Miss Grosvenor.

On Fortune's Road

Stories of Business

By

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With Eight full-page drawings by Thomas Fogarty

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I

IN THE PANIC

On Fortune's Road

I

IN THE PANIC

TURNING the corner hurriedly, Miss Grosvenor saw that the run had begun. A file of savings-bank depositors, already a rod long, reached from the open door of the bank, forming along the inner edge of the broad flagging under the supervision of two policemen, making an odd little human fringe to the base of the mountainous building that towered in glass and granite fourteen stories above them.

Even as Miss Grosvenor passed, others came. They seemed to spring out of the flagging. There were working-men and a few dressed like clerks. There were women, many of them shabby and of a foreign aspect. One clutched a bank-book, and with the other hand led a girl of eight or nine years, who moved along with the slow procession docilely, staring with a child's wonder. Nearer the door was a young and well-dressed woman, who bit her lip continually, and kept her eyes restlessly averted

from those who passed along the street. One could see that she was ashamed of being found in that out-at-elbows company, of standing out there in the street and confessing her anxiety for the few dollars she had on deposit. All eyes turned again and again to the open doorway ahead, through which the line slowly marched. There were nervous movements of lips and fingers. There was a restrained eagerness in the slow pressing on to the goal within, where the money lay.

The July sun beat down upon the stone sidewalk and the stone street. Foot-passengers hurried along the flagging. Wagons and cars rattled over the pavement. On every side, interminably, square after square of solid masonry arose. All seemed commonplace, all seemed enduring. Only there was this shabby little fringe like a human powder-train at the base of the bank.

"Panic!" the newspapers called it in staring head-lines. Banks and commercial houses were going over like dominoes. Stocks were falling. No man could borrow. All at once the firm ground of credit had quaked and opened in fissures.

The big square banking-room, with its tile floor and rosewood counters, looked enduring too. But the file of besieging depositors wound around two sides of it, ending at the brass wickets of the savings department in the corner.

Mr. Miller, the president, stood at the door of his small, glass-walled office in the opposite corner.

Behind his smiling face, picturesquely framed in a pointed red beard, there was a certain blind resentment against these shabby people. They were the big, indubitable sign of that universal loosening and unrest which he felt like rising waters licking at the foundation of his bank. They advertised a distrust of the bank as in letters a mile high, at a time when to allay fear was to live, and to excite it was to perish. Well, they would get no money. The bank had at once taken advantage of that provision of the law which permitted it to require sixty days' notice before the withdrawal of savings deposits. He felt like shouting to them, "Go away! Keep cool, and all the trouble will be over!"

Then he saw Miss Grosvenor coming up to the little gate in the rosewood railing before his office. She smiled as their eyes met, and he waited for her to come to him.

There was no time when this handsome sister-in-law was not a satisfaction. But just now especially the man looked down at her with a faint smiling, which was a kind of confession. He liked even her costume, which was a pale sort of blue with a good deal of lace about it. The dress gave every advantage of her pretty figure. He liked her steady gray eyes and the dimple in her chin, and the little parasol, fringed with lace, which he called "swagger."

In his office, which was only ten feet square, Miss Grosvenor took the chair at the end of the desk, and

Miller sat facing her. His face was composed, but there was still a faint smiling in his reddish-brown eyes. Quite unexpectedly to her and even to himself, he said quietly:

"I take a lot of stock in you, Anne," and an instant later he gave a little laugh at his own inconsequence.

But the woman understood. It was an expression of the good fellowship, the good understanding, the affection, that lay between them. Even so slight an expression from the undemonstrative man touched her sharply. It made her feel, too, that the crisis was actually at hand.

The financial details were dark to her, but her imagination supplied light enough. She knew that they were hanging by a thread and that something was required of her. Her hands came together in her lap. Her heart was beating rapidly. Her lips parted from the effort of respiration. Her eyes clung to Miller's face.

"Yes, Walter," she said, and the man knew that she was ready.

Miller put his hand to his beard a moment.

"I sold your bank stock this morning," he said quietly. "You and Clara had a hundred shares apiece, you know. Of course Clara's will be gone up if the bank fails. But I sold yours at par, and I 've got the ten thousand dollars here for you now. I want you to take it away. Naturally, if the bank fails, I can't draw out any money to-morrow; or,

for that matter, I could n't get anybody to buy the stock of a bank that had failed."

He smiled, and Miss Grosvenor understood that this sale of the bank stock was some sort of fiction; that in effect he had bought it himself, and drawn the money from the bank through some contrivance or other.

He stooped, opened a drawer in his desk, and took out a square package done up in yellow paper, — just the sort of package one might come from a store with, — and laid it on the corner of the desk near her.

Miss Grosvenor looked down at the package. For a moment she seemed unable to get her eyes away from it. Miller felt in her the leap and quiver of the nerves which one feels in a well-broken, spirited horse that has been startled. In fact, her enthusiasm for the service which Miller was to require of her abruptly died out. This seemed to her so vulgar, so like taking somebody's spoons.

"What would you have me say if I were questioned about it?" she asked in a low voice, her eyes still on the package.

"Oh, it won't come to that," said Miller, coolly. "At most, if the bank fails, this is only ten thousand dollars out of twelve millions. This thing could n't have come at a worse time for me. I 'm a rich man, but I 've been running against the current too long. Just now I 'm fearfully tied up. If the bank fails, I don't know 's there 'd be a solitary

dollar I could lay my hands on. I have some rights here. The panic is n't my fault. I don't ask anything for myself. But there are Clara and the children at the sea-shore. You know what they need. I 'd be ashamed of myself if I had n't the courage to look out for them. And it just comes to that — to the courage to maintain one's self. It 's a question of self-appreciation. My wife and children were not brought up to be beggars. I want to get this thing of the wife and children's maintenance out of the way. Then I can fight out the matter of the bank with a free hand. I intend to pull it through yet."

The sound of resolution, of steadiness, in his voice elevated her. She took up the package definitely and arose. She had a sense of coming into a man's sphere of action, taking her part in a man's fight — and she hated timorous women. Was not Walter making his bigger fight? It was part of her point of view that in such a crisis his women should stand by him and ask no questions, like those who loaded the muskets in other circumstances. She walked out of the office, her head up, with a touch of conscious erectness, carrying her yellow bundle conspicuously with a kind of pride.

At the gate in the railing, looking out at the line of besieging depositors, she saw a face in the line — that of a girl whom she identified as one of Clara's Sunday-school enthusiasms. The girl was looking at her. But there was no sign of recognition on Miss Grosvenor's part, and as though the girl had

turned to her with a personal judgment, she gathered herself proudly and swept out, carrying her yellow package.

The girl had looked away quickly, confused at having met Miss Grosvenor's eye. Now she moved on patiently, a step at a time, with the slow line, holding her bank-book in her hand. She was not at all shabby, though Miss Grosvenor could at once have told that her neat little blue jacket, from the front of which the shirt-waist bosom puffily protruded, and her becoming hat got their effect of smartness with a small outlay of money. She was perhaps eighteen. There was still a touch of girlish color in her thin cheeks. Her dark hair was smoothly parted over her white brow. Her dark eyes kept turning to the wicket ahead. She had long known whom she would meet there. His eyes and hers had mutely exchanged glances. The young man's face was distinctly German — young, pale, with a jaunty little mustache and a roll of dark hair above his high forehead. When the girl came up to the wicket she spoke to him in German.

"Well, Kurt, we thought it best to come," she said.

"Yes — with the others!" he said. There was a touch of reproach in his tone, and he bent over the pass-book without looking at her.

Minna saw that he took it as she had feared he would; and certainly it was not just nice to put

Kurt's bank and Kurt's judgment thus under suspicion. She leaned close to the wicket and spoke softly in her intimate German.

"Thou knowest how nervous papa is, especially since he can get out no more. It is much to us, this fifteen hundred dollars — all we have. He was anxious. It was best to come, dear."

"Oh, yes, surely. It is right." The young man looked up at her with a certain contrition and with a quick outflow of affection. She was so patient, so sweet, so good! "Yes, it is right," he repeated. "You give notice now, you understand, and in sixty days —"

"Yes, I understand. Then, in sixty days we can draw the money. If the bank does n't fail, we will not wish to draw it; and if it should fail, then we will be safe."

Kurt opened his lips to speak, to explain. But he felt a helplessness against this ignorance. Why say to her, "If the bank fails, your notice will amount to nothing; you will lose your money just the same"?

Minna added, with a touch of gayety, "But certainly the bank will not fail."

"Oh, the bank fail! Certainly not." Kurt smiled indulgently, as though the bare suggestion called for charity. The superior smile became quickly more personal as he looked at her. "I will come down to-night if I can," he said.

"Yes, do."

Others were pressing for a place at the wicket, and she nodded brightly, and turned away.

The young man's eyes sent a last glance after her — the dear girl! He went on with his work. Three o'clock came. The front door was shut. The file of depositors began to shorten, recruits being cut off. The pressure of work lessened. The clerks had the big bank to themselves. Two of them, in the cage next to Kurt, were working together over a ledger.

"Will the old shebang pull through?" Kurt heard one say in a low voice.

"Dunno," the other answered sullenly. "Be a tight squeeze, I guess. You bet I drew my money out yesterday — had to make a payment on my house." The man drew the corner of his mouth sarcastically, without looking up.

Kurt stared at them in blank astonishment. The bank to fail! Mr. Miller's bank! What could the fellows be dreaming of?

"Wish I had my money out of here," the other muttered. "I 've a good mind to draw it right now, rules or no rules." The man gave a rebellious glance about, his nether lip protruding angrily.

Something came into Kurt's throat; but as yet he was simply overwhelmed with astonishment. He laid down his pen, and walked out of the cage in a kind of daze. A small door behind the big vault gave into a passage that led to a lavatory. Opening this door, Kurt surprised Schwartz reading a

newspaper. Schwartz was one of the bank's watchmen. He regularly borrowed the paper that Kurt got from the old folk in Hamburg. But it was the "Daily News" that he was reading now, standing in a corner of the passage, his watchman's cane hung over his arm. He had folded the paper to a narrow strip which he held up to the electric light, reading clumsily through his glasses. As the door opened, he started guiltily. But it was only Kurt.

"What 's up?" the young man asked.

The watchman peered down the passage suspiciously. Then he bent to Kurt, laying a heavy hand on the youth's shoulder, and holding up his newspaper.

"See, Kurt," he whispered in a guttural confidence. "Barnes has failed, and so has the Packers' Bank at Cincinnati. That means good-bye to Willy Miller and this bank."

The youth looked up at him with a kind of appeal. "God! You don't mean the bank is going to fail?"

"Sure. They know it already up in front. They are sending for the clearing-house committee. Thomas told me, though Old Nick only knows how Thomas knows. He knows everything."

Thomas was the watchman who stood near the officers' desks, and "up in front" was the space about Miller's office where the management sat.

