide open, and the clash and feverish hum of the great city swept like an exciting undercurrent through the hum of the electric fan that blew hot draughts of air in their faces. The room was shadowy with the late day, and the three sat, hot and silent, in a nervous clatter of plates and cutlery. Each was self-absorbed, though now and then Kirby and Mary whispered something meaningless to each other. Not once again could Mary take dinner in this home as a mere daughter; tomorrow she was to become a familiar stranger; the strangeness of this, the unreality of it, the sense of loss and parting and death, moved her almost to tears.

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Then Jordan began to whine about the weather, intimating that if it hadn't been for Kirby and a disloyal daughter he might be away on the ocean and up in the North. Then in a still more meaningful way he announced that he had hired a young man, a social worker, to take over the philanthropic work which Mary had handled.

"This means," he said, glancing at Mary, "that I'll have to give my time and strength to it, too."

It implied that the marriage was not only robbing him of Mary and breaking his pride, but also casting new burdens upon his already overtaxed shoulders.

They sipped the coffee in silence. Then Jordan spoke again, glancing sharply at Kirby:

"I'd like to see you in the library, please." He never addressed Kirby by name; it was impossible to call him Mr. Trask, more so to call him Kirby.

Both Mary and Kirby felt that some dramatic moment was at hand; they glanced apprehensively at each other, then, with some precipitancy, Kirby followed to the library. Jordan turned on the desk-light, took off his coat; they sat facing each other, silent, almost sullen. Then Jordan spoke as employer to employee, in a hard, impersonal voice:

"I may not see you alone for some time, so I must give you directions. You're to be Assistant Superintendent of Supplies in the Pittsburgh office, the American Steel Building. Report there, please, on or about September 1st."

Kirby nodded coldly; he did not like this return of the old feeling of being an employee; he had outgrown that state, he believed. A silence followed. The old man seemed engaged in a struggle with himself. Then suddenly he drew out a pocket-book and pulled from it a check.

"Here," he said, brusquely. "Expenses and furniture."

Kirby was stunned. In a swift glance he saw the figures

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—ten thousand dollars. He had never seen so much money in his life; it was proof of his new standing. His temples began to throb. Of course ten thousand was not a munificent present from a multimillionaire, but from an outraged father, who was also somewhat economical and sermonized on seventy-five-cent golf-balls, it was a remarkable gift. There were things in the old man Kirby couldn't understand. It was as if Watts were compelled to be fatherly in spite of himself.

Kirby was embarrassed, as well as dazzled, by this expression of kindness.

"Thanks," he said, awkwardly.

Jordan rose.

"Never mind," he snapped. "Just remember September 1st. Of course great things are expected of you. And you know our compact. No help from me. Stand on your own two feet and make or break yourself—and your wife," he added, sharply.

Kirby nodded again, passed out and up the stairs. He was profoundly stirred. Mary was probably in the front sitting-room. But the room was in darkness as he entered. Then a voice called:

"Kirby?"

"Yes."

"Don't put up the light. Come here."

He saw her dimly then at the open window. He went and placed himself opposite and took her warm hands. His voice was trembling with emotion.

"Your father's given us ten thousand dollars."

In the silence at once something tragic and yet benign swept from her to him, and when she spoke her voice was strange, trembling with fear.

"I almost hate to leave father now that the time has come."

And he began to understand, began to realize the solemnity and majesty of marriage; the momentous hour when his beloved was to leave home and father, and all

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free and familiar things, to give herself up to the doom of woman, to the pains, the agonies, and the fulfilments of a woman's life—give herself up utterly, soul and body, as a sacrifice to creative Nature, so that the race might roll on through her and the generations continue, even as her mother before her, and all the mothers of the receding past. The silent mystery that had evoked these two so that they sat here, man and woman, perfect growths of brief passion and dream, was to use them now that like creations, real and living as they, might emerge through them to carry on the flame and light to the unpeopled Future.

Tides rose in their hearts, tides of love and unselfishness, of reverence and humility. Even at the moment they began to detach themselves from the free life of self, to be set as a loom in the weaving of the destinies of Earth. They were about to become a part of Creation—slaves of the Unborn.

And through the open windows came the profound hum of life—fugitive voices, vanishing footsteps, the rattle of the wheels. In all directions life palpitated under the white night of August, and they had a feeling that it was all in process, that these millions born of woman were in the throes of a new creation, new millions crying and babbling in the night. At once the city, which had seemed to Kirby a workshop of labor and a garden of wooing, changed into a vast home of families, of fathers and mothers and children. And they were knocking at the door of this home. In them the miracle of the generations was about to be fulfilled.

In their silence, their hands clasping, they heard the music of existence; they became holy to each other; and rising then softly, Mary drew him to her breast.

“Oh, Kirby,” she whispered, “Kirby.”

They knew then that this marriage of theirs was a sacrament. They spoke sacred words.

“My husband,” she whispered.

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“My wife.”

Glorified they went hand in hand down the steps, kissed, and he left—left only to return for her and take her for life.

Then, overflowing with this painful glory, she hurried to the library. She confronted her father.

“Father!” she whispered. “Father!”

He looked up, stricken; she held out her arms, and he rose, and they embraced.

“Oh, forgive me,” she murmured, fondling him. “Forgive me. I can’t help what I am.”

The tears trickled down his cheeks.

“Meg,” he whispered for the first time in months. “My Meg.”

They were married the next evening at six o’clock. And at that moment their youth passed from them; their mature manhood and womanhood began.

XXX

THE LAKE

AT 4.30 A.M., at the little lamp-lit station in the Adirondack foothills, the heavy Canadian Express, with its ten vestibuled sleepers, pulled in with roar and blinding headlight from the South, and as the porters set footstools under the steps, a man and woman, all too unmistakably a bridal pair, emerged from the car "Nacoma." The man was well built, with smooth, gray-eyed face, straw hat, gray spring overcoat, suit-case in one hand, satchel in the other; the woman was almost of his height, supple, free in her actions, in gray traveling suit and soft gray straw hat that curved like a helmet to the superb shape of her head.

"Fresh from the bandbox," muttered a porter to the impatient conductor.

Three stage-drivers were shouting the places they touched over the hills, and held lanterns in their gloved hands to light their passengers; a small group of miserably sleepy and frozen people were pestering the baggage-master; and, save for the spots of lamplight and a golden splash from the panting engine, heavy night engulfed the station, the dawn delayed by clouds. The thin, bracing mountain air swept from the cold storage of the hills.

A sleepy, grinning chauffeur approached the couple.

"Mr. and Mrs. Trask? Right over here. Yes, the trunks came all right; went up last night. Weather's been stunning, but we sleep under double blankets at night. Cloudy to-night, though. Warm enough with that robe?"

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They shivered; the robe was cold to the touch, but they wrapped close in it, and drew together under it for warmth. The chauffeur climbed in, the car jerked forward, and at once the blackness swallowed them. Up and up they went, borne with mysterious certainty until the dawn grew splendid above them; then on through the wild ways between the sky-hung blue ranges. It was finally noon when the car passed through the gateway of the estate and wound through a forest of cathedral pines to the hunting-lodge—a rambling log building at the brink of a blue lake. Here, stiff and fatigued, they alighted, ate lunch, rested a few moments and dressed, and when they emerged they were strangers to each other. For Kirby was in khaki, with woolen shirt, scarf about his neck, high boots, and soft cap; and Mary, also booted, had on full bloomers of brown and a sweater over her sailor blouse. They were delighted with each other; both appeared more natural and beautiful; they fitted better into the wild environment.

“This is the only way to dress,” said Mary; “now I’m free!” And she attested the fact by running like a young boy to the canoe on the lake-shore. Grace, agility, the fluent curves of a wild animal were in her motions. Surely Eve had this beauty on the first morning.

A hardy guide, a mountaineer overrunning with life and high spirits, but silent as the hills, now offered to paddle them.

“Everything ready for you up to Moose Lake. And if you run out o’ things you know where to find more.”

But they preferred to go alone; so, like Indian and squaw, they knelt in the light craft, and sped it with easy strokes over the still waters. An inverted canoe, with an inverted man and woman hanging down toward blue skies and wooded shores, winged along with them.

In twenty minutes they reached the eastern end, beached the canoe, carried it on shoulders through a short cut in the woods to the waters above, paddled over these, carried

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it again, and came out on Moose Lake—a level sheet of blue, locked between enormous mountains, with forests on either shore mounting like waves to the peaks.

They shot past inlets, under overhanging pines, round rocky headlands, and at every boat's length the scene grew wilder, more remote, and the grandeur of the mountain tops engulfed them in the ages. It seemed as if the powers of nature stood overshadowing them like august presences, that life and majesty and inarticulate might that man calls God.

They felt reverent, open, divine; the ebb and flow of these tides passing through them, as the flame and light of the sun soaks through a tiger-lily, or as the instincts of mating and hunting sweeps through a leopard or the lustrous fish in the waters. Life overflowed them, love for this earth and for each other, and joy that they were beautiful fragments of this beauty and radiance and power.

"There it is—our home, my husband," whispered Mary. Behind a smooth, pebbly shore on a little cleared space between pines stood the white army tent, and a little rough shack behind it with wood-stove and provisions.

They beached the canoe, leaped out, drew it up safe on the shore, and they ceased by that action to be Kirby and Mary Trask, becoming merely any two creatures of the wilderness, human only, seemingly, in their gifts of speech and laughter, their power to use tools and interpret the scene, and those memories of the past locked in them.

They entered the large tent with its cots piled with army blankets, its utensils hanging on hooks, its guns and hunting-knives, its wash-stand and chairs, and the trunks in the corners, and the damp smell of the earth. Then fifteen minutes later they tripped out, waded into the icy water, gasped, cried out, and flung themselves into the lake. Side by side they swam in that fluid fire, turning their heads toward each other, laughing with exhilaration, making sunny splashes with their hands.

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When they emerged, shocked, as it were, by health and new life, and glowing all over, Mary loosened her long, brown hair, they gathered soft pine boughs, and lay down on these natural beds, basking from head to foot in the sun. They seemed beautiful and fresh to each other, natural as the pines and the rocks and the far eagle soaring in the blue heavens; their kisses were moist and new; and, fatigued after the long day and drowsy with happiness, they fell asleep.

It was Kirby who awoke Mary with a kiss, and when they sat up they saw that the early twilight had come, the sun shut off by the bulging West. The air was cool, the waters silent and gray, but on the far shore orange and black and yellow lay on the rumpled lake, and a reddish glory bathed the shaggy mountain-side.

They discovered, then, primal hunger—they could have eaten herbs and acorns. It was an adventure to prepare supper, to coax a blue smoke and a woodsy smell from the dry brush, to open cans and roast potatoes, to experiment with spring water and ground coffee. Mary cooked like a true woman, absorbed in a very ritual of busyness, and Kirby glowed watching her; she was a perfect mate for the backwoods. The daughter of a messenger-boy, the granddaughter of a washwoman, was in her natural element. Was it because she had found some of this primitive strain in rough, sensitive Kirby that she had fallen in love with him?

Then, sitting on the ground, they performed the first sacred rites of family life—the secret breaking of bread together. It was a miraculous performance; their mere eating a sacrament, sign of their ever-recurring union with Nature, with life, that flowing through them which was to become dream, thought, love, and action, as water turns to steam. What could bind them more in one?

After supper they washed the tin plates in the lake, and as the rapid darkness gathered and the woods began to whisper and moan, to creak and crack, and a wood-owl

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hooted plaintively in the distance, they built a fire, and in the jumping gold, which made vivid the crinkled bark of trees, and under the lost swaying tree-tops they leaned through the shadows together, arms round each other, and watched the flames, pushed on fresh branches, silent, enchanted, savage. The stars, like watchers of the universe—now that the blue veil of the sky was withdrawn from Earth's face—drew in their millions to eye these dreamers; lake water lapped the pebbles; the juicy firewood snapped and sparked; the mountains whispered across the waters; the peaks dropped dew through the moaning branches.

And what was civilization now but a drop of excited whisky fallen on that pellet, Earth, that winged serene among the rolling stars? They two had escaped; one with the star-waves of the skies, hugged close to the breast of their Mother, Nature, inexpressible things mounted to their lips and changed into Silence. Silence alone could express the mountains and the stars and their beating hearts.

The fire burned low. They became drowsy again in the thin air of this high altitude.

"We must sleep under the stars," whispered Mary.

And so their couch was dew-drenched pine boughs, their walls the mountains, their roof the stars, their floor the Earth

The days that followed were the happiest in their brief life. Restless things were put by, the world erased, and there was in all space just these two, the naked Adam and Eve facing the universe. The primal things brought ineffable joy—the finding of food, the cooking and eating, the lying flat on the ground and lapping up sparkling spring water, the pure sleep of starry nights, the swimming in the lake, the shelter in the storm. Then there were the changing visions of the day—sunrise over the eastern woods, cloud and sun at noon, the orange and black of

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sunset, with perhaps a lonely deer come to the lake to drink, the run in the woods in the bracing morning, the still afternoon when they read together on a rocky headland.

They fished and hunted. Kirby was awkward with a gun, but Mary was a crack shot, and brought down partridges with ease. The fresh meat and fish added a delicious variety to their canned goods and potatoes.

One afternoon they climbed the mountain behind them, carrying blanket-knapsacks over their shoulders, and after four hours they stood on the bald peak and had a view that seemed to span half the world—mountain ranges, hill-locked lakes, wooded valleys. Here they slept and the winds of dawn awoke them, and in the gale they saw the splendor of the sunrise.

Another afternoon, cloudy and blowing, they were out on the lake when a squall blew up, waves lashed, and they nearly upset. Then Kirby took charge, as in the snow-storm on the Giant, showed his man's strength and Mary her woman's obedience and trust, and they came ashore safely. There was something glorious, however, in this peril which made the man protect the woman.

A few mishaps occurred, like finding the matches wet in the morning and having to spread them on a rock to dry; or the evening Mary spoiled the supper; or the sultry night when mosquitoes and a large variety of other insects kept them tormentedly awake; or the time when they heard a rumble in the night and thought of panthers; and the evening when Kirby cut his thumb and Mary ministered to him.

One afternoon Mary suggested as a lark that they go back and dress in city clothes and motor over to Warren's, a ten-mile distant summer resort. They did this, feeling stiff and confined, and when they passed golf-links and tennis-courts and drew up at the fashionable hotel, and a friend spied them and brought others, they felt black with unhappiness. Nature had evoked in them a love for all

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things, and given them a natural manner, but enclosed by these artificial gossipers, scandal-mongers, and this glib-tongued gaiety they felt diffident and constrained.

"Oh," whispered Kirby, "let's get back."

So they fled back to paradise.

What amazed them these days was the newness they continually found in each other. Kirby sometimes flashed into wit, a thing he seemed incapable of; once he sang out loud; and at rare moments he showed chivalric tendencies truly alarming in such an unmannerly fellow. He also developed ability as a cook.

But these newly discovered attributes were as nothing to the changes in Mary. She became a chameleon of magic variety. She might sit down in mock despair, rub her eyes, and wawl and howl like a baby; or she stood at sunrise on the rock imperial, regal, a frozen queen; or she grew tender and grave, a large-hearted mother for her wild boy; and then at times she was the light-footed girl running along the beach. But most amazing of all was the revelation of a Bacchantic streak in her.

She had found that by some accident a long string of pearls had been packed in the trunk. She took these out one afternoon and studied them.

"Rubbish!" she said. "Kirby, see the baubles! Shall I drop 'em in the lake?"

She arose as if she really meant to do so. He stopped her.

"Mary!"

"Let me go!" she cried. "Into the lake with these! Down with civilization!"

They struggled, she broke loose, ran out on the rock and held them high over the lucid waters.

Kirby shouted:

"Quit that, Mary!"

Then she turned, laughing:

"But savages wear pearls, don't they? Wait. Some

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day I'll show you that I'm a savage, too. Or maybe one of the dancing-girls of the Sahara. The blood of the East runs warm in my veins."

That night was exceptionally windy, unusually dark. Boughs clashed; they heard the rending of dead branches; all up the mountain-side they could imagine a massacre of the Indians that once paddled these waters, footed these hills. Cries, groans, shrieks echoed over the lake, and their camp-fire blew back and forth with a demon-dance of shadows. They sat huddled together, feeling, in spite of their proximity, an elemental fear.

"B-r-r-r! how black it is!" said Mary. "The primal night. I think I've never seen darkness before."

There was only the shadow-dance, with a ghostly arm of a tree here and there waving its leafy hands, and each other's strange firelit faces and shadowy forms. Wild animals or savages seemed crowding beyond the light, waiting and watching. Their loneliness was terrifying.

"Eyes in the night, eyes everywhere!" wailed Mary in a sudden singsong voice, as if she were one of the Three Weird Sisters in "Macbeth." Her own eyes seemed wild, glittering as they were with the blowing flames. She shivered; Kirby felt haunted. Not only the night, but this woman, made him creepy.

"Come," he said. "We'd better sleep in the tent to-night."

They went in; the flap smote against the canvas side like a sail in a storm; rushes of clamorous air eddied about their feet, and the loud night smote and smote again. But when they were ready for bed Mary suddenly seized Kirby by the shoulders. She laughed strangely.

"Go out and pile up the fire; make it blaze—blaze, and wait for me."

"Mary!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with you?"

"The East!" she cried. "Oh, caliph, do as I bid you, or I shall cut your throat when you sleep at my side to-night."

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Her voice and manner were blood-curdling. He stood dazed.

"Now, see here—"

"Oh, caliph of Bagdad, pay heed to your favorite." And she began to push him out. Then she whispered, excitedly, "For my sake, Kirby."

He went, aghast. He was a three-dimensional man, and here was a woman going off suddenly into the fourth dimension. Most natural for a woman; yet Kirby, the man, was appalled. Besides, he was frankly frightened by this night, and to step out into the naked dark was a fiendish adventure. He rushed to the fire, and, looking neither to left nor right, piled it high and poked it into a leaping blaze. He felt as if the night were jumping on his back, especially when he squatted and tried to strain eyes toward the tent. Solid blackness that way, and every other, too. There was no Mary.

Then above the night noise he heard her chanting a fierce love-song, and from the blackness leaped a glorious Eastern apparition. Her long hair was down her back, over her shoulders, and blew wild; the necklace of pearls was bound about her forehead, fell over her breast; a tinted silk scarf streamed, and she had on only the white nightgown and moccasins on her feet.

He sat, enchanted; and then the night passed into her, and she began to chant and dance in utter abandon, the fierce flames flashing now and then her dark eyes, her wonderful face, and changing the nightgown to something flaming and undulant, wrought of soft, white fire. The whole body—the waving arms, the curving hands, the striding, lifting, leaping feet, the fluid robe and blowing hair—all blended into one wild harmony of fire and beauty, as if the wildness and windy glory of the Bacchantic night had come together in this passionate dancer.

He was entranced, bewitched; he had not dreamt that he was married to Bagdad and Beni-Mora. They seemed to return to some other incarnation, when

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I was a king in Babylon
And you were a Christian slave.

Only this wasn't Christian; it was Mohammedan or Hebraic.

Then passing from shadow to fire, from fire to shadow, chanting loud and louder her fierce song, bowing before him, and dancing with head thrown back and arms aloft, she gave a great cry, and vanished in the night.

He followed, a little demented, a little delirious perhaps, but when he came into the lamp-lit tent she was already sitting before the cracked mirror combing her hair, and her face was grave, almost tragic.

He stood, looking at her, more dazed than ever by this new change. Then she turned to him tearful eyes.

"Oh, Kirby, Kirby," she said, tragically, "and in two days we go back. We go back—I wish I knew how to cry."

Two days later then they broke camp in Eden. Mary was sorrowful.

"Why," she said, "must this be? Slaves! that's what we are! Slaves!"

It was true. The world, after all, enclosed even Eden, and those angels of the flaming sword—Necessity and Convention—drove them out of paradise. Possibly to Mary, more than to Kirby, had come a glimpse of what life might be for untrammelled human beings, of what could happen on this earth if love ever really had a chance. She never forgot this; it became part of her faith for the future, her vision of the new world to be.

But Kirby, alas! was a man. Having come over the hills like a hunter and seized his mate he found that he could not live on love; that he began to weary of long days and nights of woman; that he feared that his nature was softening under this drench of feminism. He began to crave action, work, the world; he wanted once more the hard masculine, the excitement, and the lights.

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And now again among the dead mountains he began to dream of empire, of the dominion he was to carve out for himself; of the living people he was to manipulate, the great creative world he was to make greater. He was, after all, Kirby Trask; he had his work to do; he was a creator and lusted to sweat from his brain and build with his hand some new miracle. Recreated by this return to Nature, his brain flushed with new energy, he felt ready, primed for the fight.

And yet when these two left the wilderness they were, both of them, clear-eyed and gentle, kindly and patient human beings. So much had Nature and love done for them. But swiftly civilization shut these spiritual pores and changed them again to the mannered, abrupt, domineering people they had been before. It was inevitable, if only to protect themselves; railway-cars, conductors, candy-boy, screaming children, scolding parents, curious strangers, dirt, smoke, speed, grated against them, shocked them, cut them off.

"I hate it all!" whispered Mary. "It's a dusty, dirty, noisy world!"

New York was worse—a thunder and glare and rush of humanity that made the nerves raw. Both lost their temper in the hotel that night.

But the next night, boarding the Pittsburgh Express, they were thoroughly civilized again, eager and alert, ready for defense and offense, the powerful citizens of old.

And Mary again was eager for the great adventure of running a family on five thousand a year, and Kirby for the supreme battle of his life.

They sat late in the little state-room, an excited couple. Kirby spoke with fervid power.

"New York is the financial center of our civilization, Pittsburgh the industrial center. Pittsburgh is the flare-back of New York; behind the skyscrapers the fires of steel; behind the office and factory drudges the laborers in the mill; behind the metropolis her flaming background.

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"Yes," he went on, and Mary listened raptly, the wife eager to see her husband following a great vision. "Pittsburgh is the industrial mother; it's she that's given birth to our steel and steam civilization. And we're going back to her vitals, where, in smoke and flame and sweat, Steel is born."

And they fell to dreaming wonderful dreams: Mary, how she was going to run the house, be a real wife, and keep Kirby to his best; Kirby, how he was going to smash into the business and make it hum about his father-in-law's ears. These two young people tried hard to see into the mysterious future, to get a hint as to whether that tornado of life that had swept them to the top and clashed them together was to go on lifting them or drop them in the dust. Real peril confronted them they knew; real work, real pain; they must go through fire and water together; sickness might delay them, death betray them.

They felt almost fear, and embraced each other, the brown and gray eyes close together.

"Whatever comes," said Mary, "we're together, Kirby; we have each other."

Swiftly the mighty train rolled over a third of a continent in the night, bearing these two to their supreme tests—whether their love could outlive dusty life; whether this man could be one of the few who become masters of the world.

And shortly before dawn Kirby pulled up the shade and looked out. At once he was shot with thrilling triumph. He was back in the smoking compartment with the traveling salesman. They were speaking of the mills, and the salesman said:

"Goodness, they're all his except the piker independents."

And a lonely adventurer dreamed then that those mills might yet flame for him, a night advertisement in the skies of America, and travelers would say:

"Sure Kirby Trask *he* owns 'em all!"

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For right out there again that vision shone and passed, swallowed in darkness; the Bessemer converter showering up a swirl of golden snow, while all the waterside flamed, and the smokes were lit—the sublime fire-spectacle of America. Could he be that same Kirby? For, behold! the miracle then dreamed was already beginning to be accomplished, just as those mills had once been conjured into existence by the dreams of Watts and his associates.

Kirby thrilled; felt drunk; his heart leaped.

“I am going to my kingdom,” he told himself; “I am going to my kingdom.”

XXXI

THE MACHINE

THEY took a brick house in the East End, about twenty minutes' ride to the office on Pittsburgh's atrocious trolley system. As one of the conductors told Kirby:

"It don't go by electricity at all; it goes by fits and starts."

Roughly speaking, the map of Pittsburgh looks like an exaggerated profile of a man's face, with the Allegheny sloping over his forehead and the Monongahela running around his chin. His nose, then, at whose fine tip the two rivers merge into the Ohio, is the skyscraper district, and it appeared to Kirby that the trolley-cars, running in over the bridges and from the back country and meeting in a *mêlée*, caused a congestion in this nose, as if the city had a cold. Then, besides, the whole town sneezed and snuffled soot. Soot! Lace curtains, table-linen, collars, cuffs, ears, mouths, noses, hair, the houses, and the sidewalks received daily their delicate coating.

"It looks like rain," said Kirby on the third day after arrival.

"No," said Mary; "it's only Pittsburgh."

Yet, like a man, he nevertheless carried an umbrella. At first he changed his collar thrice daily, and washed himself every half-hour. Then he agreed with Tomlinson, the Supply Superintendent:

"It's a waste of time to wash in Pittsburgh."

On some days a ghostly haze was in the air, making the

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cliff-like streets fade into vague distances, and the buildings loom disconsolate. Kirby found that it was only the Steel City trying to smoke herself out.

Sometimes at night the blackened heavens flashed with lurid glare, as if a near-by city were afire. Kirby discovered that it was only the mills flaming with the night shift.

Girdled with mills and mill-towns, Pittsburgh labored day and night, and it seemed to Kirby that work was in the air. Everybody worked in Pittsburgh. Coal-barges floated on the oily rivers under the dirty suspension bridges; freight-yards pre-empted the shores; two railroads cut through the heart of the town; and from every height one could see stacks of pipes, rolling smoke, fluttering steam. On these numerous heights stood sooty mansions; in the hollows beside them clung shanties and shacks on the hillside, with garbage and tin cans and dirty children rolling down to the bottom. And the people in the mansions and the people in the shanties labored at an unearthly pace.

Why? Because, thought Kirby, there was nothing else to do. Old Jordan and his competitors had evidently not been intent on building a Coney Island city; they had tolerated churches, they had insisted on libraries, even a public park, and four theaters had crept in with road companies that had ceased to amuse New York. If it hadn't been for the saloons and the red light district, Kirby thought, down-town would have died the death every supper-time.

It appeared to him, too, that many of the people he met worked themselves stupid and got little joy out of seeing one another. At least such social life as he and Mary at first penetrated was remarkably like the atmosphere—the men smoked, the women inhaled.

This, then, was the bright paradise that he and Mary entered.

Kirby was the first to feel the shock. His superior

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officer, Tomlinson, was a skinny, black-eyed fellow, with black hair, black mustache, and black broadcloth clothes. He was a tartar of a boss. At nine sharp the eighth-floor offices were set humming, and Kirby sat in a shadowy corner and became a clerk again. He could not dodge the fact. His job was to compare estimates, check up lists of needs sent in by the mills, and do all the dirty figuring while Tomlinson did the brain-work.

Then Tomlinson would ask him to write letters like this: "Please ship, f. o. b., carload lot, etc."

It reminded him of melancholy Guthrie in the shorthand school with his interminable:

"In reply to your favor of the 26th ult. we beg to say that carload lots of lumber, etc."

Supplies! supplies! This was great work for the son-in-law of a multimillionaire, for a young aristocrat who had been silent and terrible at house-parties, broken the will of a Jordan Watts, been on the front page of newspapers, and lived in taxicabs! He saw now; the old fellow was shrewd, was punishing him, forcing him down, preparing to break him. His feeling of outraged disillusionment was not softened either by Tomlinson, who treated him like any green employee, saying, sharply, for instance:

"Brace up on your addition, Mr. Trask. This won't do at all. Primary-school mistake. Don't you know how much nine and seven make?"

A powerful, silent manner was of no help; not all the silence in the world could make nine and seven nineteen. He noticed, too, that while the other employees eyed him curiously they seemed aware of old Watts' displeasure, and accepted the fact that they could treat him as one of themselves. It was the bitterest day he had spent in months. He agreed with the statement of one of the local ministers:

"Children are damned, not born, in Pittsburgh."

"And they stay damned," added Kirby, "and damn

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every one else. It's a one-horse provincial, blue-law, filthy, sweaty town, and I hate it."

After the great free life of his loved sea-city, with her nights and her lights and her changeful immensity, this manufacturing town seemed sordid and petty enough. He had been tricked, defrauded, like a police officer sent from Broadway to some lonely suburb. There was no future in this work. He might almost as well have stayed with the Continental Express Company. Here at the top he found an underling was just an underling, as much a part of the routine and the rut as the meanest laborer. Only the owners were exempt, and they lived in New York. In fact, as he shortly discovered, Pittsburgh was in some ways a hired city—a city peculiarly of employees. Bankers, business men, newspaper editors, mill managers, skilled workers, common laborers—many of them—were in the employ of the Jordan Watts who had gone to New York. These absentees had hired a city to turn out their dividends.

This, then, was the matrix city of civilization—a machine of metal and flame geared to human machines and all running together smoothly and turning out Steel.

He went home that night in a hot temper, and when he unlocked the door, and Mary came tripping down the stairs to kiss and welcome him, as a new wife should, he greeted her almost furiously.

"By heaven," he said, "I won't stand for it!"

"For what?"

"This job of mine. It's clerk's work. Your father has played us a low-down, dirty trick."

She spoke a little sharply:

"Run up and wash, Kirby. We'll talk this over at supper."

When he came down he found her waiting in the little dining-room. The cloth shone with wedding-present silver; pictures of the same brand hung on the wall; everything was elaborate save the furniture, which was

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severely simple. And Mary had put a bunch of sweet-peas on the table. Evidently she had spent much time to make this meal sweet, to please and soothe her spent business man. Now she stood there looking at him gravely, her heart hurt by this failure on his part to make the home-coming tender and beautiful.

He sat down with a jerk, ate nervously and distractedly. Suddenly he put down his soup-spoon.

"Now see here, Mary," he exclaimed, "you know I'm simply bursting. Why don't you say something? You sit there as if I didn't exist!"

And this was the Kirby of Moose Lake! Her forehead seemed to stand out with power, her eyes met his, and she spoke with her masterful incisiveness.

"Tell me, then. What is this job—exactly?"

"What? I sit there like a common clerk eight hours a day and do figuring—addition, subtraction, multiplication. That's a fine job for a man like me!"

Her face was unpleasant.

"What of it?" she asked.

"What of it? Did I come here to Pittsburgh for this? Why do you talk that way, Mary? My Lord, women!"

She spoke almost angrily:

"You know what father keeps saying—you must make your job bigger than you find it, and so outgrow it."

"Make? There's nothing to make. It's made—"

"Then," she interrupted, "make a new job. That's what I expected of you. Study the business, get to know it from the bottom to the top, go through the mills, learn the processes, make yourself invaluable. Why, I'll do it with you."