Kurt went back to the teller's cage. His hands worked on mechanically. He was think-

ing of Minna. He had got them to deposit the money in the bank. He had got them to let it remain there. And Minna — the girl's face kept coming up to him, so patient, so good, working away with her little music-teaching and her little German-teaching — a mere girl, too. Now and then a start of hot tears came to his eyes as he set his teeth together and boiled with a rage to rush "up in front," and tear the money out of their hands by main force.

Presently he heard the man next him saying again, "I've a good mind to take my money right now."

There were some packages of bills in the teller's drawer in Kurt's cage.

After that the passage of time itself became fantastical, so that little incidents stretched out interminably, and an hour went by in a wink, until he was walking on Michigan Avenue, looking up at a big house, Minna by his side.

He knew it was Miller's house, and that they were going in.

As they turned from the flagging and began to ascend the broad stone steps, there was a quailing in the pit of his stomach. His nerves ached. But Minna went up confidently, and pushed the bell-button as though she lived there.

A footman appeared, holding the door only a little ajar, his aged, chalky, large-boned face peering out cautiously.

Kurt was nearest the door. "From the bank," he said without premeditation. Minna stepped up with a little friendly nod, and smiled as though she were going in as a matter of course. Her face was familiar enough, and at once the footman was throwing the door wide open.

"Where is Mr. Miller?" Minna asked.

"In the library," said the footman.

"This way," said Minna to Kurt, and the two began to move down the hall, quite at home.

The footman stared after them a moment in mere bewilderment. He made a move to overtake them. But who could tell? All sorts of people were coming at will.

The second apartment on the right-hand side of the hall was the music-room. Minna led the way in there without hesitation, knowing that the library was just beyond. The room was unlighted. The heavy doors to the drawing-room in front were closed, but a light shone strongly between the curtains that hung in the library door. It was absolutely still. They advanced halfway across the room, and stopped by a common impulse, for a singular scene lay disclosed beyond the curving curtains.

A dozen men sat about the long library table. Their head-gear was carelessly disposed on the table itself and on convenient chairs. Some of them were smoking. Midway of the table a man with a lean, colorless, square face, under bushy eyebrows and a

shock of iron-gray hair, was figuring silently on a big sheet of paper. Miller sat at the upper end of the table. His brows were contracted in a slight, anxious scowl. A half-smoked, unlighted cigar was between the fingers of the hand that rested on the table. With a kind of covert restlessness he watched the man who was figuring. The other faces about the table were waiting. One, next to Miller, was stout, bald, and sanguine. A serene, well-composed one framed in silver-white beard was farther down. A big man whose double chin overflowed his shiny white collar rested his plump white hands on the table, and turned a pencil end for end with a silent, nervous motion.

Kurt mechanically identified them one by one. Each name stood for a great bank. In a moment he caught the significance of the conjunction of these names. It was the clearing-house committee, — a Sanhedrim of finance. It could say that this house should survive, that the other should perish. It gave decisions from which there was no appeal.

Abruptly, without looking up, the chairman began to speak.

"You 've tied up one million eight hundred thousand dollars in one way and another in advances to that Electrical Development Company of yours, Miller, practically loans of the bank's funds to yourself. What do you expect us to do for you?" he demanded. His hard gray eyes looked at Miller challengingly.

Kurt felt Minna's hand pulling on his arm. It came to her then, with awe, that Miller, too, stood before his judges. With noiseless steps she and Kurt moved back toward the door.

"Not out in the hall," she whispered. "The servants won't let us stay. Over here in the corner. We won't listen."

They stole to the dim farthest corner and sat down, shadowed by the big drama that had suddenly opened before them. They knew that Miller stood up; that he was talking. At times a loud, angry clash of voices came out to them. Then the argument went on swiftly in lower tones.

Presently, without warning, Miller stepped to the doorway. He rolled out first one and then the other wing of the double door behind the curtains, closing in the library and the committee, leaving himself in the music-room. He walked rapidly to the hall, disappearing. The waiting couple heard his step, then, a moment later, a sound in the drawing-room as though he had gone in there.

"Come," Minna whispered. They arose and glided to the hall. But as they turned toward the drawing-room door, Miss Grosvenor came running down the stairs, and darted in there ahead of them. They hesitated a moment, and drew back to the music-room.

When Miss Grosvenor ran in, Miller sat on the farther side of the room. He had slid far down in his chair, his legs sprawling. He looked tired and

worn. His linen was soiled with the dust and sweat of the day. His reddish hair was rumpled. There were dark lines under his eyes. She saw in his face, in his attitude, a man tormented, pulled out to the breaking point. A slight smile moved his bearded lips, and she felt, too, that his courage sufficed, that he had himself in hand.

She sat down quickly near him, leaning toward him.

"How has it gone, Walter?" she breathed.

"It has n't gone yet, Anne," he replied quietly. "It turns mostly on some loans that I 've made to the Electrical Development Company. They say I had no right to make them. So Buford is figuring on taking that affair off my hands. He 'll cut deep if he does it. You see, I 'm a lame duck just now, and the question is whether it 's best to pluck me altogether or just to take off a wing or so. A man can do nothing. It 's all in their hands, and they will decide it according to their jealousies and self-interests, and what not."

"But if they decide against you?"

"Then it's all up." He spoke quite serenely.

"It is n't fair!" Miss Grosvenor exclaimed fiercely under her breath. She looked angrily in the direction of the library. She felt a big rage against this committee that was calmly deliberating Miller's fate. "There is no justice in it," she went on hotly. "I hope you 'll use every advantage you can get. A man ought to."

Miller gave a little laugh.

"Yes, that 's what the committee thinks," he said.

"Oh, well —" Miss Grosvenor began; then she checked herself. "I suppose it 's the rule all around," she added helplessly.

"Yes, it 's the rule," said Miller. "I don't know 's it 's so bad a rule, take it all around. Otherwise, I suppose I 'd be running a little grocery store, as my father began doing. Only if a man happens to be the under dog —" the banker sighed. "Well, we must wait."

For some minutes neither spoke. The stillness grew oppressive. To the woman they seemed in some way cut off from the world, waiting. In spite of her striving, fear stole over her — a big fear. She felt its crushing weight at the centre of her heart. She had an inexpressible wish to escape, to be softly snatched away, to slip back at once to some dreamed condition of sweetness and security.

Then both she and Miller were aware of a soft stir in the hall, of some mumbled words. The face of the old footman appeared in the doorway, dubious, bewildered, apologetical. Directly behind him appeared a young woman and a young man.

Miss Grosvenor was mechanically identifying the girl as the one she had seen in the line of depositors — Clara's Sunday-school enthusiasm. Miller recognized the young man as one of his clerks.

The footman melted ineffectually away, and the two young people stepped into full view. Minna

crossed the threshold first. Kurt stepped to her side, and the two waited, picture-like. The girl's soft eyes passed over Miss Grosvenor and rested on Miller. Kurt was quite white. A package wrapped in newspaper protruded from the pocket of his sack-coat, and one hand rested upon it. His straw hat was in the other hand. His wave of hair was disordered. He had eaten nothing since the hasty bite at noon. He had worked hard and suffered. There was a quailing in his stomach, and he felt a kind of cold limpness in his nerves and sinews. But he was standing up by Minna without faltering. She had shown him what to do. There was no motion in his mind of drawing back. The girl spoke.

"There has been a mistake, Mr. Miller. Kurt has made a mistake, and we wished to see you about it — without waiting." Her voice was clear and sweet, like her face. The note of youth and innocence was in it.

Miller waited, completely surprised. As for Miss Grosvenor, her eyes were on Minna.

"He was a teller to-day," the girl went on steadily. "I had some money in the bank. He had deposited it there for me. He heard, or thought, that the bank might fail, so I would lose the money. He was excited and confused. So he drew out the money for me. Then we saw that was n't right. The bank might — might — " In the moment of faltering over the right word to express their doubt respecting the bank, her eyes fell, and by a subtle

inflection Miss Grosvenor felt at once all the effort it had cost this girl to make her simple declaration. Miss Grosvenor's eyes were still fixed on the girl's face, and there was an odd constriction at her heart.

"It might be too late to-morrow, sir," Minna went on, looking up at Miller again. "So we came to-night."

"Yes," said Miller, kindly.

"We brought back the money," Minna added. She looked at Kurt.

The young man took the package from his pocket, as though her look had given him the cue. He started forward nervously and laid the package on a chair, as Miller did not offer to take it. He stood very close to Miss Grosvenor, but he seemed not aware of her. He was looking only at the banker.

"I was put on in the savings department to help out to-day," he began rapidly. His voice shook, and the hand next Miss Grosvenor, with which he fumbled for his pocket, trembled visibly. "I could n't bear that she should lose her money. It 's all they have, and her father is n't well. So — I took it, sir. I took it and signed her name to a receipt." Tears started to his eyes. He was overwrought. "I took it," he repeated. "I will confess it anywhere — anywhere that — " He choked over the word.

Minna stepped beside him and slipped her hand through his arm.

"Her touch quieted the young man"

"He did n't think," said her clear, steady voice. "As soon as he thought it over, he saw it was wrong."

Her touch quieted the young man. His hand still fumbled tremulously about his pocket. He bit his lip.

Miller's eyes were downcast. "I understand," he said in a low voice, without looking up. "You 'd best take the money back to the bank in the morning."

"But if the bank should — should n't —" Kurt stopped helplessly.

There was a pause. Then the banker lifted his eyes to the two faces above him.

"Yes, the bank may not be open to-morrow," he said quietly; and with a quick throb that was in some way one of pain as much as of pleasure, Miss Grosvenor felt him coming up to this situation — as trying in its way as the larger one — with the same steady courage.

"So — we could n't give it back then — maybe — and we came to you," Minna exclaimed. Miller's suggestion had evidently confused her. She looked at him in a troubled way.

"That is, you take me for the bank?" he asked, with a touch of a smile.

"Why — of course, it seemed so —" Minna was answering, and she was still evidently confused.

Miller smiled a little more. He looked up at the girl kindly.

"Well, take the money home," he said. "Keep it. I say so. Now that it's done, it does n't matter. You need n't bother about it."

Nothing could have been more kindly than the banker's manner. There was even an affectionate quality in it. Kurt stared his surprise.

Minna's lips parted. Her eyes shone softly. Her surprise was very pretty. But in an instant she seemed confused again. A little line came in her forehead; she looked at the banker in a troubled, appealing way.

"But — but — is that right, Mr. Miller?" she pleaded.

The banker still looked at her with his faint, kindly smile. Even her confusion was charming.

"I say so," he said. "And I am the bank, am I not?"

"But — but — " The line in her brow grew deeper. Abruptly tears sprang to her eyes. Her graceful body bent appealingly toward the banker. "We are poor people, Mr. Miller," she cried out in distress. "We don't understand these things. But Kurt must n't do wrong. You see that."