"Yes," he said, sarcastically, "in my spare time." His voice became loud. "Now, by God—"

She cut him short in a low, piercing voice:

"Please don't talk that way before the servant. I won't have it, Kirby. It's bad enough that you do it to me. Don't make me sorry I—" She paused, and became pale.

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He stared at her.

"Are you going to sentimentalize? I tell you this is a dirty little town; there's nothing to do, and I'm going to get out of it."

"No, you're not," she replied. "We've made a compact with my father and we're going to stick to it."

He began to eat chicken savagely then; not another word was spoken during the meal. Mary remembered the quarrel they had had over her money, and again she saw herself involved in a coarse, domestic tragedy, and felt the intense pain of young wifhood. Was she, too, destined to be disillusioned, to have a husband who came home to let his harsh temper out on her because he could not rid himself of it in the office, to find hate and heartache instead of love and comfort? She felt that much that was beautiful and erect in her nature was being bent and beginning to break.

Yet she half blamed herself. Possibly she had not yet learnt the wife's first lesson—how to handle and manage her husband; when to be silent, when to scold, when to soothe.

Supper over, she went into the parlor and looked out of the open window at the mill flare on the horizon which gave her the black silhouettes of a plain of roofs and chimney-tops. The night was hot and moist and smelt bitter-sweet with the smokes.

Kirby came in softly; he had cooled off, and remorse set in.

"Mary?" he murmured, tremulously.

"Yes," she answered, coldly.

He went and put an arm round her shoulder. She pushed it off.

"Ah, Mary," he said; "I just had to let it out."

"That's it," she said, bitterly. "You only think of yourself. And after all the work I've done"—her voice broke—"you never even noticed the sweet-peas; no, nor the chicken. I went down specially and cooked it myself to please and surprise you."

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It did surprise him. It proved how thoroughly she had entered on her adventure; how completely she had left her position in life to be his mate. It was a real, not a pretended sacrifice. She had pitched in and taken a job far more menial for her than a clerk's job for him. It made him shrink beside her—a selfish and pettish man. He could only humbly beg forgiveness; she could only grant it. Their love grew glowing and splendid; their evening was charged with bright talk and affection. Nevertheless it was a bad beginning.

So he kept his job and became a bitter clerk. But in Mary there was no bitterness at all. Like a pioneer woman she had come to this city of soot, and because she was engaged in a great feminine enterprise she paid but casual and half-humorous attention to smoke and dirt, provincialism and stupidity. This enterprise was the splendid manufacturing business of producing a great man out of a raw Kirby. She went at it as her father went at Steel, and her love and vision made it engrossing, rich, dramatic.

First she organized the animal basis of life—sanitation and the commissary—so that her man might have a sound body. She gave the house periodic tremendous cleanings, wrapping a towel round her head, donning an apron, and dusting and sweeping.

“The mistress must work with the servants,” was her rule, “if she wants efficiency.”

Then she made herself at home in the kitchen, and, after much study, laid out a three-weeks' menu, so that automatically they might have variety in the food and practise economy as well.

She was strong on economy—a Watts trait, to be sure, but welcome in a five-thousand-a-year home. Several people in the United States have lived on less than this income, but not, as a rule, daughters of Steel Magnates. So she did much of the marketing herself, all of the shopping, and kept Kirby down on extras, such as theater

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and liquor and clothes. She indulged him in tobacco, but she cut out automobiles altogether.

He would laugh over this.

"How can *you* stand it—you, Mary Watts?"

"I'm not Mary Watts," she replied; "I'm Mary Trask. Leave me in peace; I'm having a good time."

Another sacrifice was to do without a lady's maid, but she professed to enjoy even this. And her letters to her father were full of these delightful details, though the scribbled response was usually:

"I'm glad to hear that you're sticking to your compact. But I expected as much. Very busy; engrossed, in fact. Some day I'll run in on you."

So much for the animal basis. On this foundation, however, she built a remarkable superstructure. Shortly after that first evening she paid a secret visit to Franklin, Secretary of the first Vice-President, a powerful young man who reminded her of Pendleton, and the conference lasted an hour and a half. Nothing came of it, however, for several months. Then one evening she said excitedly to Kirby:

"Go in your study. I want to show you something."

He went into the little room, wondering. It held a flat-top desk, book-cases, a few pictures, a few chairs. Mary entered, staggering under armfuls of books and documents. These she dropped on the desk.

"Now, what in the world—" began Kirby.

She laughed and spoke breathlessly:

"Kirby, I've just put in three months' studying. Now I'm ready to begin on you."

He was nonplussed. His job already had had the usual effect of monotony on Kirby. It had given him the false security and content of the rut; it had put him in danger again of losing ambition. As it was not big enough to call out his power it tended to put him to sleep. It had become an easy routine, and home life was pleasant. Why disturb things?

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"What is it?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Look!" And she handed him *The History of the American Steel Company, Story of a Thousand Millionaires, High Finance: Its Secrets, Steel: the Process*, several annual reports of the company, and a bunch of statistical pamphlets.

"Well, I'll be hanged," he muttered; "have you been digging in these?"

It put him to shame.

"Yes," she cried. "And it's absorbingly interesting. Here's your way out, Kirby. You know," she said with her head-high pride, "we're to make a great man of Kirby Trask."

He was shocked out of his sloth. It would have been unmanly to resist her. So she set him to work, and they spent many evenings together in the study, reading, discussing, digesting. She held him to it, too. If he complained of tiredness she compromised on a ten-minute session, and usually the ten minutes expanded to two hours. And as he plodded on, there came a time when he began to get a grip on it, to see it big, to get the vision of Steel, until all his latent energies were aroused. He began to understand how steel is made, how the industry grew to its huge proportions, the methods of the business, the details of management, until, fired with fresh ambition, he started in on a study of the different departments—manufacture, sales, labor, finance, etc.

And he began now to show his power to Mary: his amazing grasp; his sharp analyses; his inventive faculty. For instance, he noticed that in Germany the scrap-iron was stacked in heaps twice as big as those of the company. Why? He figured out the problem. Evidently the company considered a larger heap unsafe. But if Germany did this, so could America, and the economy in time would save much money.

He worked out another project, bold indeed. There were two mills turning out the same product, and Kirby

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figured that by selling one he could make the other twice as big at one-third the selling price and save the company twenty-five thousand dollars a year.

Naturally if he could successfully carry out such projects he would become a high-price man. He was for sitting down and writing to Jordan Watts at once.

"No," said Mary. "Father won't have faith; he'll turn the plan over to some manager, who will twist it around and make it his own and take the credit. Wait a bit. Wait till you have more authority."

To carry out a part of her plan she forced Kirby to inspect the mills with her and see the processes with his own eyes. So one winter night they went out to Macleod, on the Monongahela. The cinder-dead and smoke-blackened mill-town rose up the heights; at its base lay the vast acreage of mills on both sides the river. The sharp, frosty air was thick with smoke and soot, and loud with metallic thunder.

They had to cross a railroad bridge to get into the ground, first showing their pass to the gate-keeper and waiting for a guide. On the bridge they stood then, and had unfolded to them the Vision of Steel.

For over the vast acreage they saw the shadowy outlines of a dozen immense buildings nested in a network of switches and tracks. Over those tracks clanked yard-engines with rattling trains of flat cars; red and green signal-lamps winked and glistened; and laborers, swinging lanterns, hurried to and fro.

Some of those looming buildings glowed at the windows as if they were eaten by fire; some—the converter sheds—were like craters with waving manes of flame and rolling clouds of luminous vapor. Everywhere they saw sheets of fire, leaping white tongues, glare and smoke and steam, while lightnings flashed the cloudy skies. And over it all a hundred black chimney-pipes looked through the changing lights.

And it seemed to these two as if there had been bared

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to them, in this amazing spectacle of men and flame and machinery, the very birth-throes of the anguished Industrial Mother. Her ingots roared in the "wringers," her engines shrieked and clattered in the yards, her rolls and wheels and mighty furnaces crashed and clanked and screeched.

They beheld then the birth of Steel. Guide-led over the peril of the switches, engine-wafted from one mill to another on either side the river, they stood first in this pit, then in that, flamelit midgets in Vulcanic sheds.

With staring eyes they saw the huge and sweating laborers like midwives assisting the mother; these scorched and blinded in a glare of fire, those steaming at their levers in the outer or upper gloom, all passionately intent, desperately speeded, while the black arms of roof-lost cranes or the white-hot ten-ton ingot or the splash and vapor of fluid iron or the bumping of the dinky engine writhed round them monstrously.

Like Dante following Virgil these two invaded circle after circle of this lurid, beautiful Hell—the blast-furnace releasing fluid iron that fell with shower of white flakes and cloud of white smoke glaringly into the ladles; this sputtering iron poured into the egg-shaped Bessemer converter that blew air through it till it changed into steel, while the heavens above flamed and shuddered; the fluid steel caking into ingots in the molds and carried like a row of little men on the flat cars to the next mill; the hand of the crane seizing ingot by ingot and lowering them like lost souls into the withering-white soaking pits in the floor; the same electric crane lifting them when they were reheated white-hot, pushing them on the rolls that swung them back and forth through the "wringer" until they were pressed into steel sheets, while the hot metal roared like hungry lions. Change by change they saw it; the great machines doing superhuman work, gently and unfalteringly lifting and hauling, placing and shaping the whited tons and the immense containers.

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They were thrilled.

"This, then, is father's work," said Mary, as if she meant, "This, too, is to be yours; yours to make greater."

He throbbed with new vision. From such mills as these our modern civilization sprang like a new god on Earth, son of flame and the machine, and of men like Jordan Watts.

This massive manufactory astounded him; the fact that no human hand touched the metal from start to end, and the fact that men and machines, and the diverse departments and processes, were as perfectly assembled and co-ordinated as a human body; the heart and the stomach, the blood-vessels and the brain, toiling together without hitch. Day and night this labor-body flamed and worked, ceaselessly, unrestingly, through the years.

"And the brain of this," he thought, "is Jordan Watts."

He felt ready now; he had studied the industry; he had seen its body at work; he must now break in and become a part of its brain—that brain that from the remote top somehow could speed or slow, break or make, lessen or increase the weighty body. It was up there that he belonged.

"Kirby," said Mary, "you must join the Board of Managers."

XXXII

KATIE

STARTING with that night Pittsburgh laid her spell on Kirby's spirit. He could not help but think of her as a Siren among American cities—a smoky beauty, whose hair by day drifted gray over the darkening streets, and by night was gusts of fire flaring a lightning along the rivers. Lit by the flare of Steel, the desolation of the streets and the industrial grime of the hills and hollows became a thing of dark enchantment. The cars were still slow, the evenings almost empty, the folk he met absorbed in work, and the soot was almost ceaseless; yet these things were as the wind, the thunder, and the barren heath in "Macbeth"—merely the setting for miraculous things.

Pittsburgh was *flaming*—that was the secret of it. The element, fire, which has always been a magnet for man, whether flame of camp at the trail-end or light of ship or home, warmed the crass town almost into a radiance of romance. Kirby got so that he liked the taste and smell of the smoke, and told such strangers as he met that it was "healthy."

Part of his new reaction on the grim city was his growing importance in the company. This made him one of the influences of Pittsburgh, and he could feel his hand manipulating the body of the mill. Mary had suggested that he join the Board of Managers. Of course this was not an immediate possibility; one had to be a Manager to belong to the board. However, occasionally on Saturdays the

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managers lunched with the superintendents in the private dining-room at the top floor of the building, and these lunches constituted a semi-managerial meeting.

Kirby had discovered that sometimes these meetings were attended by some of the foremen and some of the assistant superintendents. He went to Tomlinson.

"Is there any reason," he asked, "why I couldn't attend the next Saturday lunch?"

"I'll find out," said Tomlinson. Evidently some one "higher up" thought this advisable, for ever after that Kirby was at the meetings.

From thirty to thirty-five men sat about the immense table, and while they sipped coffee and smoked cigars the meeting was called to order, the minutes of the previous meeting read, and absorbing discussions arose—plans for changes in management, conferences on wages, labor, and prices, suggestions on buying new properties, installing new systems, or anything else the members had in mind. The attempt was made to get the best out of each man.

And it seemed to Kirby that these thirty-odd men were the great gray brain of that flaming industrial body, that what they thought and dreamed to-day to-morrow became living facts in the reality of machinery and sweated labor. It was a miracle to Kirby to be a throbbing cell in this quivering mentality, to utter forth words that might roll into action through the mills and over the continent, to feel this power and supremacy, and the excitement of brittle thinking.

But if these men were the brain, they were, after all, only the brain. If the analogy could be carried so far, behind this brain dwelt the guiding spirit of the industry, the supreme ego. Surely this Jordan Watts was a marvel; for though he was never present, yet he overshadowed each meeting like a great bird of prey hovering over them, ready to swoop. Every project was subjected to the test, "Would Mr. Watts approve?" Little notes from him

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were read and action taken accordingly. He seemed to watch them at the table like a ghost.

The workers and the mills, then, were the body, the department heads and managers were the brain, and Jordan, the guiding spirit, rose above them, one of the great of the world, spreading the power of the industry over the earth and sluicing the golden profits of the machine into massive philanthropies. Could he have stood so high in heaven, however, without this mighty pedestal of Steel? And on a like pedestal would not any man appear great?

So Kirby thought, and he added, "When he topples off I shall take his place." This vaulting ambition became almost an insanity with him; he was half-crazed again with the dream of empire. He saw himself raised above the millions, panoplied in the publicity and power of a dynast, the Man of Destiny, the Napoleonic American.

So he became again the man of silence, and sat at the first three meetings, dark and stolid, as if he heard and saw nothing, the big black cigar continually in his mouth. But at the fourth meeting he arose, and with crushing, clear logic presented the scrap-iron scheme. The men were almost amazed at the apparition of this new power; in the hush that followed he knew that he had made himself felt. The scheme was referred to a committee and adopted the following week. It worked exactly as he had planned.

With this triumph stiffening his self-assurance, he arose at the following meeting and outlined his plan for the selling of one mill and the reconstruction of another. It was a bold and dazzling project, and took away the breath of the experienced managers. They could doubt no longer that another "young genius" had been added to their number. The plan went to an investigating committee and then to Jordan Watts, who promptly O.K.'d it, and within ten months Kirby saw it put into execution.

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Twenty-five thousand dollars a year was actually saved to the company.

The reward came late the following autumn. Tomlinson called him in one morning:

"I've been transferred to the shipping department. You're to be Superintendent, beginning Monday."

So he ceased utterly to be a clerk, and showed himself a terrific department head, speeding up the work, constantly experimenting, a master of yes and no. All his old habits as Business Manager returned to him, and several more were added. Requests and reports had to be made to him in writing; orders went from him on little typewritten slips signed "K. T.," and out of this grew the nickname "Katie," which clung to him thereafter.

"Katie's new order" was the word that went round. "Tell it to Katie," was the department slogan.

During the following spring he made another bold project. It had been felt by the managers that the transportation rates on steel rails were ruinously high; but the railroad company refused to consider a reduction. Mary and Kirby spent weeks drawing up a thirty-page document of facts and figures. Then he sprang the audacious plan. It was nothing else than to force down the rates by building, if necessary, a rival railroad to parallel the other one. The mere plan would probably have the effect desired, but if it didn't he could show a profit in such an enterprise.

The managers found it necessary to take him into their secret consultations; again an investigation was made, and finally Kirby was authorized to deal with the railroad. Vested with this power he conferred with officials all through the summer, and convinced them again and again that the company would not hesitate to build the rival line. In the fall the railroad capitulated.

Three days later Kirby found a pencil-scrawled note from Jordan on his desk.

"Dear Kirby," it ran, "You become Traffic Manager,

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beginning the 15th. Office on tenth floor. I see you are beginning to make good."

He slammed the desk shut, stood up, and trembled with drunkenness.

"I've done it!" he told himself. "I've landed!"

And he went straight home. Mary was dusting the study, and when he broke in like a madman she thought he must be ill.

"What is it?" she cried, flinging down the dust-cloth.

"Read this!" he commanded.

She read.

"Oh, Kirby!" she exulted. "Our dreams are coming true. I wasn't mistaken in you. Didn't I tell you to join the Board of Managers?"

It was a great moment for both of them. Yet the old rascal had written, "You are beginning to make good." If this was only a beginning, what then was expected of him? Surely the wise old man was subjecting him to a supreme test. Yet there was no doubt now that the old man was "coming round," was beginning to approve of him, was making ready to give him a place at the top.

Nevertheless, no other miracle occurred for over a year. During that period Kirby was engaged in large activities, and became known as one of the great men of the company. He was in all the secret councils of the Board, a dynamic member who continually swept the others into new experiments. His recklessness knew no bounds, yet, held rigidly down by Mary's practicality, his plans were usually found highly feasible.

"Have you shown this to Katie yet?" was a usual question with a doubting manager.

The summers were fiercely hot in Pittsburgh; during the first and second the Trasks had only a two weeks' vacation in the Maine house, but the third they took off entirely and went to Europe. Why not? As Superintendent his salary had been ten thousand, and Mary had carefully put aside the surplus, allowing no unusual extra

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expenditure in the household. Now he was getting fifteen thousand a year, so the savings could go into a tour. She even agreed now to an automobile and a lady's maid.

These three years were happy ones for Mary. She had surrendered herself completely to the making of her husband, and so long as he made strides she felt that she had a great life-work. Their studies and scheming together in the evening and on holidays consumed her whole nature. And nothing could be more dramatic and absorbing than seeing her plans being realized step by step.

However, as she went on, her housekeeping ceased to be an adventure; the joy of making a little go a great way became less stimulating; and finally she performed her domestic duties merely as a necessary and irksome part of her life's routine. There were times, even, when she wished for the old freedom and luxury, the swift change of scenes, the arrowy flights back and forth over the world. She was too strong-natured, however, to give in to these moods, and went deliberately ahead, so that Kirby never suspected a dissatisfaction.

There were times, too, when this dissatisfaction crystallized into a new yearning. At such moments she had a great desire to have a child. Once she broached the matter to Kirby, but he felt that a child would saddle them financially at this time, and she finally came to agree with him, that during these perilous years of growth she must give her whole time and energy to Kirby. The child must wait.

After that first night her relationship with her husband became an untroubled harmony; they never quarreled again. But once she delighted him by making a tiny fight for him. He was home with a bad attack of tonsillitis, the first illness in years. The doctor had come twice in the day, and finally said:

"It looks like diphtheria to me. I'd better get the anti-toxin."

KATIE

So in the morning he appeared, prepared to plunge a hypodermic needle into Kirby's arm and inject the yellow liquid. Mary watched, actually pale with vicarious suffering.

"What's the effect of the antitoxin?" she asked.

"Oh, it 'll make him a little sick, probably; give him a bad headache for a couple of days."

"But he's sick enough already," said Mary, sharply. "Besides, I've heard that sometimes the injection brings a bad attack. Are you sure he has diphtheria?"

The doctor looked again.

"Well," he said, "the spots look better. But you never can tell. We had best be on the safe side."

"Let me see," and forthwith Mary looked down her husband's throat and made him say "ah." Then she turned on the doctor. "I'm sure it's not diphtheria; it's just tonsillitis, and it's getting better."

The doctor had the hypodermic ready, and he lost his temper.

"Really," he remarked, "I can't take a lay opinion. I must do as I think best."

Kirby meekly offered his arm; but all at once Mary interposed, facing the doctor with all her magnificence, her face white, her hands shielding her husband.

"You are not going to give it to him," she said.

"Why, this is absurd—"

"Absurd or not, you sha'n't give it to him."

The doctor could only beat a hasty and awkward retreat, and enchanted Kirby grew well in a day.

"No," said Mary, fondling him, "I wasn't going to let my man suffer for a theorist."

Kirby concluded that she was the most wonderful woman in the world. At this time he began to grow patently stouter, and Mary tortured him with a restricted diet and dumb-bell exercises at night. Nothing, however, stopped the corpulent tendency, and the grave-eyed woman could only dolefully mourn the passing of his good looks.

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"A middle-aged husband!" she sighed. "I've been taking too good care of you."

"Middle-aged!" he laughed. "Middle-aged at thirty-two."

However terrific he might be in his work, at home he could be a playful boy, a tender lover, a charming comrade. They both felt that their marriage had been unusually successful.

During all these three years Jordan Watts only appeared in Pittsburgh twice. He spent the night each time with the Trasks, was very agreeable, but not once hinted as to what he thought of Kirby and his future.

But one evening in the fall, at the beginning of the fourth year, while Mary was dressing for dinner, the maid came in.

"Your father's down-stairs."

"Then hook up my dress quick!" cried Mary, flushing with delight. Impatiently she broke loose and flew down the stairs. Jordan was still waiting in the hall.

"Father!" she cried.

"Meg!"

They embraced eagerly, and he patted her cheeks and kissed her with an unusual display of fondness.

"This is great! great!" he exclaimed. "My old girl." Then he lowered his voice: "Is Kirby home?"

"No."

"Due—when?"

"Any minute."

"Then hurry me into some hiding-place. I want to talk with you."

She looked at him sharply, her heart beginning to pound with expectation. Then, laughing like conspirators, they stole up to Kirby's study and locked themselves in.

"Now sit down, Mary," said her father.

He took Kirby's desk-chair and she the arm-chair beside it.

"I've made up my mind," he said, "to give you folks a new chance."

KATIE

"What is it?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Well, you own a hundred thousand in stock, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Then if you'll make it over to Kirby I'll see that he's elected a director, so that he can attend the New York meetings and learn the business from the top."

This was a typical Watts proposition; Mary was rudely disappointed. Always fresh obstacles in the way!

"I'm afraid," she mused, "that Kirby won't do it. He's always refused to touch my money."

"He has?" Jordan chuckled. "Well, it's up to you. As you two rise and fall together I don't see why he should cut off his future with his priggish pride."

"It's not pride," she said, stoutly. "I admire him for it."

"Fiddlesticks! If a man wants to succeed he's got to use everything he can lay hands on. He's done pretty well; now he's got to show if he's big enough to overcome such personal scruples."

Her face darkened.

"I think you might help him, father."

"No," he said, brusquely. "I've stuck to my word; he must stick to his. I offer him the chances; it's up to him to make good. I wouldn't value him at two cents if he had to be helped. You don't seem to understand that he has the chance to become a great man."

"It seems to me," she said, sharply, "that he's proved himself already."

"Tut! a mere beginning. But do as you please." He seemed a little chagrined. "Take it or leave it. Only such a chance won't come again in a hurry."

"I'm afraid," she mused once more, "that he won't take it. Yet I'll ask him."

They went down to the dining-room then. Mary was confused; she knew that this was the opportunity Kirby had been seeking, that it would throw him into direct

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contact with her father, and that he could not help but rise rapidly when he could fight his fight man to man; yet in her heart of hearts she almost hoped he would refuse. She had accepted his attitude on the money, and thought it manly of him to struggle single-handed, to labor along the line of most resistance instead of taking the easy short-cut.

At table Kirby saw that something was "up" and grew excited himself. But for some time he remained unlightened; Mary was silent and old Watts was very jocular.

"You're a fine modern couple!" he cried, indulging in his favorite theme with them. "Always think, you young folks, that there's time enough for children."

Mary blushed, looked down.

"But not for me," he babbled. "If you don't hurry, the little fellow won't have any grandparent . . . Modern corruption! In my time—"

He talked for ten minutes, until Mary cut him short with, "What are you talking about, father? You only had two."

It brought the thought of dead Alice. Silence followed. . . . Then, in the hushed expectancy, Mary spoke to Kirby.

"Father has made us a proposition. He'll put you on the Board of Directors if you become a shareholder by taking over my stock."

Kirby glanced at her, his eyes glittering; he felt his blood rushing; dazzling prospects opened up to him; this was success indeed.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"You know what I think," said Mary. "It's for you to decide."

She waited, trembling; she saw that look of steely triumph, that bristling air of dominance. The whole man seemed to pulse like a powerful dynamo.

"Why," he said, "it's just a formality, isn't it? If it's the only way it would be a shame to refuse."

KATIE

Jordan laughed.

"That's the talk!" he exclaimed. "How now, Meg?"

But to Mary came a black emotion akin to despair. Her reason said: "Of course he must do it. Be very happy," but her heart insisted, "There's something in him you don't fully know yet. He's thinking of his success while you're thinking of him." However, such thoughts must be banished. She smiled lightly at her husband.

"Yes," she admitted, "it's only a formality."

XXXIII

WIPING UP THE FLOOR

ALMOST monthly now the Trasks of Pittsburgh came to New York for directors' meetings and made a holiday of the jaunt. It was delightful to drop house-keeping routine and go from the murky mill-town to the chiseled brilliance of the metropolis, whose abrupt buildings rose sharp in the vigorous blue skies, and whose sunny air was rinsed by the sea. They found a different rhythm of the streets here, a richer, swifter pulsation, an atmosphere trembling with vivid activity. And by night they felt as if they were bathing in the lights. Surely Pittsburgh was a mere lurid pocket of this world-center, this magnet-city that drew the great of every enterprise and profession.

As Kirby put it: "You meet all the heads in New York."

These holidays meant theater, opera, possibly some public dinner or social function; and for Mary there was shopping in the department stores and visits to the tailor, and for Kirby the meeting with great names. Uniformly Jordan took his lunch in a club at the top of one of the skyscrapers, and here in the private rooms Kirby met many men of wealth and power. He was impressed and amazed by the fact that many of these appeared to have the time to sit for hours together, smoking, drinking, and telling stories; he had always imagined that the top men were the hardest worked. He also met a new viewpoint, put forth almost passionately by a

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scion of an old New York family—namely, that in America there were two divinely ordained classes: those God had chosen for obedience, those God had chosen for rulership.

“And,” said this man, “the lower classes are better off than we. Their hard work and poverty is good for them. Look at their wives and ours: theirs are strong and can work; ours are nervous wrecks. It half kills them to bear children.”

A “self-made” man protested vehemently that the wives of the workers were hardly fortunate.

“Some of them,” he said, “instead of caring for their homes, have to go out and work; and they work up to the day the baby is born, and then return to work ten days later. It’s inhuman.”

“You’re mistaken,” said the scion; “I understand they go back to work in a week.”

This amazing viewpoint, coupled as it was with another, that “you can’t keep a good man down; those with native ability rise straight up to our class,” set Kirby thinking. Possibly, he thought, there was something in it. It warmed him with comfort to think that God had plucked him for power.

He could never get enough of these New York excursions; he waited impatiently for each call of a meeting; for not only did he move about here like a free god among the pleasant Olympians, but at the Board table he felt that he had traced back the whole gigantic steel industry to the one little skull that dominated it. Jordan’s directors were echoes of Jordan, and it was wonderful to see the little man sending out thought-waves through the gray brain and flaming body in Pittsburgh, or catching, as it were, the thought-waves of the Siren City and radiating them over the world. He might find that Europe’s demand for rails was slackening; out went his word to close Mill 7. Or Pittsburgh might inform him that there was a rumor that the Senate contemplated lowering the tariff on armor-plates; Jordan would speak to a secretary:

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“Get Senator Stillman on long distance.”

Then he, sitting in his leather arm-chair, sped his mind to Washington, and possibly blocked legislation.

The first meeting that Kirby attended was held late in the autumn, a dark and drenching day. The twenty-two-story Frost Building stood at the corner of Rector Street, just below Wall, and when Kirby emerged from the taxicab he saw, only three doors away, the gas-lit five-story building of the Continental Express Company. He stood a moment in the rain, and, among the hurrying umbrella-lost people, in a shock of the Past. He was eight years younger, a thin and troubled clerk, going down-town in a crowded cable-car, tramping over the sawdust floor and climbing to the third story; the radiator bubbled, the gas flamed above his desk, rain smote the air-shaft window, and there in the corner were Old and Young Ferg; a gong sounded; pen-points scratched in ceaseless monotony. He was caught seemingly in a lifetime of obscurity.

“Extra! Wall Street extra! Paper, mister?” A dripping newsboy pushed against him.

“No,” he snapped and came back to himself. Three doors away? No, eight years, eight ages away. He looked down and saw his ample girth; he felt the heaviness of his jowls; his clothes smelt of a Havana cigar; his stickpin held a rare pearl; he was a Traffic Manager and Director of the American Steel Company. A miracle, indeed; and yet one hundred and fifty feet away, at that very moment, possibly, half-drunk Bradsley was still fussing with tariff sheets. What was real in life?

With a grim snort he entered the Frost Building and took an express elevator to the twenty-first story. The offices were large and simple, furnished in an expensive but unobtrusive way. All the furniture was of golden-oak and leather, the walls were papered tan, the carpets plushy brown, a few maps and pictures of the works hung here and there. The entrance held telephone switchboard and office-boys; to the left were large rooms full

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of busy men and women; to the right Jordan's suite. First, an anteroom where people waited; next, the private office with immense flat desk, empty of everything but blotter, glass inkstand, pen, elastics, and pins; and last, the Board-room with its long table and leather chairs.

From the wide windows Kirby could look directly down on the old crumbling graveyard of Trinity Church. The tall, brown steeple leaned far below him, and Broadway went up and down with little toy-people and little toy-cars. On this same graveyard looked the walls of other skyscrapers, cutting off the view on all sides save the west, where Kirby saw a stretch of low, red roofs along the waterfront, masts of ships, steamer funnels, and a patch of busy river. It was a typical commercial view of New York—the church swallowed in finance, industry, and water and rail transportation. Steel—it all meant Steel: Steel lifted him twenty-one stories high; steel tracks were on the street; steel sewers beneath; steel steamers lay moored at the docks; steel wires enmeshed the city with telephone and telegraph; steel bridges spanned the rivers.

"And Jordan Watts," thought Kirby, "is Steel. And some day I may be Steel."

He was very much interested in Jordan's methods of work. He very soon perceived that the old magnate was surrounded by extensions of himself—namely, lawyers, accountants, secretaries, engineers, draftsmen, and specialists of every sort. He was evidently a great believer in putting each type of work in the hands of a specialist, thereby leaving himself free for the large supervision and the major initiations. He kept fresh this way; he could begin things and end them, the harassing details all worked out by others.

"Yes," he said, "I leave the particulars to others. How, then, do I get results? Simple enough. I pick only the *right* men."