The appeal came straight out of her youth and innocence and love. Miller stood up. His hand went out, and for a second touched her shoulder lightly.

"Yes, yes," he said quickly; "I see that. Leave the money here. It is better. You have done right." He glanced at the young man,

and repeated, as for him, "You have done right."

"Thank you," said the girl, shyly and uselessly. The two made as to go. But Minna turned back, still very close to Miller, looking into his face. "You won't blame Kurt?" she said softly.

"Not a bit," said Miller. "If the bank stays he will stay."

"Thank you," she said again.

"Thank you, sir," said the young man, and they went out together.

For an instant both Miller and Miss Grosvenor looked down at the package of money wrapped in a newspaper. Miss Grosvenor was first to speak.

"I suppose I might put it with my ten thousand," she said with a short and bitter laugh.

In the instant she felt herself put aside in some subtle way as being ineffectual, unhelping, unimportant. She had the sense of a queer, potential sort of kinship between that gentle, unknowing girl and the hardy, sophisticated banker. The girl's courage matched his, and her own courage in taking the money seemed so poor, so shabby. It was like being found without one's clothes. She felt that in some way she had failed her brother-in-law — and she liked him so well.

Abruptly she bent forward and clapped her hands to her face.

"It makes me ashamed, Walter," she said, her head bowed.

Miller looked down at her sympathetically. The picture of youthful love and innocence which had been before them made its appeal to him, too.

"Yes, our lost paradise," he said kindly. "It 's pretty. It 's beautiful. But if we 're to go back to it, you know, we must go back to the grocery store, too, or to something even simpler than that. A house on Michigan Avenue and a place at the sea-shore mean things not paradisal. You can't make a fortune or keep one in Eden. That girl can do it, of course, and she can make her young man do it. But we 've paid a good deal for our sophistication. And don't we like the sophistication pretty well, too? Would you rather be Miss Grosvenor of Michigan Avenue or Anne What 's-her-name of Halsted Street?"

Miss Grosvenor dropped her hands in her lap and looked down at them rather pathetically. "I think I 'd rather be Anne What 's-her-name — if I could," she said in a low voice.

The picture that had been before them troubled her heart. That other girl seemed to come straight out of the dreamed condition of sweetness and security. Her courage had been so fine, so beautiful. Miss Grosvenor looked up at Miller appealingly.

"That ten thousand dollars, Walter," she said plaintively.

"Yes," said Miller; "it 's uncomfortably naked, I admit. It 's a trick. But, in the main, it 's no

different from a lot of other things. A good many other ten thousands that go to the making of a Miss Grosvenor or a charitable Mrs. Miller have about the same flavor. For my part, I think they 're worth while. I like the money. Of course the other thing does appeal. It — does seem — safe." He let the words drop one by one, and looked steadily at his sister-in-law. "Still, if you wish, the ten thousand will go back to the bank."

He sat down as leaving it all to her. Miss Grosvenor was tracing lines with her finger over the arm of her chair.

"Oh, I don't know," she sighed helplessly.

After a while she heard the snapping of Miller's watch-case. It was growing late. The stillness of the house again oppressed her. In some way it seemed like the emptiness of her life. She had no more argument. She simply sat, waiting. There grew up in her a conviction that the decision would be against them. If only in some way she could begin over again!

It seemed to her that she felt before she heard the stirring at the library door; with a sense other than hearing quailed from the strident cry, "Oh, Miller!"

Miller arose. For an instant, as he stepped toward the door, he looked at her, his eyebrows drawn in a scowl which expressed simply a stubborn, belligerent readiness. She felt his courage, but it did not help her.

During the long wait that followed she had a fear of stirring, lest the slightest motion might in some way touch off the avalanche and bring the very house crashing about her.

At intervals the murmurous sound of voices reached her through the closed door. After a while she knew that the men were coming into the hall. There was a sound of steps and of voices. Once or twice she heard a subdued laugh. The front door was opening and closing as the men went out rapidly in groups.

Then the door closed with a kind of definiteness. It was still. She knew it was all over, whatever it was. She took her nether lip between her teeth and laid her hands tightly on the arms of her chair.

Miller appeared in the doorway. His face seemed composed. He stepped across swiftly and stooped slightly above her chair. Then she saw a quiet smiling, and she knew at once before he said:

"It 's all right, Anne. The bank won't fail."

She sprang up, stammering, "Oh, Walter!" The next instant he had put his arm over her shoulder comfortingly as though she were a child, and she was crying a little.

"It was trying, was n't it?" he said soothingly. "But it 's all right now."

Suddenly Miss Grosvenor made a pirouette, whirling clear around, and faced him again, beaming.

She was bubbling over with happiness. She did not philosophize, but at once, as though a bad dream had gone by, she felt her life, full, warm, sparkling as ever.

"It 's just splendid!" she declared in simple, pointless exuberance.

Miller smiled down at her. "Yes, it 's all right," he said.

Her eyes fell on the package wrapped in newspaper. "Oh, and now the poor things won't lose their money. I 'm so glad of that!"

It seemed to her the crowning stroke of good fortune. She threw back her head and gave a laugh. "But I believe I 'll keep my ten thousand, now that I have it," she declared.

Miller looked down at her humorously, perhaps a little satirically. "Yes, it 's a good joke now, is n't it?" he said.

Miss Grosvenor sobered. She looked down a moment. When she lifted her eyes he saw doubt in them.

"Was it just because I was afraid — a little while ago?" she asked.

"That you wanted to be so good?" Miller replied, and laughed. "Well, being afraid is a powerful incentive to goodness." He laughed again and put out his hands and caught her by the shoulders.

"You see it is n't worth while to be afraid," he said. "Keep your head up and your hand steady.

Isn't it better to be Miss Grosvenor than Anne What 's-her-name?"

"Yes — now," she admitted.

But after she had gone upstairs to her own room, in blue and gold, she kept thinking, "Was it just because I was afraid?"

II

A DAY IN WHEAT

II

A DAY IN WHEAT

A VICTORIA drawn by shining bays, the coachman in drab livery faced with yellow, wheeled up to the curb on the east side of the Board of Trade.

Miss Thatcher did not at once offer to alight. She reefed her gaudy little parasol, and looked deliberately up the craggy bulk of granite that towered overhead. She was aware, as parts of the picture, of the windowed broadside of the bank blocking their dingy bit of street just to the north, and of the awkward mass of the elevated-road station shutting off the view to the south. An inarticulate roaring of human voices came out of the broad, open windows above.

"How much noise they make!" she commented, gathering her skirts.

"They 're always at the boiling-point," said Miss Gund, briskly, with the advantage of her experience. "I hope they 'll boil over for you. Maybe Arthur can get them to. We may as well get out."

Miss Thatcher's eye had been quick to catch the gilt signs on the two windows and the door across

the sidewalk: "Gund, Randall & Morehouse: Stocks, Bonds, Grain, Provisions." That, and the mere glimpse beyond of a big bare room full of lounging men, were rather disappointing — not so suggestive of money and excitement as she had supposed.

She alighted in a leisurely way. Shorter and plumper Miss Gund followed her with a bounce which seemed rather due to the environment. Everybody hurried there, even those passing men who turned briefly challenging eyes upon the tall, alluring figure beside the carriage. Miss Thatcher did not mind the glances here more than elsewhere. It was an advantage of her size and beauty that she could stand calmly aloof.

But Miss Gund was less serene. "This is the office," she said. "Oh!"

The office door opened, and a large young man came hurrying out to them. His big, loose frame moved with a kind of awkwardness, and he took off his straw hat, someway as though he wished to hide it, disclosing a long, narrow brow, and a thinness in the lightish hair over the top of his head. But his long, smooth face was distinguished in a way by the amiable mouth and the mutely eloquent brown eyes. He briefly, even hurriedly, shook the neatly gloved hand which Miss Thatcher extended.

"Is it a good day for us, Arthur?" Dora cut in at once; and his one tiny hope that, after all, they were not going to stay, fell to pieces.

"Why, no; it is n't really a very good day," he began. His troubled eyes even made an appeal to Miss Thatcher.

"Perhaps you 're too busy," she suggested. She mentally drew herself up.

"Oh, I 'm sure it 's a good day," said Dora, with sisterly privilege. "I read the 'Tribune's' Board of Trade column to Margaret before we started, and it says the market is 'wildly nervous.' That 's good for us, is n't it? We want it to be lively."

"But if you 're busy —" Miss Thatcher insisted. His was not the attitude which she had reason to expect.

But Arthur had come out of his helplessness. It was apt to be that way with him — as though it took his machinery a few minutes to get into running order.

"I meant the gallery will be crowded," he explained lamely but amiably. "Of course I 'm not too busy. I 'm only a sort of flourish in the office as yet, anyway."

They started across the flagging.

"Oh, and will the 'bull clique' be up there, — the one the 'Tribune' says is running the market? How shall we know it? Can you point it out?"

Dora paused at the door to put these questions with a touch of excitement.

"I hope it will come out and perform for us," said Miss Thatcher. "What is it they do? 'Go broke'? Will it do that?"

A little panicky constriction caught the young man's heart.

"Perhaps; I'll ask them to!" he cried in nervous recklessness. But Miss Thatcher was passing him to enter the door. Her beauty was too near; it was too real. His eyebrows drew together. "I hope they won't 'go broke' anywhere, Miss Thatcher," he said in a sort of hurried aside.

It made a commotion in her nerves — perhaps not an unpleasant commotion. What an odd speech!

She affected not to hear, and she glanced calmly at the strange scene — a big bare room, with a space at the left divided off by a cheap partition of stained wood and ground glass, the remaining space mostly filled with chairs, in and over and about which men lounged. There were some big blackboards, whereon two boys nimbly entered chalk figures. It struck her as decidedly unkempt and smelling of tobacco.

They crossed the width of the office, and were nearing the door which gave into the main hall of the building. In the corner was a small den partitioned off with the same stained pine and ground glass that made the larger division.

"Oh, here's papa's hole," said Dora, cheerfully. "Is he in? Let's speak to him."

"He's busy," Arthur warned hurriedly.

But Dora had already stepped aside, tapped at the small glass door, and was opening it and peering in.

"Shut that door! Go away!" said a high, peremptory voice from within.

Miss Thatcher recognized the voice of Peter Gund, and her face became blankly composed. Instantly she felt a sort of dismal failure in her expedition. This bare, unkempt room, with its air of cheapness, that example of courtesy from Gund, Senior — in a way it seemed to justify her father's estimate of them, or, at least, of Peter. She knew her father's attitude well enough. Finally he had said to her: "Young Gund always seems to me like Peter's savageness trying to wriggle into an acceptable form."

That had been after Arthur Gund's second evening call, which had been his last; for Miss Thatcher believed in loyalty to one's father — at least, up to a certain point. Lately she had thought a good deal; and if now she kept her eyes steadily averted from Arthur, it was because she had a rebellious instinct to keep him apart from Peter's vulgarity.

Dora flushed hotly, and they went into the hall considerably under the cloud of Peter's manners.

"It certainly sounds 'wildly nervous,'" Miss Thatcher commented.

As they ascended the broad, curving granite stairs to the trading-floor, a roaring strife of voices gushed down to them.

As soon as Margaret spoke, Dora saw that her chance had gone by; for in the space of a second

she had meditated a feminine defence against Miss Thatcher's judgment of Peter. It had been on the tip of her tongue to say, "Your father was in there, too."

Perhaps Miss Thatcher would have received it incredulously. It was quite beyond her conception of her father that he had sat by and silently admired Gund's curt dismissal of his daughter as though she were a trespassing boot-black.

The two men sat at opposite sides of the small table in the little den — Franklin Thatcher, a tall man with a formal and military suggestion because of his clothes, his square shoulders, his grizzled moustache and imperial. One could guess that he was fond of a silk hat. It was easy to imagine the background of his establishment on the Lake Shore Drive. Peter Gund was a mere post of a man, weighing about one hundred pounds, partly bald, with a smooth, thin face, and a tuft of whitish moustache, his complexion a faintly blotched and mottled red, no eyebrows, and puffy, wrinkled lids that commonly drooped over the watery, weary-looking pale-blue eyes.

The threat of feminine intrusion delivered by Dora intolerably stung Thatcher's straining nerves, and at Gund's prompt "Go away!" he looked up with new regard.

For at that moment something like three million dollars lay at hazard, and the dice must be thrown at once.

Every second impassively clicked off by the electric clock on the wall narrowed the margin within which a fortune might be saved, and Peter Gund was not one to let courtesy distract the steady eye with which he measured the chances.

The big wheat deal was in a desperately bad way. Money had tightened unexpectedly. It was almost impossible to borrow on any terms. When Thatcher began to buy wheat in February with Sheahan and Tomlins (the three constituting the mysterious "bull clique"), he had proposed merely one of those speculative adventures with which he sometimes varied his leisurely occupation of "capitalist," as the city directory designated him. But Pat Sheahan's was a more ardent temperament, and, through stages which he could now scarcely account for, Thatcher found himself and his partners in a position where they must buy more or ruinously throw over the big line they had accumulated. He had felt uneasy for days; but the fear that strikes cold to the pit of a man's stomach and loosens all his nerves had not touched him until this very morning. Then, coming rapidly to the office of Gund, Randall & Morehouse, his straining eye sought the senior partner. The two went without a word to that little den in the corner. The door was closed. Thatcher took off his hat, and drew his hand across his brow.

"Pat's fallen down," he said; "can't borrow a dollar." The bull clique's reserve force had been

Sheahan's supposed ability to arrange a certain large loan. It looked like Waterloo, with no Grouchy in sight.

Thatcher understood well enough, in his half-benumbed helplessness, that if the desperate situation was to find its younger Napoleon anywhere, it must be in this mere post of a man opposite. Even in the distress which confused his mind, he was conscious of a color of contrition. He and Gund had known each other a long time, and he had to own that as between them Gund's attitude had been the franker. As for himself, he had cherished reservations, especially of late, after he had set up that more pretentious establishment on the Lake Shore Drive, and Margaret had come home quite "finished." In his heart he felt that Peter was a stranger to the significance of a silk hat. Just now the reservations seemed infinitely unimportant. That million of his own which lay at hazard dwarfed everything else. It was the pedestal on which he stood, with the other lords of the town, that went on under its smoke, amid its din, in its endless stretches of grimy streets, ready enough to pay him the consideration he asked so long as he could maintain his position; instantly ready, also, if he fell, to distort its vast visage in a derisive grin, to set its huge foot on him, and forget him in a day. He even thought — the straw-clutch of a drowning man — to ask Peter to come into the breach with his fortune. But he had to own that Peter had been generous. If he failed he would stand

in Gund, Randall & Morehouse's books for a sum which most men would be richly content to retire from money-getting with.

"You 're in a devil of a box," said Gund, looking thoughtfully at the sheets of paper before them. He drew a match with a long scratch across the under edge of the table, and lighted the big black cigar between his teeth. The teeth were glitteringly false. This, of course, was only the prelude, and Thatcher fetched a tremulous sigh.

"But it ain't so bad," Gund went on thoughtfully. "You 've got a chance, I guess. Sheahan and Tomlins have some money left, for they 're supporting the market right now. Sheahan 's got a big credit with the trade, and a big following. He 's black Irish, and he 'll fight like the devil. Besides, he 's a clever man, and knows how to fight. He may stand up for a couple of days. The deal can't win; it 's bound to go to smash in the end." He lifted his weary-looking eyes, half veiled by the puffy lids, to Thatcher's face, and added kindly: "The thing for you to do, Franklin, is to sell out — unload on 'em — let them hold the bag before the smash comes."

Thatcher's eyes dropped to the table.

Gund considered the memoranda a moment. "'Y gad, it will work first-rate, I believe," he declared more briskly. "Wait a minute."

He jumped up and ran to the outer office to verify a fact or so.

To Thatcher's expert understanding the proposition was quite plain. It meant that he should surreptitiously sell his wheat in the market to his partners, and by betraying them to complete ruin save a part of his own fortune.

All his life he had cherished a certain gentlemanly conception of himself. Yet he did not leap back from Gund's suggestion. What he felt was a sort of sickness, a sort of tremulous incapacity to do the necessary thing. It was like saving his life — or more. If it could be done at a stroke, one desperate lunge of the knife, a pressure of the trigger with shut eyes and clenched teeth — but his mind was sufficiently awake to realize that it must be a more elaborate and detailed treachery. Sheahan was no fool. If he was to be confidenced out of his money, some carefully planned betrayals would be necessary. Then the accounting afterwards! He saw Sheahan confronting him — a big, coarse, half-illiterate brute. The overwhelming sickness in his mind increased.

Gund, darting back to the stall, found his client standing by the door. The client avoided the pale eyes. In his soul in that moment, before the man of daring counsel, he felt rather abject and futile.

"We'll let this go for the present, Peter," said Thatcher, with downcast eyes, in a low voice, in a way that half entreated the other's forbearance. "I believe I can raise some money; I'm going to try."

"But, thunder! you can't," said Gund. "Can't borrow a dollar."

"Yes; I believe I can," Thatcher repeated. "I 'm going to try."

"Wheat 's weaker now; you'll be too late," the broker warned. "This market ain't going to wait for anybody."

"I won't be long. Give me a chance. I 'm not up to this other business — now." He grew firmer as he argued. "My account with you — "

Peter made a gesture. "If you 're going, go quick. The minutes count."

Thatcher hurried out.

Gund stood a full minute, worrying his little whitish moustache. Then he walked slowly into the main hall of the Board, and on up the curving granite stairs to the trading-room, all the time fingering his moustache and looking down thoughtfully. At his back, through the windows, lay a fine perspective of La Salle Street, walled by its towering buildings, its flaggings and roadway full of constantly shifting masses. Before him was the high and broad trading-room, with its three packs of shouting, gesticulating brokers, — packs which seemed to be constantly drawing in the loose human atoms on the floor and casting them forth again. But Gund had no eye either for the panorama behind the wide windows or for the clamoring packs before him. He strolled out upon the floor, quite oblivious of all the pandemonium, still busily worrying his moustache and looking down. He was addressed here and there, stopped, questioned. He answered with a

word absently, and strolled on. Only here and there he spoke a word on his own account, — catching the eye of a broker, calling him up by a mere indication from those puffy eyelids, leaning to speak for an instant, then passing on. And as Peter's saunterings and whisperings progressed, an *habitué* could have told from the shoutings, from the manner in which the fingers of those flourished, gesticulating hands were held, that the market was turning.

"Now what does it mean?" Miss Thatcher asked.

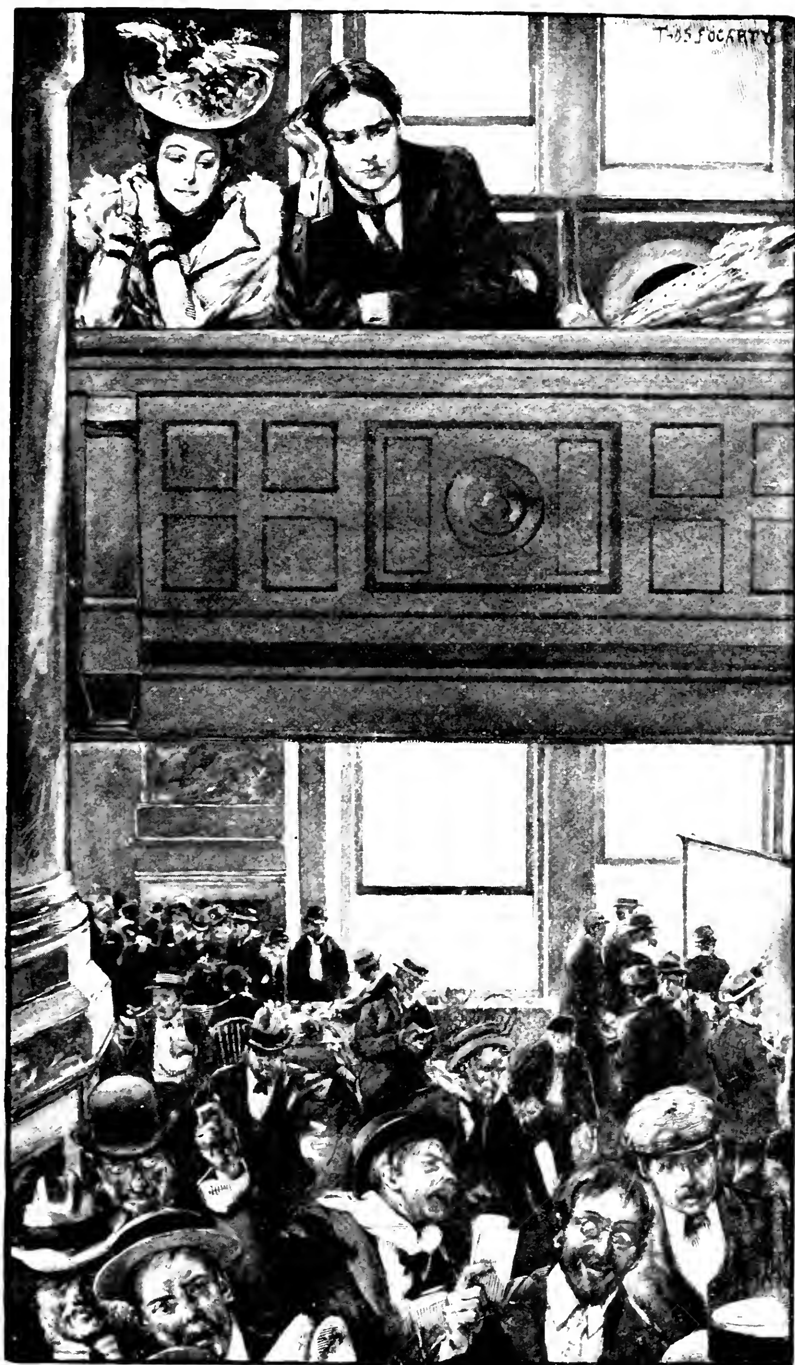
"Five eighths," Arthur replied, half absorbed in the market. He spread his fingers and made the sign for her.