It was his genius in finding and using human material. Among the secretaries one of them, a woman, interested

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Kirby deeply. In a superficial way she resembled Mary; a well-built, mature person, dressed all in black, with brown hair and black eyes. Her voice was soft yet direct; her lips small; her jaw tightly set; there were lines about the eyes and over the broad forehead that indicated overwork and overstrain, but she came and went lightly, commanding, pervasive, watchful. It was her duty to interview and pick from among the callers the lucky ones who would be allowed to see Watts; she also did much of the telephoning, arranging appointments, or turning away trouble. Between Jordan and the vulgar world she stood like a soft buffer. Evidently he was wise in choosing a woman for this delicate task, for the soft answerer could turn away wrathful mortals in a way that was comforting indeed.

This, then, was the outlay. Add to it the seven or eight complacent, rotund, cigar-smoking directors who attended the meetings and this Inner Sanctuary of Steel was complete.

For quite a number of meetings Kirby found himself merely an ear and a vote. Jordan did the talking; the directors listened with evident enjoyment, and then blissfully gave their yes or no as the little man indicated. This annoyed Kirby considerably.

"Some day," he vowed, "I'll set off a stick of dynamite here."

But the opportunity was long in coming.

Jordan treated him in a genial yet impersonal way, introduced him as "My son-in-law, Mr. Trask"; went to the opera with his two children; showed glimmers of his old-time affection for Mary; but never once spoke man to man with Kirby. He was evidently too busy, too engrossed to do so; and, besides, he was almost never alone for more than a few minutes.

In this way the winter passed. The next summer Mary and Kirby made a tour of the West, saw America, and everywhere—in poppy-flooded California, in the Grand

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Cañon of the Colorado, in Yellowstone and the immense Northwest, in Salt Lake City and the great American Desert, and in all the new throbbing cities of the Middle West Kirby was stirred profoundly by the presence of Jordan Watts. His name was in every newspaper, on every tongue; his steel was the tough muscle of every town and hamlet. And evidently the nation was proud it had given birth to him.

As Kirby touched here and there the immense three-thousand-mile spread of this new civilization the sweet insanity of his ambition roused him again. Some day Jordan Watts would be forgotten; then it might all be Kirby Trask.

Full of new power, determined now to bring matters to a swift issue and break his way up without further delay, he returned to Pittsburgh in the fall. His thought was, "I won't be a mummy director any longer; I'll show the old man."

Then in October came the call for a meeting. A year had passed; Kirby was nerved for action.

Standing at ten-thirty at the window of the Board-room Kirby had a vision of golden October in the city. The Trinity trees were yellow and red, and the fresh wind was stripping them and blowing leaves over the trolley-cars; dust eddied in the streets; and over the brilliant blue skies patches of clouds hurried along, passing swift shadows on graveyard, over the skyscrapers, and down on the sunlit people. Sun and shine came and went; it was a vigorous, brittle morning that reddened the blood and roused to action. It was sparkling and joyously exciting. Kirby felt strong, clear-brained, ready.

Directors came in and encircled the silent Traffic Manager. They felt his reserved power, as did every one these days. He stood there in his dark-gray suit, just beginning to suggest massiveness; his head looked bigger than ever, his eyes more piercing.

"How are things Pittsburgh-way?" asked one.

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"All right," he snapped, and was silent.

"I hear," said another, "you're having a little labor squabble over there."

"Yes," said Kirby.

"Anything serious?"

"No."

Conversation sagged.

Then Jordan came in with a bright "Good morning," and took his place at the window-head of the table. The directors seated themselves about him and began to light cigars; Kirby lit his and, in his usual manner, sat hunched up, eyes on the table, seemingly vast distances away.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read by the secretary, then Jordan began swiftly to put propositions, read communications, and get the votes. Nothing debatable appeared in these transactions. But finally Jordan started to speak of the labor trouble and Kirby felt a strange tremor in his breast.

"This isn't an ordinary trouble," said Jordan. "It's not a question of labor-union or strikes. The men of the blooming mills merely want the right to present their grievances by committee instead of personally. They say that personally they are not listened to."

He paused, then continued:

"Ordinarily I would say no. But lately I have been making so many public utterances on the just treatment of the worker that I think it might be good policy to follow it up by this definite action. Later on we could reverse our decision if necessary. Hence, if no one objects, I take it that it is the sense of this meeting that the demand be accepted."

He went through the formality of waiting for an objection. Kirby rose slowly. His voice was hard and vibrant, hammering through the room.

"I wish to object," he said.

The dynamite had exploded; the directors grew pale at this apparition; Jordan was annoyed.

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"Mr. Trask," he said, tartly, "will state his objection."

"I object," said Kirby, "to giving in to labor. I object to a soft policy. I object to weakness. I know the Pittsburgh situation; I have been living in it. Grant this to the men and you open the door for the walking-delegate and the union—it is only a step beyond. I know these men; they are speeded and worked under military discipline. No other method will keep the mills running like a smooth machine. You propose to break this discipline, but I say if you do so you will find that when they have a finger they will want the whole hand. There cannot be more than one master in a house. Either we are the master or they. I call for a secret ballot on this question."

He sat down. The directors moved about uncomfortably; Jordan's eyes were glittering.

"Well and good. We shall have a secret ballot."

The secretary prepared and passed slips and pencils; the ballots were marked; the secretary opened and counted them. An intense excitement was in the room; a strange suspense.

The secretary's voice shook:

"The proposition is lost—unanimously."

Jordan stared. This was unbelievable. His voice was low and hard.

"Very well, gentlemen, just as you wish. New business."

A swift reaction came to Kirby; he had beaten the old man on a show of strength; he had broken down the despotic rule; he had evoked a revolution in the board. But was it well? After all, Jordan still had full power over him; could easily hurl him back to the darkness. His thought was:

"All is up now! Every time I argue with him I make a deadly enemy of him."

And why had he argued? Up to the very moment he had risen to his feet he had never had any definite opinions

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on the labor problem. He knew that several hundred thousand human beings worked for the company like so many cogs in the machine, many of them in the withering heat of flames, in the grime and gloom, for twelve hours out of the twenty-four, many of them seven days in the week. He knew that the ever-swiftening machinery paced the men, speeded them up, made them old before their time, and released them at night to their smoke-blackened homes in the squalid mill-town, fit only for food and sleep, weary drudges in the pit of society—co-creators of this glory of the top that Jordan and Kirby enjoyed. And he knew that these men were spied upon, that any attempt to better their conditions by forming unions was suppressed by discharging the malcontent. All this he knew, and much more; for looming over the times like a black shadow was this immense struggle between the Olympians and the Drudges as to how the power and wealth should be divided. Kirby, once a drudge, knew the grievances of the men. Why, then, had he taken his harsh stand? Was it merely because he had been waiting for a vital argument with Watts and took the opposite side like a school-boy debater?

He went home in a cold sweat, and when Mary returned from calling late in the afternoon he told her.

“And I’ve ruined us, I’m afraid, Mary. He won’t put up with me any longer. Just you watch.”

She laughed.

“I’m not so sure. But were you right in your position?”

“I don’t know.”

“Oh, Katie, Katie!” She fondled him. “How you love to beat your head against stone walls! Never mind; I’ll speak to father.”

They went to their rooms to dress for supper, and when Kirby came down-stairs and passed the library door he heard Watts calling:

“Kirby!”

“Yes.”

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"Come here a moment."

He entered sullenly; he was prepared for a brutal scene. The old man sat meditatively at his desk, his eyes mere slits in the electric light.

"Sit down."

Kirby sat; he thought of that moment when J. J. had begun to curse him, and his heart dropped into his shoes.

Then Jordan spoke slowly:

"Kirby, I'm going to make you a Vice-President."

Strange lightnings played through the bewildered man. He could have risen and yelled. He straightened up.

"Vice-President?"

"Yes. Your office in the Frost Building, and you and Mary will have to live in New York. You might live here—the house is big, and I'm alone. Maybe Mary would run it again for me."

Kirby was breathless; he sat staring at this amazing man.

"Oh yes," added Jordan; "your salary will be twenty-five thousand dollars a year."

Silence followed. Could Kirby believe this? Then Kirby leaned near.

"That's a big thing to do—but why?"

Jordan turned suddenly, clapped a hand on his shoulder, and smiled affectionately. His eyes were twinkling.

"I'll tell you why," he exclaimed, joyfully. "Any man who can wipe up the floor with me as you did to-day I need as a partner. Besides, you were dead right."

And so another miracle had been performed for the hero. Now he had truly risen up on the steps of the throne. But in the wild burst of glory he felt a curious twinge of unpleasantness. He thought of Meggs, and how by trampling on that detail-man he had become Business Manager. Now again by trampling on obscure men—the toilers in the mills—he had seized on success.

But Mary glowed over her two men: her really great father, who was too large-minded to indulge in personal

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feelings, but raised power wherever he found it; her splendid husband, a Vice-President at thirty-three. She was realizing her life-work; it was her triumph. Her father had to admit now that her choice had been perfect; that she had brought him a partner and a son possibly as great as himself.

"Yes," she said, hugging the old man, "I'll keep house for you—just like old times, only better."

XXXIV

A NEW LIFE-WORK

[T was not long before any one day out of Kirby's life might have seemed like a week of the nineteenth century or Europe. He was turning into that mass of nerves of the twentieth century which might be limbless so far as its activities are concerned. It moves mainly on wheels; it is hoisted up and down buildings; it can rest in a chair and argue across a thousand miles, penetrating, mentally, Chicago, St. Louis, Washington, or Toronto; it utters sounds, and the sounds are caught, typed, and scattered by carrier and mail-car; it hungers, and food is brought to it; it desires clothes, and the tailor appears; it craves music, and a pressed electric button floods the room with Wagner. Such was Kirby—an American Big Business man.

Promptly at seven his valet entered and cut down the labor and time of dressing, shaving him besides. Going down-stairs, breakfast appeared at once. His motor waited at the door, and he rushed through half a dozen newspapers on the way down-town, absorbing with jerking eye a colored wash of the world—London, St. Petersburg, Hong Kong, the Isthmus of Panama, Wall Street, and Chicago.

Arrived at the office the opened mail was scanned, letters from everywhere. Then came dictation, long-distance 'phoning, interviews, telegrams, callers, lunch, two or three meetings in various parts of the city, more callers, more 'phone calls. He might speak to a man a block or a hun-

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dred miles away, a man he had never seen, yet project his personality crisply over the wires.

Evening saw him home dressing; then possibly a public banquet or a meeting with a financier or a rare evening of music or drama. Then bed.

At other times he traveled in a private car from city to city, hurried trips back and forth.

In short, he became a strenuous Brain. He did almost no walking; he was eternally sitting in a motor, a boat, a train, or an office; and the swift variety of problems and people demanded thinking, thinking, and thinking through all the waking hours. And all that thinking demanded to turn into action was speech—over the 'phone or to secretary or conferee.

There was something unearthly modern and American in this cerebral life, and Kirby's very appearance began to conform to this inner violence. He began to get a trifle fat, sat dumpy, with big head bowed, and eyes intensely alive. Mental power breathed from him, a very atmosphere. The employees, as they put it, could "feel when he was in his office."

He was, truthfully speaking, a social nerve-center; every fine little wire or line of tracks or sea route the nerve radiations that brought him the world, that winged forth his power.

The speed, variety, and romance of this life were rich indeed; he probably lived at, say, a hundred man-power. Yet the ceaseless process seemed to make him cynical and hard; he had little trust in human nature; less in Nature; his faith seemed mainly in power, in what he called "results."

Jordan Watts stood in awe of this man, who seemed rather like forty than thirty-three. He almost felt as if he had begotten a monster. But daily his admiration and respect increased, gradually he opened up to Kirby his secret plans and thinking, and soon the two men formed a habit of daily secret conferences that lasted an hour or more.

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In short, the aging man began to lean on the younger, and this increasing dependence seemed to emphasize the now palpable fact that he was an old man. He still toiled terrifically, schemed, plotted, and struck bargains, but his whitening hair, his wrinkled face, his stooping shoulders were evidence of a wintry decline. Mary and Kirby hardly noticed this, though Mary said:

“Father doesn’t seem so well lately.”

In fact, sometimes he complained of feeling dizzy. She urged him to see a doctor, and the doctor advised him to retire.

“You can’t depend on that heart of yours,” he said, “unless you ease up. Live quietly, and you have years ahead of you. Don’t go to pieces like our business madmen.”

Jordan was not much impressed.

“I’ll die in harness,” he announced.

Nevertheless, from time to time he seriously contemplated retiring from active life to devote the rest of his days to philanthropic work. He felt that in Kirby he had found his natural successor.

“Yes,” he would chirp proudly now, “Kirby’s my son and heir.”

And he would proudly point to Kirby as an example of democratic America.

“In nine years he rose to the top—broke through everything.”

Kirby was becoming, indeed, part of the bright color and romance of the life of the United States. He grew to be a well-known figure in Wall Street now, and his picture began to penetrate the country. There was a wide-spread feeling that he was the brains behind Watts, and that Watts was passing out of power.

Men generally feared him a little,—the atmosphere of power that surrounded him, the cruel stab of his eyes, the silence and attentiveness while he chewed his cigar back and forth, the final unalterable yes and no.

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"When he says no," said a broker, "it's all over. You couldn't change him with an earthquake."

Naturally this crowded life made Kirby a typical American husband. Mary saw little of him, and when they were together there was either the hurry of getting somewhere else or the presence of strangers. However, at rare intervals, when she begged and finally coerced him to run off with her to High Hill, he was tender, generous, and simple. Yet even then she could not feel that he was "near" her; under his playful exterior ran an under-current of preoccupation, a subtle worry. It was like a troubled woman playing with her child; answering yes or no, patting, kissing, laughing, even building a block-house, and yet all the time lost in another world.

She persuaded him also to see a doctor, believing that he was overworking.

"If you don't exercise," said the doctor, "pretty soon you'll have to be carried about all the time."

But Kirby paid no heed. The most dramatic life on Earth, that of American business, had caught him in its speed and spaciousness. The blame could be laid on modern Communication and Transportation, which, making the world like one house, brought each master in daily contact with a thousand interests.

But however the blame might be disposed of, the real burden fell on Mary. She joined those tragic Americans—the idle wives. It was a pitiable fact that her life-work with Kirby was done. She had sacrificed the world and her wealth to become obscurely domestic in a murky city that she might develop a great man; she had known the maternal joy of seeing her man-child grow under her hands, and the heavy task had brought her a rich happiness.

Now, however, he had passed out of her hands, like a boy who has reached manhood and leaves his mother's house. There was nothing she could teach the Vice-President; events themselves were educating him far more richly than she could even fathom, and, besides, he had a

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new teacher—her father. From daughter to father this fascinating human dynamo had passed, and all the daughter had left was an occasional half-hour with a pre-occupied husband, an evening of opera, a rare vacation that made her feel like a doll more than a wife.

And yet, what else had she in the world? She felt widowed; she felt that her lover was dead. Her married life seemed to end when they moved to New York. Of course she could not but know that she was one of many wives in a civilization that overworks its men and makes them unfit for home relationships. But this knowledge was cold comfort to her aching heart.

Before her marriage there had been excitements of courtships, care-free travel, the running of the household, and the philanthropic work. She had now, however, no desire to set up relationships with the young men who would have been glad to woo her; her love for Kirby ran too deep. Travel now was full of the care of her brooding husband, or separation from him made her lonesome. The running of the household after the first joyous weeks of heading again a well-oiled machine became too easy and monotonous. And as for the philanthropic work, that was being so well handled by the social worker, in fact so much better organized and directed than she had dreamed of, that it was totally beyond her now.

In short, she found that she had sunk her whole existence in Kirby, and Kirby had run off with it. What was left? She was a woman out of a job.

As a result she became a restless American woman, testing and flinging aside one fad after another—now it was a Hindoo prophet; now a new system of medicine; now a new beauty cult; or the craze for a freakish artist. She contemplated trying woman's suffrage activity; she thought of learning Grecian dancing. Yet she found that there was really nothing to do but be idle, to dress well, to make a good showing. And as she went on she ac-

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quired a positive hatred for social functions and the people who circled round her.

Now Mary was a woman of native power; she had much of her father in her. Hence, to compel her to live a trifling life was to clog and stop her up so that she seethed with restlessness and broke out every now and then in some queer way. She had been used, both before and after her marriage, to rich days of hard work and hard play; idleness was killing. She became neurotic, keeping her doctor busy diagnosing her, tried electric treatments, Christian Science, osteopathy, water-cure, and knew in her secret mind all the time that only two things ailed her—she wanted the satisfaction of the two primal instincts, those concerned with love and work.

The desire for love in this strong, upright woman was pathetic. She would never have admitted to Kirby what it would mean to her if he kissed her and fondled her as he had done at Moose Lake.

Naturally there were many times when she thought again of a baby—the matter she and Kirby had discussed in the early Pittsburgh days. But her feeling then was that she must give her time and strength wholly to Kirby; that in those crucial years of development she had to be mother as well as wife to him. Kirby had felt, besides, that a child would saddle them with financial problems that would endanger their home on his small salary.

“Besides,” he argued, “a child anchors a family down. No more traveling; no more freedom.”

There was a more subtle reason, a woman's reason, that troubled Mary. This was the vividly remembered death of her sister Alice. She had said to Kirby once, “There's nothing sadder in the world than that.” She had a strange, unreasonable feeling that she was to meet the same fate; that the little new life would emerge in the world only to kill her and itself. The mystery and terror of the process appalled her; it seemed like the imposing of a death sentence: “After nine months you must meet

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this day of doom—inescapably. There can be no pardon, no reprieve. Once let the process start and it will inevitably fulfil itself.”

Now in these desperate days the thought recurred to her. Here was a natural work calling her; here was a woman's functioning which possibly she had no right to deny herself. The sacred gift of life is, in a sense, only given that it might be passed on. She recalled the night before her marriage, when she seemed to be a glorified gate of the generations; a slave to the Unborn. Was there not something wrong and unnatural in damming the racial flood? For what else, fundamentally, was she created a woman? And if her mother had suffered to give her birth, how could she refuse to meet the ancient doom of woman herself?”

“Am I a coward?” she asked herself. “Am I unsexed? Cannot I endure and suffer as well as the meanest and lowest of creatures?”

Certainly, if to be a modern woman meant neurotic horror of the most elemental thing in her nature, then it might be better to abjure mental growth, social activity, and become a domesticated dullard.

So she reasoned at times, thrilling at the thought that she had the power to reject or create a new human being; that if her mother had rejected her she, Mary, with all her energy and dream and clear-blooded womanhood, might never have existed. A dream-world surely!

So she reasoned. Yet many thoughts checked her. She was not sure that a baby would satisfy her.

“Possibly,” she thought, “if I had had one ten years ago.”

Perhaps it was too late. She felt mature, sober, too old to domesticate herself. A woman of thirty-one or thirty-two appeared to her almost on the verge of old age. And then there was the haunting vision of her fair young sister lying dead. They had told her such ghastly tales of that fiendish night—that night that had driven the young

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husband away to Europe to recklessly squander his life in dissipation.

Nevertheless, by the following summer her desperation had increased to the point where agony and death seemed preferable to an idle life. There was absolutely nothing else to do; it appeared a part of the duty of an American husband to keep his wife from engaging in anything useful.

And Kirby at last agreed with her. He began to see the necessity of having an heir; he could not, of course, live forever. Besides, he figured that child-bearing "would keep Mary quiet." Her outbreaks of irritation, her complaints, her languors and strange excitements, her nerves, all interfered with his comfort.

And so they entered into the profound and thrilling mystery of life, and even to Kirby came the thought that no creation of steel industries could touch even the hem of this natural miracle.

And that strange winter revolutionized Mary. To begin with, she simplified her life—cut out society and feverish activity and fads, and gave herself up to the life of life that was now using her as a channel. Swiftly through her ran the tides of the race, and she awoke to find that she had a new life-work.

She could not have explained the quick change in her spirit; there was no reason now why child-bearing was any more important than it had seemed before. And yet she glowed with life. When she thought of the seed that was growing in her into a human being she went about fraught with large destinies, as if she were a mother of the State. She was glorified by this union with Nature, with the generations, with the eager rush of the floods of life ever beating against the walls of her body.

She felt now that everything else in her experience receded into pettiness; why, she could not tell. Her joy was pure. She refused to import a layette from Paris, as her delighted father urged, and sat down like her mother

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before her and stitched the darling little baby-clothes herself. Over these she cooed and laughed and sang little songs, putting love and joy into every flash of the needle. It was a sight in the evening to see her in her sitting-room, the white filmy stuff in her lap, her eager head bent, her fingers flying. Jordan grew amazingly tender. He recalled his wife, who had once been young and expectant, too.

"Meg," he would whisper, "I can't believe it's you."

And she would lift a blushing face and brown eyes that were luminous with the inner light.

"You're getting more and more beautiful every day, Mary Madonna."

"Oh," she laughed, "I'm getting so that I can't appear in public. Beautiful!"

Kirby felt uneasy; he didn't know how to treat this miraculous love-overflowing wife. He tried hard to be gentle and tender.

"Say," he would break in, gruffly, "aren't you straining your eyes?" Or, "Let me get that for you; you ought to keep quiet."

Then she would pat his cheek and laugh merrily.

"Oh, Kirby, when you try to be polite you're absurdly funny."

His uneasiness increased with the months. Spiritual matters, miracles irreducible to business, made him squirm. He resisted their softening effect. Swelling emotions appeared incompatible with running a steel industry.

At this time Mary was firmly convinced that every thought of hers, every mood and every action, were registered on the growing child. She felt that in this innocent blank she was writing ineradicably her passing moment. The responsibility of this was overwhelming; she could produce, then, a weakling, a criminal, or a genius. Hence the necessity of leading a miraculous life.

So she took long daily walks to fit herself physically, and marveled, as she passed through the streets, that she

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had never before noticed how many women were in her condition. She was convinced that half the population was busied with this process, and she pitied or shared her joy with these others.

"All of us," she thought, "are sentenced."

She also kept fit mentally—read good books, heard good music, gave herself up to poetry and nature and tried desperately never to lose her temper and always to think noble thoughts. Besides, she constantly dreamed of what her child should be: if a girl, a creature of light and fire; if a boy, some kind of a genius. And in order to even have a hand in its physical formation she kept constantly before her and studied devoutly an old photograph of Kirby, taken before he had become fat.

"Like this you must look," she said.

If there had been anything in her theory, that child would have been the wonder of the world. It would have risen from its swaddling-clothes and spouted Browning instead of sour curds; it would have played Beethoven with its tiny waxen fingers; and its beauty would have stricken the watchers with dumb amazement.

Nevertheless, this feeling of responsibility forced her to be active, body and brain, gave her delicious occupations, made her new life-work vital. There were at rare intervals invasions of the old fear, memories of her sister Alice. She laughed them away.

"What do I care," she asked, "if I die for my little one?"

Human life became infinitely precious and miraculous to her. It simply seemed wildly impossible that there was to issue from her body a living child, this sensitive complex of vision, dream, passion, and trembling possibilities. She had the mood of the Psalmist:

"When I consider the heavens, the moon and the stars thou hast made"

It thrilled her unspeakably to think that she was a vehicle for the flame and the glory of the world.

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As the time approached—April—she became truly a holy creature; awesome and lovely, standing in the shadows of agony and death. She was gentle, sweet, grave; into her face went a large thoughtfulness, a suffused and placid beauty that had not been there before. She was one of the common, every-day sacrifices of the race; what roof has not covered such a heroine?

She was fully prepared, tranquil, brave. Life was little to give in exchange for this partaking of the mystery and miracle.

But Kirby's uneasiness became acute agitation. Jordan, too, was "on pins and needles." Both were forced to face the fact that in a few days Mary might die. And thus rainy, sunny, windy April set in.

"What's the matter with Katie?" was the question that flew about the Frost Building and went mouth to mouth down Wall Street.

"Losing his grip?" asked one.

"Oh, I guess he's going insane. The business is wrecking him," suggested another.

"Looks as if he were preparing to commit suicide."

For he went about positively haunted and crazed. He lost all interest in his work, labored mechanically, sat sometimes chewing an unlit cigar, head sunken between his shoulders, eyes bulging. The ringing of the telephone racked his nerves. He was dazed, impotent, useless.

"Take a week off," suggested Jordan.

"Can't. Too busy."

"But, man alive, you're accomplishing nothing. You spoil everything you touch."

"Oh, leave me alone, dad."

So he came each day, a demented man. He had made the disquieting discovery that he loved Mary overwhelmingly. How in the world had he forgotten this primal fact?

The fifth of April was reminiscent of that long-lost May-day at High Hill—a perfection of mild blue skies,

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little winds, suggestions of mud and blossoming and the mating of birds. He opened his office window and heard the restless city yearning for the hills.

At four that afternoon the 'phone rang. He picked it up. "Hello!"

"This is Mary."

He almost dropped the receiver; her voice was quiet, yet it intimated things terrific, the end of the world.

"Yes," he murmured.

"You'd better come home, dear. Oh, I'm all right. But come home."

Like a maddened bull charging he smashed out of the office, went down the elevator, leaped into a taxicab, and yelled to the chauffeur to "run like hell or I'll—" But the door slammed.

He was out of his mind on the way up, but, arriving at the house, he dashed up the steps, unlocked the door, and flew to the second floor. A doctor and trained nurse were already in the bedroom, and Mary stood there in her blue dressing-gown, very pale, her eyes shining brilliantly.

"She's beautiful," he thought. "Why must she go through this?"

They kissed each other.

"I'm all right," she said, in a queer voice, for she was trying to keep from him the strange fact that she was terrified beyond all reason. "I'm all right. Now you go down. I just wanted to know you were near."

"Mary," he whispered, "what can I do for you? What can I do?"

She smiled faintly.

"Please don't worry, dear. I'm all right."

But she was not all right; already Nature was seizing her and swinging her to and fro in a frightful abyss, making her know of a surety that never had a woman suffered like this before. How long could she stand it? Her body was being wrenched in two. And suddenly she seemed panic-stricken.

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"Please go," she said, in a voice that shot him out of the door. The nurse closed the door on him firmly, and frantically he lunged down the stairs and rushed into the sitting-room. There stood Jordan in the dim light, and both knew they were men—miserable, wicked men—and the most helpless and paltry creatures in the universe. Poor old Jordan stood there, twisting his hands, scared into old age.

"Has it begun?" he asked.

"Good God!" cried Kirby, "why did I get her into this trouble?"

"You'd better take some whisky," suggested Jordan.

"Yes; and what can she have? Lord, I've been brutal to her. Oh, dad, dad, I can't stand it."

And then the long wait began. Time and again they tiptoed out into the hall, and stood on the lower steps, listening. No sound was heard, and yet up there in anguish and terror a new soul was being born into the human world. Kirby went to the window, flung it open, heard the soft, restless April night, the hum of the careless city, marveled that this tragedy was lost in the seething and laughter of New York. Then Jordan sat down, and Kirby began pacing the floor, flinging off his coat, tearing open his collar, running his hand through his hair. The only break was when another doctor and another nurse hurried up the stairs.

"Why another doctor?" asked Kirby.

"Oh," said Jordan, "to give an anesthetic if it's necessary."

A harsh new fear possessed him, and the tense minutes passed one by one. Now they heard the door open and shut and the hurry of a nurse in the hall. Now only a dead and infinite hush. It seemed that they could wait no longer; as if their heart's blood was being wrung out drop by drop.

"And she looked so beautiful, so pale, and her eyes shone so," thought Kirby.

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Seven o'clock came—eight—nine. Again and again they went and listened. Then at nine-fifteen Kirby grew white as a sheet and tottered.

“Was that Mary?” he asked.

“Yes,” whispered Jordan.

Kirby could not believe it; Mary would never give way like that.

“Oh!” he whimpered, “oh!”

A knife was stuck in his heart and twisted round while those screams of the creation-moment rang through the house. Then terrifying silence followed. Was she dead? Kirby clung to the stair-post.

The door opened above; a nurse appeared shadowy on the landing.

“Mr. Trask?”

“Yes.”

“It's a boy.”

Strange, convulsive tremors attacked Kirby's chest, reached through his throat, and the hard fighter of steel changed into a weeping father. He sobbed; his heart melted; divine love and tenderness and relief swept through him. He climbed the stairs; he paused at the half-open door.

“May I come in?”

“A moment,” whispered the nurse.

He entered. There on the bed lay Mary, her face white and bathed in sweat, her lips smiling sweetly, her eyes almost shut. Her beauty was complete; the ineffable wonder of motherhood lay on the dreamy face. And all at once a strange sound, like the noise of a fighting cat, rose from the foot of the bed.

“What's that?” asked Kirby.

And the nurse lifted it—the queerest, knobby-headed, red little boy-baby that had ever been supremely ugly.

“It's your son,” she said.

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TO Mary there came now the marvelous moments when she was merely a tide of love that went out and enfolded the little life that fed on her. In her ecstasy she could not sleep that first night, but lay laughing softly whenever she heard a stir in the bassinet or that strange, squawking cry.

"Ah," she breathed, "the poor little thing."

Once she dozed, and waking suddenly exclaimed:

"Where is he? I can't see him."

Such was her stretched weakness that the raising of a hand was no mean enterprise. The nurse put the child beside her where, by turning her head, she could gaze at it. Never had she seen such tiny perfection; such foam of fingers, such utterly little lips, such wonderful deep eyes. To be sure, the head was frightfully misshapen, so much so that Kirby knew secretly that the boy was deformed and was badly frightened. But to Mary the baby was ineffably beautiful.

The fact that it lived, breathed, cried, opened and shut its eyes, stirred about, that its heart, no bigger than the tip of a thumb, beat against her, was to her an impossible miracle. Had the heavens opened and the child descended to her through flames she could not have been more divinely amazed.

"And I'm his mother," she thought, "and Kirby is his father."

All life had changed; she and her husband had joined

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a receding generation, and this helpless seven pounds of baby raised in the night the cry of the future. From hand to hand the torch passed, and the light in the eager children's faces cast into the shadow the aging parents. But were the parents not living all over again in the children, vicariously experiencing a new existence? At least for the present Mary lived so; her whole being in the hunger and sleep and stir of the babe.

Kirby entered in the morning with awkward, soft tread; his gentleness with her was exquisite.

"Ah, Kirby," she murmured, while he fondled her delicate, blue-veined hands, which seemed bloodless and weak, "you love me again, don't you?"

He leaned to hide the tears.

"I always have," he whispered, hoarsely.

"And our son," she went on, "don't you think he's beautiful?"

"Oh, yes, yes," he lied, devoutly.

"Did you ever see such a cunning little fellow?"

"Never."

"Go and look at him again."

He lumbered over and gazed on the malformed thing.

"You haven't held him yet, have you?"