"That 's less, then?" she asked doubtfully.

"Yes; it 's going off fast."

He leaned over the edge of the railing, watching the pit, Miss Thatcher watching him. "Thatcher 's catching it hot and heavy," he was thinking. "How grotesque, her being up here! But, thank God, nobody knows her; and she is here — beside me!" He looked around at her, smiling.

The ten minutes which she had at first proposed had grown to twenty. It was unexpectedly snug up there in the gallery, beside the big sheltering pillar. They had the farther end quite to themselves. Dora had gone back to look into the street through the top of a broad window. The great trading-floor spread out below them, with its three shouting packs, its many rows of high little tables over which men



"*In the gallery*"

seemed more sanely busy, and its open space where men continually crossed and recrossed, gathering, gossiping, pointing, dispersing. Over the heads of that mob there was an odd air of seclusion. The very noise made a better place for them to be still in.

He explained some things, but the explanations mostly went wide of her understanding. She preferred to understand him. She asked a question now and then at random, and observed him, conscious of her own little secret drama in which she was assigning him a part, but not dreaming of the big drama of the pit as it appeared to him, and in which, to him, she was the innocent figure. He leaned forward, watching and listening. She knew it for a battle. It subtly charged her nerves with its electrical atmosphere. It was as though they had been together in a storm. Words, gestures, the ordinary means of approach, were not needed. There was fusion in the air. They drew near to each other by insensible processes.

"You find it really interesting?" she asked murmurously, without caring what his answer might be. She simply wished him to feel her presence.

He drew back a little, and gave her his attention. "Why, it 's really a big trade," he said. "I think a fellow 's bound to dó something. Of course" — he dropped his eyes — "I suppose there are a lot finer things to do." He got over the self-depreciatory implication by looking up at her. "One

ought to do the best he can, and this is really a big business, — that is, the best part of it: the 'cash wheat' business, — buying, storing, shipping grain, and all that."

"Of course it 's important," she said quickly, with a completeness of approval which he found not at all marred, but rather improved, when she added, "if one can understand it."

She looked thoughtfully across the floor. They seemed to be confessing something to each other.

"After all, Chicago does do a good deal; and if you 're of Chicago — "

"Certainly!" he caught it up quickly. "My father, in a way, has made a place here, — made a foundation, — and why should n't I go on with it?"

Miss Thatcher's hands came together in her lap. "Yes," she said deliberately; "I 've felt the same thing myself of late."

Such was the effect of this demure speech that the young man had a thrilling sense, which remained for half a minute, that they fully understood each other.

"I like to see a man do something," she added quite recklessly; and then, as though daring could go no further, — the words did not matter, — she looked him in the face. She did not mind electrifying him. In a certain soft rebellion she took his surface disadvantages into the fold of her protecting affection, so that it was then really much better for him than if he had been able to make his own advances gracefully — than if he had been of the most

plausible form. It was her way of paying him for his awkwardness.

The two human figures in the lee of the big pillar in the gallery presented no suggestion of the dénouement of a play. Peter Gund, happening to glance up, saw two idle spectators of the wheat-pit; then he made out the yellow hair and the hat and Arthur. He was too busy to be definitely amused, but he thought, "Nice time for Thatcher's daughter to be studying the wheat market!" and he even had a fleeting sense of typical youth and beauty looking on at the battle and pretending to study it, but really too full of its own comedy to understand anything else.

He moved along, and gave another order to sell wheat. For if Franklin Thatcher did n't know enough to sell out on his partners, Peter Gund knew enough to sell out on his client. He had made up his mind that Thatcher would fail to raise the money to support the market — that he was about to lose. The failure of the bull clique meant necessarily a big drop in the price of wheat. From this conclusion and this fact Gund moved promptly and characteristically to the action of selling wheat on his own account, so that he would profit by whatever decline occurred. He explained briefly to Randall, whom he found down in the office, nervously slipping two silver dollars between his fingers, his white-felt hat on the back of his fat head. Gund sidled up to him.

"Guess Thatcher 's gone to pot, sure," he said in an aside. "He 's trying to borrow some money, but he can't do it. I 've just been upstairs," — he glanced up at his partner, — "and I 've sold a slough of wheat for our own account. If those fellows pull through, we 'll have to cover it at a loss. But I 'm guessing they won't pull through. If they don't, we 'll make enough on this stuff I 've just sold to square what Thatcher 'll owe us, and more, too. You might go upstairs and watch it; but don't try to cover without seeing me."

Not long afterwards, Gund stood before an electric printing-machine in his office, and read this:

"The market is turning strong again. The big selling seems to be over. Good buying now; price up three cents from the bottom: supposed to be the clique."

Randall hurried in, — his third trip from upstairs.

"I 'm dead sure Thatcher is buying through Judson," he began excitedly.

"S-s-s-st!" said Peter, for Thatcher was coming in.

Gund went to meet him.

"It 's all right, Peter," he began at once; "all right!" He stooped and laid a hand confidentially on the small man's arm. "I went to Judson because —"

"Are you buying?" Gund cut in.

Thatcher vaguely felt himself accused. "I went to Judson because I did n't see you when I came

back from the bank," he explained, "and there was n't any time to lose. Besides, Judson 's been pretty hard hit with Tomlin's and Sheahan 's business. Been called for margins, in fact, and had n't responded; so I thought it only fair to —"

"You raised the money?" Peter looked up, really astonished.

"Yes; I got the money, — hundred and twenty thousand."

"Pshaw!" said Peter, an exclamation of incredulous admiration. "I did n't think it could be done."

"Yes; it could be done," said Thatcher.

It seemed to Gund's intent eye and ear that there was a kind of confusion and recklessness somewhere behind Thatcher's words.

"I congratulate you," said Peter, calmly.

Thatcher felt an aloofness, an accusation, and it added to the trouble in his mind. "See here, Peter," he began. He slipped his hand through the broker's arm, and turned him toward the big hall, leading him, as though walking helped him on with it. "I — it was the girl's money."

"The girl's?"

"My girl's — Margaret's. It 's the right thing to do. It will pull us all out. I did n't — really did n't hesitate —"

Peter's weary and watery eye took an upward and sidelong glance, calmly, at the tall figure. He felt the rattling and shaking of overburdened machinery. He recalled briefly the fortune left by Mar-

garet's mother, of which the father was the trustee. But he had his own work on hand.

"How much?" he asked with brutal directness.

"One hundred and twenty thousand dollars. It was all very available, — good bonds and stocks." Thatcher's white hand went up to the military tuft of hair on his chin. "It will pull us all through," he said. "You see, the tide has turned now. It just needed that to get us around the corner. I knew it could n't last, Peter," he added, with pathetic emphasis. "Of course if you felt like turning in and buying now, it would be a chance for you to make something. The tide has turned." He drew himself up a little.

"All right," said Gund, vaguely, and he went back into the office. But he halted, just out of Thatcher's sight, and twisted his moustache. He gave a glance at the clock. The time was very short. The bold play that he had made in selling wheat was in jeopardy. If Thatcher and Sheahan should regain control of the market, he would have to buy in that wheat at a loss. The time was very short. And Thatcher's hundred and twenty thousand dollars, — the girl's money (which meant it was the last the bull clique could raise), — part of which had already been swallowed up in helping Judson out of his "hole"! What an ass Thatcher was! Gund started forward, walked deliberately through the hall, up the stairs, and out on the trading-floor. The big clock showed that he had

only thirty minutes left. Again he sauntered among the brokers, speaking his confidential word.

A little later the electric machine said:

"Tremendous line of wheat coming on the market. Price weakening. Crowd thinks the clique is unloading. All sorts of rumors, — one that a clique broker is in trouble. Wildest sort of market."

"There 's your father now," said Margaret.

"Yes," said Arthur, without looking around. He was leaning forward, watching the pit, and his nerves felt the crisis.

"Gad! See 'er slide!" Randall murmured, in a kind of rapt admiration. Downstairs he stood before the blackboard watching the quotations, and he recognized Peter's hand. But would he win?

The market, like a thing fatally hurt, had been weakly fluttering up, only to meet harder blows and to sink more definitely. Upstairs it was a death-struggle. The wheat-pit was so packed that the human atoms in it became welded. The mass swayed and writhed in one complex motion along each of the four sides. Its voice was an inarticulate shriek.

The big bell tolled out the stroke of one. The hollow note booming over the great hall called the pit to its final effort. The shriek grew more violent. The flutterings grew less. The price began to sink steadily, ominously, point by point, like the going out of a life.

Arthur exhaled a long sigh. He looked around at Miss Thatcher. His manner was not excited, not constrained.

"It can't last," he said, with a kind of compassionate solemnity, as though in fact they were watching the going out of a life.

"No?" she breathed.

In the last two minutes an overpowering suggestion had been gathering in her mind: Arthur's first reluctance, Peter Gund's worried appearance down there, — they might be involved in this catastrophe which she felt to be hurrying on below.

It was overwhelmingly shocking. Still, there was a kind of desperate perverseness, — a reckless desire to make it up to him a little.

"Will it do any harm if we stay — now?" she asked meekly.

He smiled readily enough. "Not at all. Stay," he said.

Abruptly the noise below took a new direction. There was a pouring of the human atoms toward a bulletin-board in the farther corner, where a man had tacked a placard. The wheat-pit died down as though it had been turned off. A word was shouted along, passed on. In an instant the din in the pit recommenced furiously. Arthur bent over, listening. A man below flung out an arm toward some one, and shouted, "Judson!"

Arthur stood up. Instinctively Miss Thatcher arose. They faced each other. Dora, a little

farther along, glanced up at them; but neither of them minded that.

"A failure?" she asked softly.

"Yes," he said gravely, looking into her face; "it amounts to that. It 's Judson." She did not know who Judson was, but she knew the look on his face. "It 's the end," he said.

Her chin was lifted a little as she looked at him, showing the soft line of her throat.

"Shall we go?" she asked.

Her compassion enfolded him. They were very close together. There was another word to say. Both of them half understood that. In a way the storm engulfed them; but they were strangely at home in it.

"Yes; I want you to come with me, — you and Dora," he began.