"No," said Kirby, in a fright.

"You must, then. He's so little. Miss Wilkins, let him have the baby."

So the bundle was lifted and a paralyzed Vice-President held it out as if he expected it to explode.

Mary laughed.

"Son, what do you think of your clumsy father? Oh, take it away from him; he'll drop it."

The nurse accompanied Kirby to the door, but out of ear-shot he spoke eagerly:

"Come in the hall a moment."

She stepped out. He put the fateful question:

"Say, is the kid's head all right?"

She laughed merrily.

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"Surely. It 'll come round in time. Most of them are that way."

He swore with relief, and went down to breakfast.

The child made a great change in the house. All life revolved about it; the servants, the callers, and the two men became gentle and eager servitors of the divine visitor. A sweet spirit reigned that seemed to evoke in each something benign and kindly.

Kirby now understood how grossly he had failed as a husband, how little time even—to say nothing of affection and comradeship—he had given his precious wife. He recalled remorsefully how she had wrapped her whole existence in him in the Pittsburgh days, given him all, inspired and checked him, kept him to his career.

"Yes, Mary made me," he told himself. "Mary made me."

His debt to her seemed almost as great as the debt of life the new baby owed its mother; and yet the only payment she had asked of him was his love and fondness and a little of his time and strength. He had failed even to give these trifles. And now she had endured agony and risked death to bear him a child, and by this one sacrifice belittled to pettiness his strenuous life and growing greatness. For what were steel rails and telephones compared with that tiniest babe, that helpless littleness crying for arms to hold it tight, which by its mere appearance made a dusty household overflow with tenderness and mercy?

Of course civilization had still to be captained, else it might collapse. The people must be fed. Machines and commerce must continue. And he, as a captain, could not desert his post. His responsibility was overwhelming; he was, in a sense, performing great services for the world; all his genius and power were harnessed to a basic industry. He was, after all, so he argued, one of those great executives who help to keep the world going, help to get the world's work done day by day, help this production and distribution which builds cities, feeds, clothes, and grows

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the populations. By such reasoning he could condone his falling off as a husband; he, too, in a way, was a sacrifice.

Nevertheless, he decided to follow Jordan's wise example and delegate large portions of his work to picked specialists; this would allow him greater mobility. And as a result he fell into the habit of leaving his office early and stopping in on the way up-town to get flowers or a delicacy for Mary. Then the twilight hour was hers, and they would sit together at the open window and chat affectionately.

Her changed personality affected him profoundly, for now that rarest human wisdom of all, the wisdom of old wives, was hers. She seemed to have a new patience, a larger understanding, a mellowness of spirit, a richer intonation of the voice. She looked older, her face fuller, with beautiful lines of pain and experience and darker tints of life in the eyes. It was the ripening process of primal functioning. She was a woman now who knew life, who had lived, seasoned by pain, purified by love. She was that star of the race—the mother.

And so once again a woman evoked the angelic in Kirby, and for a while the lover in him was balanced against the schemer and fighter.

"You're changed," said Mary; "you're my old boy again."

"That's because I'm jealous of the new boy."

"Jealous!" She laughed with the soft delight that always came when she thought of the baby. "Why, he's getting to look more like you every day."

"You mean his hands and feet."

"No; everybody says so. The doctor said so this morning."

"Then I'm sorry for him," said Kirby. "But why was the doctor here?"

Mary laughed brightly.

"I won't stand for that scientific nurse. She tries to

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bring him up as if he were a machine. I guess my instincts know more than her old maid's brain!"

These things amused Kirby vastly. That baby was evidently the most sensitive organism that ever tried to weather the blows of this world. Wrangles went on as to whether he should lie on his right side or his left; whether he should be allowed to cry until his heart broke (or he fell asleep with tear-drops on the filmy lids) or his mother should snatch him up and cuddle and spoil him.

"Ah," murmured Mary, "I can't let him cry. He's so tiny."

And every time the infant sneezed she insisted on telephoning the doctor. She endured a series of divine terrors over the most amazing trifles; leaping out of bed at one in the morning because she had a feeling that a safety-pin was open and would stab him to death, or running up two flights of stairs to see if he was in a draught.

For a while she nursed him, and lived very strictly again, lest temper, or salad, or weariness should give him colic. But when he was put on a bottle her new problems staggered her; every formula that disagreed with him causing her to torture herself. And of course daily she weighed him and was ecstatic or miserable over the scales. It was a very little business, maybe, taking care of one child, yet she found it an enterprise that exhausted her.

Kirby of course was fiercely proud that he had a son; he bragged about the small man whenever he had a chance. But his joy was as nothing compared with the happiness of old Watts. That white-haired grandfather found his second childhood with the baby. He insisted on bringing home a new rattle every day, and it was a sight to watch him crowing and laughing and playing with the placid youngster. He would seize it up and go thumping up and down the room, making ridiculous noises. He would blow a horn for it and ring bells in its ears. Or he would keep building up fires in the grate because the baby's

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face lit up whenever the flames gurgled. His delight knew no bounds, and his pride was insufferable. Naturally the baby had been named Jordan Watts Trask, and what greater joy could there be than in petting and playing with his namesake?

Mary delighted in watching the two together—the old and the new child; but she had to admit now that her father was an old man. That first pathetic agedness she had witnessed on the night in Maine when she had broken his will over Kirby had now reached the point where it was daily in evidence.

That summer the family was moved by motor up to High Hill. It was a season of simple happiness; yet for Mary there was one ominously tragic event. This was the discarding of the baby's long clothes for shorter ones. She mourned over the fact.

"He's a baby no longer," was her thought; "he's growing up."

And now it seemed to her that life was cruelly brief; the child in arms turning into a man overnight, the man growing old at once like her father. Soon, she felt, she would be out of a job again; her new life-work over. But then she would be old herself.

The two Jordans had become great chums; each day saw one in the arms of the other borne over the grass and out to the stables, to the wonders of cows, horses, and pigs. But the old man often ailed; he had recurrences of his dizzy spells, and when the family returned in the autumn he went again to his doctor.

The physician spoke very emphatically.

"There's only one thing to do—retire at once. Otherwise I won't be responsible for you. You've lived a dozen lives already, and the body won't stand for it."

Jordan laughed.

"Oh, I'm good for a little fun yet. However, give me till the first of the year."

He certainly was good for "a little fun," as events

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proved. In November he was sixty-seven years old, and the approach of this birthday brought a spontaneous rally of the metropolis around the old man. There was a general understanding that the time had come to celebrate a great American.

A banquet then was held in his honor in the ballroom of one of the great hotels; three hundred of the nation's high and mighty, men and women, sat at the glittering tables in floods of soft light and under streamers of black and gold, and the balconies were crowded with visitors. On the raised platform, fronting the brilliant audience, ran the long speakers' table, and in the center sat a little white-haired man smiling radiantly. No dizziness to-night; he felt clear, strong, powerful—one of the dynasts in a young democracy.

Speaker after speaker eulogized him. "More than any other living man he has helped to make a world-empire of America." He had proved in his own life how the low become high in a republic; he was compared to Lincoln and Washington; he was analyzed as a man who had brought prosperity to millions, given the workers employment, built cities, and yet in his latter days had risen to the supreme heights of philanthropy, scattering his millions with a lavish hand to heal and bless and bring knowledge and peace to the people.

"And yet," said one speaker, "demagogues of discontent have arisen who would seek to defame him with cries of plutocracy. But the sober sense of the American people will crush these malcontents, these anarchists and enemies of the republic. If Jordan Watts is a plutocrat, let us have millions such!"

This was a new note at a banquet; possibly the first public appearance of the shadow of a new national struggle. The audience applauded wildly, rising and shouting.

Jordan was deeply stirred by this. Of late he had been forced to become cognizant of a new cry that was being raised. He had always looked upon himself as a benefac-

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tor and an inevitable dynast, skipping, perhaps, many pages of his life-story; yet here was a young politician in Ohio making a speech that echoed over the land, wherein he warned the people that their power was passing into the hands of the few, and that the monstrous Trust was an Octopus, whose tentacles spread over America and sucked the life-blood of the people; and here in a popular magazine—a sturdy offshoot of *Harrington's*—there was appearing a series of articles on “The History of Standard Oil,” wherein it was shown that that corporation had risen by slaying, crushing, and defrauding men, and an appeal was made for a new moral awakening. Kirby, of course, had also been made aware of these things, and the shock had been rude. He had thought that the great industries were based on a rock, that here at last, above the drudges and skyrocketers, was security and lasting power; and yet for a quivering moment he had the feeling that they were merely larger growths of a J. J. business, based upon quicksand. But the thought that his power and wealth might sink under him was too monstrous to entertain; besides, he had daily proofs of the rigidity and endurance of the machine, and the strength of his will. So he put the thought by as idle.

Nevertheless, when Jordan arose at the banquet and raised his clear voice, which carried through the hushed hall, he began his address with a warning:

“I am glad the last speaker denounced the demagogue. Every time a man succeeds a dozen fail, and the failures, in their bitterness, are willing to wreck the whole social order, that they may gain by violence what they were too weak to gain by honest labor. Beware the failures! If they should mislead the people, the splendid machinery of civilization we have reared in the Western world will be stopped and smashed by anarchy, and America will meet the doom of ancient Rome. Better than agitation, new mills; better than discontent, the smoke of factories, the hum of cities, the crowding of schools; better than dem-

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agogy, unclogged industries that bring peace to the world."

Then he went on to repeat his famous and naïve "advice to young men"; such scattered pearls as these:

"It is not riches that matter: they alone don't make a man happy. It's knowing 'I wronged no man.'" "You can have a happy home on fifteen dollars a week. Young men, marry. Own a bit of land, and be a free king in our victorious democracy." "I consider a man who helps himself as ten times better than a man who requires help." "If I have shown one thing in my life, it is that any one of ability, who is willing to work and to save, can rise to the top."

They applauded him vociferously; they rose and drank a birthday toast; and surely, gazing at the flower of civilization below him, he could not help but feel that he was a successful man. Messenger-boy to multimillionaire, obscurity to this sweet fame, years of struggle to this supreme hour of world-recognition; what life had ever been more romantic than his? And this surely was the crowning moment in his career; for not alone the three hundred faced him and heard his words and applauded. No, he spoke straight to the eighty millions of America and the hundred millions of Europe; for in a few hours the newspapers from the tip of Florida to utmost Oregon, from London to St. Petersburg, would scatter his message and his triumph among the nations. The whole civilized world would exult in him.

But when Kirby and Mary got him at last into the automobile they found him so exhausted that he could not speak. They had to help him up the stairs to his bedroom and he had to be undressed.

"I'm afraid," said Mary, "the dinner was too much for him."

And in the morning, when he came tottering in to breakfast, Mary was genuinely alarmed.

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"Oh, it's nothing—just a dizzy spell—let me see the papers."

The headlines pleased him: "Public Banquet to Jordan Watts"; "A Speech of National Importance"; "America's Richest Man at the Height of His Career"; "Warning against Agitators"; "Advice to Young Men."

His hand trembled over his coffee.

"Father," said Mary, "please don't go down-town to-day."

"Oh, I'm going," he said, obstinately.

She argued with him, but it was useless, and her heart trembled with dread when she saw him helped across the sidewalk by the chauffeur. But he turned and smiled at her.

"Don't worry, Meg."

She was constrained to run out in the raw, blustering weather and herself wrap a robe about him. Then she kissed him.

"Come home early, anyway."

"I will," he said, smiling. "I've made a date with little Jordan."

He dozed a little on the way down, but at the Frost Building insisted on the chauffeur leaving him at the elevator. He entered the offices with uncertain step, but nodded brightly to the employees, then stepped into his private office and shut the door. At once he plunged into his work, as usual; secretaries came and went; letters were dictated; notes scribbled on postal cards.

Kirby stopped in a moment.

"How are you, dad?" he asked.

"Chipper and happy. Don't I look it?"

He looked, thought Kirby, unusually old, but Kirby said nothing, and went back to his work.

The old man was alone for some time, mainly telephoning. Outside the hard, gray heavens went gustily by, and the wind smote the windows, but Jordan paid no attention. He was toiling terrifically, as usual.

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Then at a quarter to eleven the 'phone bell rang. Jordan leaned over to the instrument.

"Hello!"

"Long-distance Washington; Senator Barlow on the wire."

"Yes, hello, Senator!"

"Hello, Mr. Watts! It's this matter of appropriation for the Wyatt Bridge—"

"Yes, John. Now, see here." His brain worked busily. "That project has got to go through before the end of the session. My Pittsburgh people tell—"

That was all. Simple as the simplest of things, and hence profound and terrible. An old man merely sank back in a comfortable chair, and at a snap all that busyness of thought, of empire, of dream and command, vanished, and left behind a bundle of skin-wrapped bones. The old messenger-boy had gone on an errand for a bigger magnate than himself.

XXXVI

THE SKYSCRAPER

“CENTRAL” warned the telephone operator, and the young woman, sensing catastrophe, rushed into the private office. She saw the gray face, the wide-open mouth, and ran out shrieking.

“Mr. Watts is dead,” was the terrible cry that sped through the place; and the pale-faced, panicky employees and Kirby crowded into the room. It seemed impossible that that tremendous life could stop.

Kirby felt his heart bursting within him. The tragedy moved him inexplicably. He had the body placed on the lounge, and sent for doctor and private ambulance. Of course these were foolish formalities, yet his whole being cried out for action. Something must be done.

Then, standing, looking on the dead clay, he remembered Old Ferg. The worn-out drudge, the worn-out magnate, had both come to the same thing. He himself was hastening through his excited years to the same end. All came to this. And of what use were empire and glory and the pageantry of the world?

He felt the foolish tears rise to his eyes; tears not alone for the dead man, but for himself and for all human beings. A brief glitter in the sun and the cruel mystery engulfed them. Life was bitter, he felt, fiendishly bitter, and all his greatness fell from him, and the dead man and himself were atoms in the night, one still troubled, the other evidently passed beyond trouble. And this personality that once had struck fear and admiration in his heart, that

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once he had envied and aped and fought with, was now an armful of ashes. It was heart-breaking.

He hurried home ahead of the body and found Mary in the nursery, holding the child. His quiet, his pallor, when he entered the room, as well as the unusual hour of his return, made her quickly put the baby down. She stood up, wide-eyed.

"What is it?"

"Father," he began, and a hoarse sob choked him.

Her face turned white; they hugged each other desperately.

"So it's come," she whispered. "Father! Father!"

And later, when she beheld the form that once she had seen young and sprightly, the busy father who had fondled her and called her "Meg," the inevitability of beautiful and proud youth becoming aged and wintry, oppressed her heart. A few months back the sweet blossoming new life had emerged through her; now a similar life, after the swift process of the years, passed into death, withered, sapless, and decaying. Her father, too, had once been a baby, a sweet, fresh thing at his mother's breast! And was her baby now to become this—this misshapen and worn-out thing? All in a few years! She and Kirby first, but day by day the change in that young and dewy babe! She felt as if these thoughts were killing her, mingled as they were with her powerful love for her father.

But the body was laid away; the baby laughed and cooed; shopping and marketing had to be done; friends called and sympathized; the husband returned to his work; and though the old house knew a blank in itself, as if its old spirit had departed, or as if one of its limbs had been amputated, yet the routine of life, the clamorous needy day and the busy night, swept the family on, until Jordan Watts was more of a memory than a presence. He had come, shaken the world, and gone; but the world moved on as if it did not miss him, as if no man is indispensable. After the first swift panic in Wall Street, which Kirby

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stopped by making an official statement that the industry was continuing without abatement, business and life in the metropolis took the old stride, and the world revolved about other names.