The bell tolled its last warning. Some people farther on in the gallery were getting up. The frenzy below continued. Margaret did not understand — except that he wished her to be with him. She had the sense of a trial and of loyalty. The three went down the stairs together.

The final strokes of the bell, announcing the closing of the market, echoed through the lower floor of the building; and Peter Gund, turning from the blackboard in his office, saw Thatcher's coachman outside, leaning from the box as some one on the sidewalk spoke up to him. Peter turned confidentially to Randall.

"They 're mighty well busted, Jim, all three of 'em," he said cheerfully. "There 'll be assignments this afternoon. Thatcher owes us something in six figures; but we 'll cover this wheat I 've been selling, and come out well ahead. I 'm going to lunch now. Suppose I 'll be called to the confab by and by."

As he stepped out on the flagging, he saw the victoria driving away empty. "Thatcher won't need his drab livery; he 'll want dark blue," he thought. For just then the stir of the ended battle was in his nerves, the lust of his victory was in his blood. The gibe was his satisfyingly brutal kick at the corpse. It was not so much that he had saved the house from a large loss. The house could stand a loss, if it came to that. But he had won; he had brought the concern through a strait where few pilots would have availed.

It was three o'clock when Arthur hurried back to the office. Peter was on his way to the confab upstairs. He stopped, midway to the door, a cigar in his mouth. Arthur crossed to him hurriedly.

"How did — things come out?" he asked hastily.

Peter examined the open, anxious face with indulgent cynicism.

"Well, three things have n't come out at all," he said. "Their names are Franklin Thatcher, Pat Sheahan, and E. G. Tomlins."

Arthur took off his straw hat with a nervous motion, and turned it over thoughtfully by the brim. "Is it really so bad as that — for Thatcher?" he asked.

"Busted to the devil and gone. I 'm going up to the funeral now." Peter watched for the effect of his words.

Arthur shifted his weight to the other foot. For a moment his hand fumbled aimlessly for his coat pocket. Then he came up squarely to his father's eye.

"See here, father," he said steadily. "I 've been out of the office most of the day. I 've been with Margaret Thatcher. I took her and Dora to lunch, and —" He was going on very steadily, but just what else was there to say? Just what had happened? A great deal, of course, as he understood it; but what was there in an instant's surreptitious contact of the hands, a murmured word, that he could resolve definitely into words for his father? "If we can do anything to help Thatcher out, father, I 'd like it," he added.

After all, it was as clear an explanation as Peter desired. For him the fact lay not so much in what concerned the girl as in Arthur's self-assertion. Hitherto he had been only the tractable pupil, and the habit of that relationship was so strong that it came to Peter's lips to say sarcastically: "Certainly; pitch right in; do whatever you feel like for him." As it was, he grinned a bit; but his face quickly

sobered to his son's steady gaze. He understood in that moment that there was a "we"; the boy asked to be taken into account. Peter was not displeased.

"Well," he said non-committally, and walked away.

Upstairs in Sheahan's office he found what he had expected,—a half-dozen men with the catastrophe on their hands. Some of the stress, the highly wrought nervous energy, evoked by the big speculation, was carried over into this conference to decide upon the disposition of the débris. A stranger might have said that Sheahan took it hardest. The burly, black-bearded Irishman was plainly suffering. He said little, was very tractable; and every minute, when somebody else talked, he screwed up his face, nearly shutting his eyes, like a man who is trying to hear something amid confusion and physical distress. But Gund comprehended the letting off of the tremendous head of steam which Sheahan had been carrying. He knew that Sheahan was realizing the situation fully and would recover quickest. Chubby little Tomlins seemed quite gay. He made jokes—and smelled of liquor. Peter's weary eye measured him and Peter amiably reflected: "He 'll be drunk to-night, and to-morrow—whew!" Thatcher was vacuously composed. "It will come to him day after to-morrow," Gund thought.

He left the room with Thatcher at five o'clock. The client slipped his hand through the little

broker's arm. Gund was a comfort to him to a degree which he did not try to understand.

"Well, Peter, I owe you something handsome," he said in a gossiping way.

"Yes," said Gund, thinking of something else.

"I shall pay it all in time," Thatcher persisted, with a poor bolstering of his pride.

Gund gave his head an impatient jerk. "We 'll take that up some other time; it does n't matter," he said. "Now, that jag of cash wheat at Duluth —" he gave some practical advice.

"That 's true," said Thatcher as to the advice. "But that don't matter much now, either. It 's all gone." He made a large, loose gesture.

He added: "I suppose there 'll be talk enough when I — errmm — make my assignment." He laid the hot iron to his flesh with a certain morbid interest.

"You need n't assign," said Gund, promptly.

Thatcher looked at him dumbly.

"Nearly all you owe, you owe to me. I 'm going to fix up the rest. Rather have it all in my own hands. Rather not have you assign — understand? I intend to keep your name out of it." In his charity, Peter felt uncomfortable, nervous, on the defensive. It helped him a little to add: "I 'm looking at it from the standpoint of the chief creditor. It makes my claim better — understand?"

"Well, really, Peter —" After all, for a moment only commonplaces came to Thatcher's mind.

Yet it was a great reprieve. It meant that he could take his failure and bankruptcy off in a corner by himself. He was not to be publicly pilloried. It was so great a relief that finally he said weakly, almost tremulously: "It 's very good of you, Peter."

Gund had to defend himself against that. He said brusquely: "Oh, the devil! it ain't anything. No use your assigning. You have n't got anything left to assign that 's worth mentioning."

That wholesomely braced Thatcher up a little. "No; that 's so," he admitted. "Still, I 'm glad not to get into the newspapers. I 'm sorry about the girl's money," he added, as though that incidental regret were left.

"That was unlucky," Peter admitted candidly. "But it happens. I reckon she won't suffer any. I suppose she 'll marry well, in time." He might have said that without thinking of Arthur, but it happened that he did think of him.

"Well, I 've sometimes thought that she fancied your son," said Thatcher. The words came naturally out of his attitude toward Gund. He spoke them quite shamelessly. He did not know exactly that he was leaning upon Peter; but he had a weakly wounded and nervous comfort in keeping a fast hold upon this stanch, enduring little man. "And I don't know but Arthur — " He broke off, smiling like an old man over an indifferent joke.

"Well, I rather guess he does," said Gund, promptly. "Of course, if it happens that way, so

much the better. We 've known each other a long time." He really felt sorry for Thatcher, not so much because he had lost his money as because he had turned so wofully flabby.

"That 's so," said Thatcher, still with a comfort in the subject. "Of course I once expected to give her a different sort of send-off — and in time — "

"Pooh! Guess I can scratch up enough to set the youngsters going respectably, if it comes to that," said Gund.

A real emotion stirred in Thatcher. "You 're a good fellow, Peter," he said, with futile gratitude.

Gund smiled a little grimly. "Well, I 'm a pretty good trader," he said. "I know my way around in a wheat deal."

In the office Randall and Arthur were waiting. Gund beckoned to the partner in a way that excluded the son.

"Have they laid down?" the partner asked at once.

"Gone all to pot, — flat broke," said Gund.

The bare office, with its rows of chairs whence patrons watched the blackboards, was quite empty. The floor, like a deserted battlefield, was littered over with the débris of the day's trading. A silent workman in a blue blouse was sweeping it with a big broom, and putting the chairs to rights.

Gund dropped in one of the chairs and lighted a fresh cigar. He was tired, but content.

"Thatcher 's gone to pieces," he repeated, with a discursive and philosophic interest, now that the strain was over.

"Must grind him — the assignment and all that," Randall suggested.

"He won't assign." Gund philosophized a moment in silence. "It 's sort of queer," he said, with a purely philosophic interest. "I suppose I did as much as any one man to break him, and now I 'm going to help him out. This morning, over there," — he pointed to the den in the corner, — "I advised him to unload on Sheahan and Tomlins. He could 'a' done it, and saved a lot. But his nerve failed him; he was n't equal to it. The minute I saw his nerve was gone, I knew the game was up — and I unloaded on him. Then what do you suppose he did?" Gund looked up at his partner with a deep relish for the fulfilment of his theories. "It 's exactly what I always said: When a man's nerve is gone, look out for him. Why, Thatcher went out and robbed his daughter. The girl had one hundred and twenty thousand dollars left by her mother, — stocks and bonds, I suppose, — and he took it. It 's always the fellow whose nerve is gone that does those things. A bold man don't do 'em. Thunder, no! He goes out in the open and robs strangers. That was the money that braced the market about noon. Of course we were short a big line then. You see, I 'd advised Thatcher to unload on the others, and it seems to me a bright,

nervy sort of man would have suspected that I 'd be unloading on him. But what do you suppose Thatcher does?" Again Gund cherished his point for a moment. "Why, soon 's he sees me, he toddles right up and tells me what he 's done, — taken the girl's money and so forth. Had n't nerve enough to keep it to himself and play it through alone — understand? Must come and tell me, and play right into my hands. Well, I just went up-stairs and sold him that hundred and twenty thousand dollars' worth, and some more, too."

The broker smoked a moment, and even smiled a little, in pure fondness for the accuracy of his judgment.

"'Scrupulous,' I suppose they 'd call it," he said, after a moment, retrospectively. "Well, when a man gets 'scrupulous' in a wheat deal, he 'd best go throw his money in the river. It ain't that sort of a game."

He was aware that his son had moved around to the door, and now stood looking out, waiting. Peter's eyes were fixed discursively on the younger figure as he went on:

"This wheat speculation is the fastest race they 've got up yet, and a handicapped man can't win in it. The faster the race is, the less you can stand a handicap; and scruples are a handicap. A man with scruples wants to stick to the cash wheat trade, or something else slow and easy. But if he comes in here, blast him! let him play the game to win. I

guess the boy 'll stick to the cash trade, and I don't know but the second generation ought to. If we make money enough for 'em they can afford to wear gloves, — stick to principles and pink teas." He got up abruptly. "So I 'm going to step in and help Thatcher out," he added, leaving Randall to guess the connection, or miss it, as he might.

He crossed the office, and laid a hand on his son's arm.

"Ready to go home?" he asked briskly.

For answer Arthur opened the door; but on the flagging he paused.

"How does it come out?" he asked.

"Well, Thatcher 's lost all his money," said Peter; "but he won't have to assign or to come into the newspapers. We save him his name." There was a slight movement of the puffy eyelids on the plural pronoun.

"You, father!" Arthur cried triumphantly. "It was fine. It was like you."

The young man's praise struck a harsh note in Peter's breast. For an instant he looked hardily at his son, and it flashed upon him to tell this triumphing young gentleman just what was "like" his father — to explain precisely what had happened that day. And this impulse was a belief in his own day as against the coming day, which called itself finer.

"Kid gloves don't do it all, young man," he said. "What good are they, unless somebody has had the

bare, strong hand to grab things and to hold on to them ? "

But, after all, that was impracticable ; let the second generation be as fine as it liked. " You can remember," he added, " that your father knew his way around in a wheat deal, if he did n't make much of a fist in society." He wished to forestall the protest which he saw coming, and he went on hastily : " It 's up to you, now — up to the kid glove. See if you can do as much for the girl as we did for the father. I fancy she 'll need it. You 're going up to their house to that Frenchman's lecture business to-night ? "

" Why, yes — if Thatcher is n't going to assign. But, then, of course she won't know about it ; there 's no need of his telling her." Arthur spoke with a certain nervous hopefulness.

" Is n't there need ? " said Peter, derisively. " You depend on Thatcher for doing the useless thing. He 's gone to pot. You go up there and see."

Arthur found the suggestion startling enough ; but he labored to put it aside. Of course Thatcher would n't tell her at once, he said ; perhaps not at all. If he should tell her, he could see that some cherished things that had happened that day might be quite expunged. He relied on Thatcher's pride, on his natural reluctance ; but as he got out of the cab in front of the high-gabled Roman brick front on the Lake Shore Drive, his heart beat up disquietingly.

He did not see Thatcher. Presently he understood an excuse, — a sudden indisposition, from which he could draw no augury. He got one full look at Margaret — very splendid in evening toilet. That was reassuring, for she seemed herself. Then he avoided her eye, until it came to him that she also was avoiding him, and that was disquieting.

Presently the lecturer stopped, amid applause. The room at once broke into multitudinous action, from which Arthur stood apart in a kind of painful incapacity, a tumult in his mind. He saw Margaret twice, and looked away at once. The people were going.

Again his anxious eye met hers, and he looked away. But she came directly over to him, where he stood aside. The action touched him, but it gave him no certainty.

"You 're getting a wide range of knowledge to-day," he began.

"Yes," she said. She looked steadily into his eyes. "I 've just had my second lesson in wheat, too. Papa told me."

"Oh!" He gave his head a jerk aside, of protest, of regret.

"I had to know sometime; it was best to know now," she said, still looking at him, and with a little melancholy smile. She had proposed, as a duty, to make him understand the difference as soon as might

be, — the great change in their positions since the afternoon. The change, to her understanding, was an elemental one, altering everything, unmaking everything. This was exactly as he had feared that it might be.

Yet just at that moment, as she stood before him, knowing everything, and warning him that she knew, it did not seem to him that the conditions of their relationship had been altered in the least. In the shock of the disclosure her loveliness and his sympathy were all that he understood; so that at once, as though they were back in that electric moment in the gallery, he said:

"It 's too bad, Margaret, dear; I wanted you not to know. But of course it does n't make any difference to us, does it?" he pleaded.

And at once it was as though she were back in the moment when she had felt so profound a compassion for him. He seemed to ask her compassion now as much as then, although it was her father who had failed, not his.

"No," she said; "it does n't make any difference to us." She stood before him an instant, looking down, a picture of loyalty and surrender.

It was perfect, — only they were in plain view of half a hundred people, and he could do nothing but fetch a sigh. The sigh seemed at once to put them into relationship with conventional things. Margaret even laughed a little. They turned towards the guests.

"Then I don't see why it was n't the best day that ever happened — all around — for me!" he said triumphantly.

"If you 'll always think so!" she said.

They gave an irresponsible little laugh together, and walked down the room side by side, looking anything but downcast. Arthur was thinking, or his brains were humming, in irresponsible gladness: "After all, a wheat deal more or less — what does it matter?"

III

THE PLANT AT HIGH GROVE

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I

THE three men kept apart in the Pullman car on the way home from Chicago.

Dyer had gone ahead to the smoking compartment, which he had to himself. Malden sat at the end of the car, his light overcoat crumpled about his stout person. In his agitation he had forgotten to take off his stiff black hat. There was a wing of iron-gray whiskers on each ruddy cheek, but the lips and chin were clean-shaven. He had a way of compressing his lips now and then, the lower one slightly protruding. His blue eyes, aging, already somewhat dim, were set to the window in an uncomprehending stare.

Johnson, the Superintendent of the plough works, sat halfway down the car, his round, solid head showing above the high back of the seat. His clothes hung loose and ill-fitting on his great bony frame. The big jaw and chin, projected on an heroic scale, looked all the more salient from the

leanness of his face. His hands lay in his lap. One thumb had been broken, a forefinger blunted and twisted. A girl sat across the car, — a slim, graceful little creature in a red jacket, — with brown eyes, hardly more than a schoolgirl, admirably pretty. Now and then she looked over at Johnson calmly. If she met his round gray eye, her own soft eyes did not instantly fall, she did not color and stir in her seat and move her head as she had done when her glance encountered Dyer's. Nobody knew better than the Superintendent that to this pretty romance-haunted girl he belonged in an order of things world-wide from that in which she placed Dyer.

Twilight gathered as they approached High Grove. While the train was still some miles away, on the other side of the river, they could see the living fire ball of the forge chimney, a giant's torch, a ruddy, earthy star. As they rushed nearer, the long, low mass of the plow factory took shape on the opposite side of the river, a stretch of rough brick wall pierced with numberless windows. On the very brink of the bank stood the squat smithy, of limestone, with an iron roof from the centre of which protruded a short iron chimney of large diameter. The forge beneath sent up its flames, which burned from the top of the chimney in a protean crown of ever-varying fiery hues. The numberless blank windows of the factory mirrored this fire crown, and its inverted image, waving, leaping,

forever changing and renewing itself, burned in the water below. This was the frontispiece of the town. Beyond lay the business district, mostly comprised in the brick-paved town square, in the centre of which stood the soldiers' monument,— a pedestal bearing the inevitable sculptured volunteer with his musket at ground-arms.

The neat little railroad station of pressed brick had a festal effect, with its rows of incandescent lamps and its bustle of people, as the train drew up. The station lights shone upon the tender green of young oak leaves, a fringe of that vast mantle of foliage which embowered the town. A score of townsfolk stood on the station platform. Young Genslow, the dubious new editor of the semi-weekly "Messenger," was talking with two girls. One was the plump and snub-nosed Miss Presley. The other was Johnson's sister Lena, a girl of eighteen. She had his yellowish hair, but of a richer tone; his gray eyes made soft and lustrous, translated to the feminine; a beautiful clear pink-and-white complexion; a graceful young figure. Young Genslow was laughing as he spoke to her, his white teeth showing under his little boyish curly red moustache.

A cart stood in the shadows back of the station, a man, not in livery, dutifully holding the horses' heads. Miss Malden was coming forward out of the shadows to meet her father.

The cheeky young editor, who was said to have

been a Chicago newspaper reporter for a few months before he alighted in High Grove, reached the manufacturer first.

"Are the Malden works going into the trust, Mr. Malden?" he asked off-hand, smiling, confident.

All the townsfolk within hearing paused to listen, open-mouthed over the audacity, shocked and deeply curious over the scandal of this beggarly cub of a country editor halting Mr. Malden in public and asking him about his business.

Miss Malden stood apart from her father and the interviewer, yet well within the focus of all those curious eyes.

She wore a simple summer costume. Jennie Presley's hat far outmatched hers in size and ornaments. But there was that in Miss Malden's pose which put down the other figures in the picture. Her large dark eyes gave one serene glance at the cheeky young editor, from the advantage of a height rather greater than his own, then turned calmly away to the foliage.

Johnson, some distance up the platform, watched her steadily. Again he felt her something carefully finished, a creature highly evolved, predicating long preparations, a product to the making of which there had gone an infinitude of toil, to which, unwittingly, many hands and minds had labored in the impenetrable past. He knew that she was aware of himself and of Lena. He knew, too, that she was not going to give a sign of it.

Genslow was setting forth High Grove's interest in the future of the works; the "Messenger's" willingness to give it the first official information. Malden, his brows puckered forbiddingly, was glowering down upon the unwelcome questioner.

"The Malden works have not been sold to a trust or to anybody else!" he broke forth angrily. "And they 're not going to be sold!" he added, exasperated beyond patience. He brushed by the editor, turning to his daughter.

Miss Malden turned with him, still with that calm air of expunging the scene. Johnson watched them climb into the cart and drive away.

Beyond the square the ground rose under its unbroken mantle of foliage. Here and there an electric street lamp twinkled gayly through the leaves. Lighted windows in the comfortable dwellings, set spaciously apart, glowed cosily in the dark. There was a broad air of prosperous content, and Malden was conscious of this amid the stress of his thoughts, as his daughter drove on, in silence, toward home.

"You decided not to sell, then?" said Miss Malden, finally.

Although he had stubbornly kept silent, his agitation pressed for utterance. At her question he burst out wrathfully: "The trust fellows proposed to buy this plant from us and then shut it down, dismantle it, throw it into the river — and High Grove with it! They had the cost sheets all spread out. They

had gone over them with a microscope. They can make plows cheaper at Illinois City. I could have told them that before. As though I had n't found it out during these last two years of cut-throat competition. My father founded these plow works when there was n't any town here, — only his little blacksmith shop and half a dozen houses."

In his agitation Malden went at once to that aspect of the matter which appealed most strongly to him, leaving her to guess the connection.

"The works and the town grew up together. I have spent most of my life here. It 's a good town, Julia; a good town. And good works! My workmen have always been decently treated, — treated like fellow-beings. They have felt secure in their places here. I have worked all my life to get them to buy their homes, to attach themselves to the works and the town. I believe I have done something here! I have given where I could, — not merely money, but thought, intelligence, if I have any intelligence. Your mother and yourself have given. There 's the library and gymnasium, the scholarship prizes in the public school. There 's your Art and Crafts society — and other things. I mean we 've tried to make a community here, — a real community, all bound up together. I think I 've had some influence in this town, aside from among the workmen. It 's improved, — a little city. And it all depends on the works. I don't want to brag; but I 've done something!"

He turned his agitated face to her for approval. "Yes, father, I know you have," she assented quickly. Perhaps she understood even better than Malden that ideal of himself which he cherished, — something half feudal, half scientific; the leading man of his community; the shepherd of his people; the wise and liberal employer; the rich man with a heart and conscience; the foremost light; the temporal human Providence, scattering benefits.

"I don't believe in trusts," he went on; "never did. The competition these last two years has been fierce. Those fellows at Illinois City want all the trade on any terms. Arthur's father came into the works later, by advancing the money for the extensions. Arthur himself has been a great deal away from High Grove, — at college, abroad, anywhere but at home. I want to be fair to him. He does n't feel it as I do. High Grove is nothing to him. I let him persuade me to go to Chicago and talk it over with these men who are getting up the trust. Blair offered us $400,000 for the works, in cash or in stock of the trust, just as we liked. Then it came out that they proposed to abandon the works, to transfer the business to Illinois City, where coal is cheaper and where there's an advantage in shipping. I have to say that Blair was delightfully candid about it. He said the trust wanted the Malden works on account of the name, for the Malden plows are well known. Besides, they wanted to assure the Wall Street men, the under-

writers, that all danger of competition had been eliminated. That's the main idea. They want to stop competition. So the $400,000 was ready. Blair seemed to have it among the small change in his vest pocket. But as for running the plant after they'd bought it, that was n't to be thought of. Blair came back to the cost sheets. They could make plows eight per cent cheaper at Illinois City, and to his mind that was enough reason for simply cancelling High Grove, blotting it out of existence, expunging it. Four hundred workmen and their families; a whole town; a good community — tush! Blair simply put that in the waste-paper basket!"