One of the strangest experiences was to sit at table every night without Jordan there; but even this strangeness wore off—the vitality of these human beings overflowing all tragedy, all loss, just as April covers the barren pastures.

However, there was one change which became permanent. When the will was read it was found that nearly a hundred million dollars went to philanthropies, much of it funded in a Watts Foundation, which was to make a business of working toward World-Peace and higher forms of education. The rest of the estate descended to Mary and Kirby and the baby, with a few personal donations excepted; and thus Kirby stepped into absolute power.

"The king is dead; long live the king!" And the new king became at once one of the international figures of America. Now a newspaper might flash a heading:

TRASK SENDS STEEL SOARING

His power was unbelievable. He sat now in Jordan's office like a monstrous brain with his nervous system spreading out over the continent; truly now the mills blazoned the sky with his fame; and where before the name of Jordan Watts had been sown over the cities until every tongue echoed it, so now for the time being the name of Kirby Trask. The day of that curious slogan, "Nobody loves a millionaire," had not yet dawned. "Katie" he was called popularly, after the democratic fashion of calling a President "Bill" or "Teddy," and, like Jordan, he became the model of youth, the example of American success. Such chance phrases as he dropped were apt to be sold on placards for twenty-five cents apiece, and had he stepped into the Guthrie Shorthand

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School he would have been surprised, perhaps, by a new legend on the wall:

"I have found stenography a stepping-stone to commercial supremacy."—KIRBY TRASK.

He was a multimillionaire now; and as honey draws flies, so he attracted a buzzing swarm of the great and would-be great. Senators and Representatives became his friends; the President of the United States called him into consultation; the mighty heads of other Trusts, and those powers behind all the other powers, the great Wall Street financiers, asked him into their homes and their clubs. And his freedom was unlimited: he could dress, act, do as he pleased; come and go; be more silent than ever. The king could do no wrong!

Curiously enough, this final triumph did not make him any happier. It had come gradually, and it had come through death, and in his meditative mood he felt only the crushing burden of a world-responsibility. Now there was no Jordan to spur or check him; no teacher. He had to look for all strength and wisdom in himself. He was, in his business hours, the loneliest man in the world. Naturally cut off from others by his unsociable manners, he was further cut off by his feeling that every man he met was trying to best him, to get "something out of him," and that most of them were secret enemies. Even the other officers of the company affected him this way: were they not all eager to seize what he held?

There was another disturbing element—the rising of a tide of popular discontent all over the country, directed against great accumulations of wealth and power. Daily this tide rose, expressing itself in "muck-raking," in Presidential messages, Congressional investigations, in strikes of labor, and in governmental suits to dissolve the huge trusts. This was disquieting; but Kirby paid no serious attention to it. Every age has its "calamity-

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howlers," its "agitators," he argued. In the first flush of success he could not be expected to find much of a menace in a wrathful democracy.

He felt secure; he owned the major interest in a basic industry that must last as long as civilization lasts. It was absurd to think that this power, risen from the people, would flow back to them. All he had to do surely was to hold on, and neither enemies from within or without could budge him from the throne. But the bright wonder of conquest he had expected was not here. As a young man he had felt that unlimited dominion would plunge him into ecstasies; but here were both he and Mary taking it all as a part of the day's work, a part of life.

There was, however, a fresh and thrilling element. This was his unhindered power to put into execution the new and dazzling schemes he had in his head. Such was his successful project to absorb the only large rival of the Trust; and his other to triple the exports to the European markets. He engaged also in much rebuilding of the mills, and in the final installation of scientific management. In this field he was a pioneer, half a dozen years ahead of the world.

He also instituted relief work among the workmen, doing excellently in protecting the men from dangerous machinery, in rebuilding mill-towns, in giving medical attendance, funds for accidents and sickness, old-age pensions; but he went no further. Though he saw the menace of that black shadow of a struggle between the Olympians and the Drudges that might yet imperil the rule of the magnates, though once he had been a drudge himself, he continued the Trust policy of spying on the men to prevent their organizing, of working them a twelve-hour day.

"There shall be only one master in this house," he thought, and left this peril to the future.

For some time he and Mary conferred over the problem

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of what monument to build to her father's memory. Finally he hit upon an original plan.

"It must be down where he lived and died," said Kirby; "down in the business district. And it must have steel in it, and tower over the metropolis."

In short, he projected the Watts Building, the tallest in the city. Some of the newspapers made merry over this. One jesting reporter wrote: "Making a Mausoleum Pay. . . . Here's a tomb that is going to pay rents and profits. A modern pyramid that isn't going to go to waste; it's to be steam-heated, electric-lit, and have express elevators, vacuum-cleaners, mail-chutes, and a few corporations. . . ."

Possibly Kirby saw his error in publicly calling it a monument, but he held on grimly, and while it was in process often he had the chauffeur run the car past it, or pause before it, while he leaned out, and with his piercing eyes gazed at the yawning rent in the ground, the laborers swarming like flies over the rocks and dust, the drills thumping and steaming, the steam-shovel "eating up the dirt."

And as he saw it rise, a great rust-red skeleton of steel, and the red-hot rivets were flattened with the clamorous air-hammer, and the derricks hoisted and placed the beams, and the hardy iron-workers balanced dizzily on a foot-wide flooring, he thought: "I am changing the skyline of New York; I am topping the metropolis with a statue to Steel; I am showing my power before the people. At night my tower-light will be seen through all New York."

It was probably as much a monument to living Kirby as to dead Watts. But it rose, and there it stood at last, in the autumn, forty-five stories of granite and marble and steel.

Kirby had planned to have the top floor and the tower set apart for the company, with the circular room at the tower's top fitted for himself. _ Windows were to cir-

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cumscribe it so that one could see the whole circle of the city beneath, that city terrifically, beautifully alive in rush of white light, in great blowing of smokes.

Kirby had to go West in September; he reached home again in October, late at night. Mary's first word was: "The building's finished. It's wonderful."

Kirby had the curious sense of coming into his kingdom.

Then the next morning a divine surprise awaited him. As he entered the hall to go down to breakfast Mary called him from the next room:

"Come into the nursery, Kirby."

He went in. The snug room, with its brass crib and tiny white furniture, shone with bright morning, and on the lap of that mature woman whose beauty now was matronly (how Mary would have hated the word!) sat the little boy, already, with his large head and gray eyes, a replica of Kirby.

Kirby leaned and kissed his wife.

"What is it?" he asked.

Her cheeks were flushed with excitement, her eyes shining. She stood the little fellow on the floor between her knees.

"Stand over there and wait," she said to Kirby, and to her son, "Go to daddy!"

And the miracle happened. The little feet stumbled along, and in a wild rush, with lusty shouts, the boy staggered into his father's arms. It was the spectacle of that moment when the human race left the quadrupeds by standing erect. And Kirby was thrilled almost to tears; for an instant he divined the wonder of human life, and his kingdom vanished in the white light of humanity. And he only wished, with his heart and soul, that this boy might grow to be a splendid man, a wise man, a good man; and for a moment he was stung by a sense of his own responsibility to the people, his sacred trust.

But he went to breakfast and read the papers. Here

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was news of a steel strike in Germany. Excellent that! The exports for a while would be doubled. He took out pad and pencil and began to figure. He entered his automobile. The chauffeur leaned in:

“To the new building?”

“Yes.”

The car shot the length of the brilliant city. The morning was lusty and blue; the tides of humanity were still racing workward; activity, joy, health were in the sparkling air. Down Broadway the automobile sped, held up here and there at a crossing, winding in and out among the trucks and cars, blowing its horn, speeding deep into the heart of the city. And then it stopped; the chauffeur opened the door, and Kirby stepped out. People jostled about him; Broadway up and down was in cool shadow, a mighty river-roaring cañon. He looked up. He saw the rise of the Watts Building up and up till it broke through the skyline and held the heavens alone with its white, fluttering flag. He passed with curious excitement through the arched entrance. The marble arcade was golden-globed, and on the left were brilliant shops and on the right the bronze doors of the elevators. He could smell the mortar, the paint, the fresh dust; workmen in overalls still went to and fro; the elevator-starter, in his bright uniform, bowed to him. He entered an “express” elevator, the signal-lamp glowed red, the doors shut easily by compressed air, and the steel car mounted the shaft like a rising eagle, noiseless, swift, resistless, with the quiver of pinions. Up and up it went for a whole minute. Then it stopped, doors opened, and he stepped out on the top floor. Already the clerks were moving in, a bright bustle of vanmen, of disarranged furniture; the telephone-girl at the switchboard smiled on him. He glanced swiftly, then climbed the circular stairway to the tower. Yes, he was passing above even these. Brilliant light flooded the round room; on the green stone floor was a rich rug; the large desk stood in the center. And there

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he stood, with sharp, gray eyes, graying hair on the powerful head, massive jaw, a bulky creature at the city's top, looking out. He was utterly alone in the skies.

Below him rose the skyscrapers, giving slanting glimpses of deep streets busy with tiny black people and darting traffic, and from their tops curled white smoke in the boundless swim of sunlight. He saw the waters that circle the city like a hugging arm of the sea, and on the level stretches harbor-craft and ocean-liners. He saw the bridges suspended between Long Island and Manhattan, Brooklyn beyond; he saw the Jersey heights and inlets swarming with houses and smokes; and he saw north the sweep of New York to the gleaming Bronx, homes and factories, schools and churches. All the mighty metropolis stretched like a map below him, crowded to the circling horizon with millions of human beings.

And he remembered the day he had come to this city and stood in the deserted cañons, an atom. And all at once he exulted in the miracle that had lifted him to the topmost tower, with all the city under him. He was dominating; he saw his empire starting below, a little sea-fragment of the Western Hemisphere. He had been merely a poor American boy in an obscure town; now he dominated: now on his actions and his thoughts hung panics that might send a swift ruin on the land, hung enterprises that might lift it to higher levels of happiness and health. His words went forth like merciful or devastating armies. He could overthrow in bloodless battle like Napoleon.

He was not awed this morning before this power of his; the terrific burden at this moment did not trouble him; he merely exulted. And he remembered the process that had brought him here, and understood what it implied. First he had been among the multitude of drudges, then he had risen into the skyrocket class, the adventurers trying to break to the top and ever in danger of falling back, and finally he had risen to the Olympians.

THE SKYSCRAPER

And he began to understand what had brought about this three-layered civilization. It was Science tearing off the crust of earth and releasing the powers and riches of Nature. Busily the race seized on these, a chaos of rough enterprise—mines, manufactories, laboratories, exchanges. And in the swift trade that followed three mighty gods began to roughly organize the chaos—Steam, Electricity, Steel. The railroad came, the post, the mill and farm machinery, the typewriter, the telegraph, the telephone, the automobile. And all these were like nerves and blood-vessels laid out through the chaos till it began to coalesce, the parts aware of each other, the Earth gradually shaping into one body.

Geniuses had risen from the people and accelerated the process, cut out waste, combined industries, until the mighty Trusts emerged, and the new rulers, the Trust Magnates. The power of kings had crumbled before these new dynasts: theirs was a military power based on applied force; the new power was the power over the necessities of life based on inherent force. Hence, the new dynasts had a power transcending that of any previous race of rulers.

And Kirby had become one of these and exulted. It seemed right that he should be so, it seemed democratic. It seemed right that in a democracy the men of genius should break to the top and manipulate the power. Some one had to manipulate it; heads were needed; who could do it better than those who had shown the native ability to succeed?

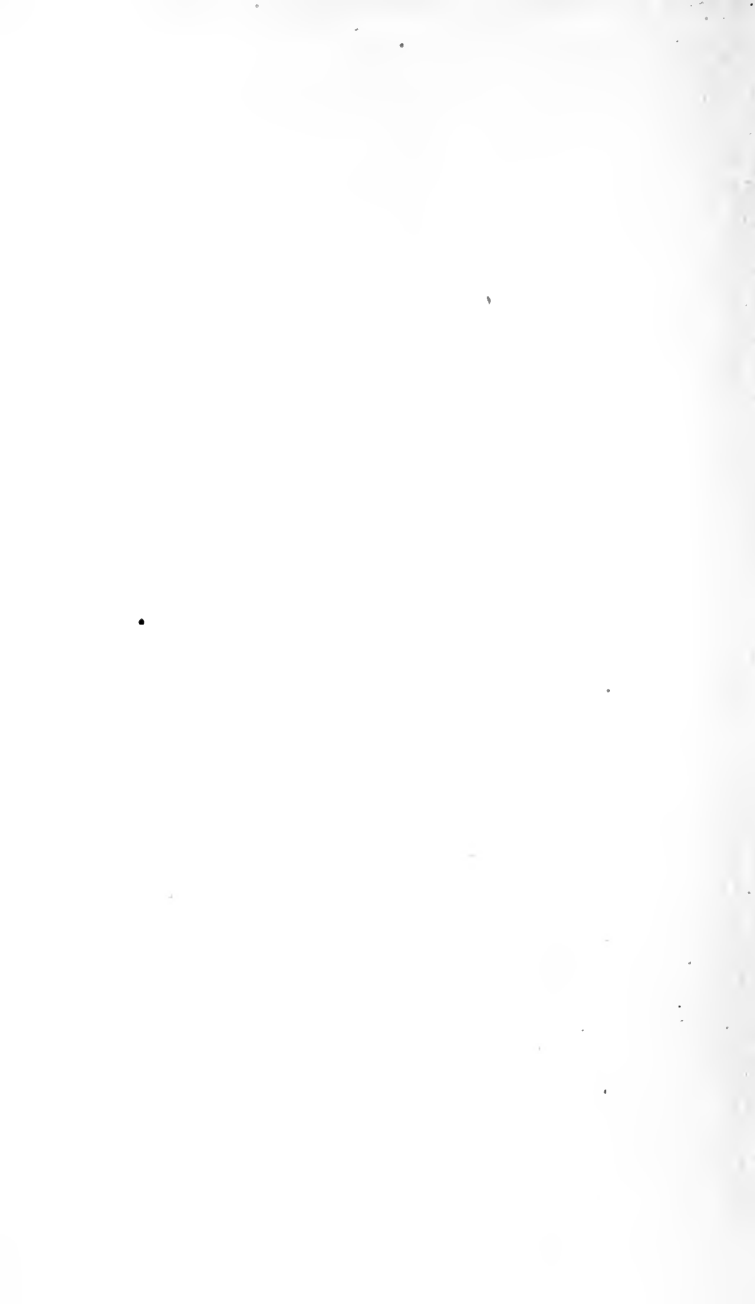
It was, he knew, unlike a king's power; it could not be passed on to the son unless the son had the genius of the father; lacking that, a great fortune swiftly broke up and passed to new hands.

And so he felt righteously crowned. And he throbbed with pride to think that he belonged to a great country that could automatically hand its geniuses to the top. Out of the millions Kirby had emerged, and now, at last, he dominated.

THE OLYMPIAN

It was a dramatic moment. This building was a throne; this hour his coronation. And he did not doubt that his power was as tough and durable as the steel sinews, the stone-flesh of this mighty skyscraper. He was a skyscraper himself, risen in the heavens of America. What agitators, what popular discontent, could shake this dynasty of Steel?

THE END



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