The figure and the manner of Blair, the chief promoter, kept recurring to the manufacturer's troubled thoughts, — a large, bland person of unfailing good humor, calmly juggling with millions, speaking of $400,000 as though it were small change, listening to Malden's objections, then urbanely coming back to the cost sheets as though they settled everything. To the manufacturer this large, bland, good-humored figure had a strangely disturbing effect, as though it calmly alleged an irresistible power, a force of nature against which he might struggle in vain.

"But if they can make plows cheaper at Illinois City, father, won't the plows get made there finally, after all?" Miss Malden asked suddenly.

Malden looked at her, surprised, wounded, touched on the sorest spot. "You've been talking with Arthur Dyer!" he declared accusingly.

"No!" she answered quickly, and colored slightly in the dark.

He continued to look at her accusingly, — his own daughter taking sides against him; siding with Dyer and Blair and those who alleged the inevitable power of the cost sheets.

"It merely occurred to me," she added.

They were turning into the gravel roadway which led along the side of the ample grounds. The house, a large square brick structure of some dignity, with a deep veranda, was set in large grounds which occupied the crest of the hill. The town spread beneath them.

"What does William think?" Miss Malden ventured as the horses slowed to a walk.

"Ah, William!" Malden instantly lightened up, as he caught at this one point of cheer. "Johnson understands it. He's a workman himself! You should have seen his eye brighten and his jaw settle when I told him we were not going to sell! Yes, Johnson understands it. He knows what it means to the workmen and to the town. Whatever Arthur Dyer — and you — may think, I know there's something in High Grove worth saving. I know eight per cent in the cost does n't cover the whole case. It's the community, the well-being of four hundred men and their wives and children,— yes, of a thousand men. What! After I've worked all my life to make this what it is, to hand it over to the trust for destruction? Not much!

I'd be a pretty leader to lead my people into that pit, would n't I? No, no, Julia, High Grove is worth saving. Of course I don't blame Arthur so much," he added more quietly, as the horses stopped; "he does n't feel it as I do. I wish I had the money to buy out his share of the works. Then I'd fight it out alone — with Johnson." Preparing to alight, he seemed to remember something. "Why did n't you go over and speak to William?" he asked.

"Did he wait? I did n't notice," said Miss Malden.

II

LEAVING the station, Johnson turned homeward. His house stood at the beginning of the reach of level land near the river, beyond the works. Persons living on the hill called this the flat. Shade was not so abundant here. Farther on, some rows of plain, frail little boxes of houses with no shade at all stood close together, the doorsteps flush with the board sidewalks. Johnson's house was of frame, a story and a half with a small L, plain but comfortable, in a neat yard inclosed by a picket fence.

His mother still did the housework, with incidental help from Lena. She was a woman of ample frame, with a broad plain face and thin iron-gray hair. This evening she wore the usual loose calico wrapper which made her bulk look so shapeless. Going and coming between kitchen and dining-room

as she served Johnson his late supper, she saw, in spite of his abstraction, that he was in high spirits.

"So Mr. Malden won't sell the works?" she said presently.

"No. He'll not let the plant be shut down. We'll fight!" he affirmed with a grim relish.

"Well, fightin' a trust takes a long pocket-book," she observed.

"Yes," he assented absently, his mind already busy planning for the new condition; "and close economy all around. Hard work for me, mother! A good many corners must be cut off. Perhaps it will involve lower wages for a while."

She paused, coffee-pot in hand, and pondered the point in her slow way. "Well, I s'pose so," she said. "I s'pose whether they sell to the trust or don't sell, the men 's pretty sure to get the worst of it, anyhow." She delivered this bit of philosophy in her mild, good-humored voice, stopping to laugh in a kind of exaggerated purring which shook her ample sides and made little noise. It was said without rancor,—a simple, good-natured expression of the point of view at which she had arrived through the long struggle against poverty during her husband's lifetime, and in which she had been confirmed through the companionship of other people struggling against poverty.

Johnson glanced up at her with a touch of surprise. Long ago he had perfectly comprehended his mother,—slow-witted, of the most commonplace

and circumscribed mind, incapable of mental expansion, clinging with invincible stubbornness to certain rudely traditional things, yet, along with this invincible stubbornness, of so lax a fibre that even Lena's rashness did not deeply trouble her; affectionate, instantly ready to give her life for those she loved, but utterly incompetent to manage her own daughter, her flabby will absolutely helpless under the bright, alert will of the headstrong girl. Long ago Johnson knew all this. Long ago he had thoroughly comprehended her rudimentary idea of society, which consisted in the good-natured belief that the poor always got the worst of it. Now his eye took in her bulky figure in the loose calico wrapper, her broad, red, hard hand upon the coffee-pot, her plain, flat face, wrinkled, its age almost pathetically accentuated by the glaringly white false teeth. It came to him abruptly that this figure of toil was also a result of long evolution, predicating conditions through an impenetrable past. With an unpremeditated action he reached out and took her free hand. There was something like a lump at the base of his throat as he smiled up at her. An abrupt passion of loyalty to her, not only as his mother, but as the figure of toil, moved his heart. His emotion affirmed the truth of her rudimentary philosophy, which his head disdained.

"They don't often get the best of it — in the long run, mother," he assented. There was the old contrition in his assent. A sharp point of

remorse pricked his brain with the accusation that his mother certainly had scarcely got the best of it.

They heard the front door open. Johnson dropped his mother's hand with a self-conscious suspense. Lena came in, a package in her hand. There was a sort of helpless waiting and questioning in the way the mother and brother watched the girl as she crossed the room briskly and began untying her package at the sideboard. The quick, graceful movements of her body and hands showed her supple, nervous young energy. The sideboard mirror reflected the beautiful, delicate coloring of her skin and the rich tone of her soft, abundant hair. As she glanced down at the package, the long lashes veiling her lustrous eyes, she looked a dash of splendid color on a dull background, a note of passion, an anxiety.

"Well, I guess Mr. Malden means well by his men," said the mother, disengaging herself first from that suspense which Lena's entrance had evoked.

"No man means better; no man means better," the Superintendent declared heartily.

The girl looked over her shoulder with one of her quick movements. "Such lovely houses as he gives some of 'em, — nice little shanties stuck in the mud," she observed.

She saw her brother's eye harden, and she met his steady, almost hostile, look boldly.

"Oh, I know about the library and the scholarship prizes and all that," she declared. "I know those Maldens. They like to show us off and look pious when people praise them for taking such interest in us. You ought to have been at the Arts and Crafts business yesterday when Miss Malden had her two swell friends out from Chicago. One of 'em said: 'But, my dear Julia, how do you ever have the patience to teach all this?' Then she saw Jennie Presley and me standing by, and she said: 'Of course the young ladies must be very clever.' Jennie Presley's father is a merchant. He 's got plenty of money, and I hope we 're not tramps. But that woman, with her air, might as well have said: 'What an interesting lot of monkeys you 're training!' That 's what we are to Julia Malden at bottom. She 's real proud of us when we do the tricks without making a mistake. Did you see her look over my head at the station to-night? It would n't have hurt her to bow to me, I guess. If she 'd whistled and held up a bun I might have stood on my head right there. Jen Presley says we must n't blame the poor girl, because, with all her charity patients, she can't always remember which are the Arts and Crafts and which the free soup and second-hand clothes."

A slow, dull ruddy glow came up under Johnson's tanned skin. "Was it Jennie Presley — or Genslow that said that?" he asked in a hard voice.

In an instant he regretted it. He was always failing with Lena. His very anxiety betrayed him into stupid exasperation over her incorrigible wilfulness.

The girl flushed. The hurt showed in her eyes; but they did not falter before his steady look. She stooped a little toward him.

"Does it hurt you to have somebody pay me some attention, William?" she asked. Her voice, sweet as a child's, had the note of a hurt child.

Johnson's eyes fell. He was ashamed. She was so adorably pretty. When her sweetness defended her wilfulness he was utterly at a loss, like a man set to correct an instrument at once too strong and too delicate for his hands.

The girl passed slowly from the room. They heard the front door close behind her. Johnson drank his coffee in troubled silence. Mrs. Johnson sat down at the table, pushing her spectacles up on her wrinkled forehead.

"I know how you feel about it, William," she began mildly; "but sometimes lately I wonder whether you done right,—keeping yourself as much like a workman as you could, I mean after you got able to live better. When I think of Lena, I guess it ain't been very good for her. If we'd lived different, in a finer house, in the best way you could afford, maybe it'd 'a' been better for her. Maybe she'd 'a' been content to keep on at school like you wanted her to."

Johnson scarcely dared look at her for an instant, and he quailed inwardly as though she had brought up his most deeply hidden secret and exhibited it before his eyes.

"It would have been better. I believe it would have been better," he said.

"Seems like you could n't do very much good to other people this way, anyhow. Course I know how you feel about it," the mother hastened to add.

"No, you don't know, mother," said the son. "I have some influence with the men at the works, but it 's just because they know I 'm fair with them, not because I live like a workman. I 'm the boss there. You can't get over that. That 's the fact that fixes our relationship. You can't get over that. I 've felt that for a long time. The old zeal is gone." The dull glow came under his tanned skin. "Maybe it 's pride that kept me on in the way I began. Something happened" — he looked up at her, yearning with a sudden contrite affection toward this homely maternal figure of toil. "There was a love affair which fixed everything. I 've never been able to change it. Pride, perhaps, prevented me. And you and Lena — you 've had the worst of it. I have n't been good to you."

The suggestion of an old love affair scarcely stirred her imagination. Naturally there were love affairs in youth as there was measles earlier. This unaccountable man-child of hers would have had a love

affair, and he would never have told her. That was most natural. What touched her was his contrition.

"Not me, son! Not me," she said quickly. "I'm as good off here as anywhere — better off than anywhere else. I would n't be happy any other way. Lena — she's flighty, and it might have been better for her. But I guess it would n't have made any difference in the long run. She's flighty, but a good girl, William. She goes to church every Sunday."

Johnson smiled a little. The speech helped to restore the accustomed relationship between them.

"Don't trouble, son," she said soothingly. "We're all right."

"Well — I hope so," he said, smiling at her.

"And if Mr. Malden should sell the works and they'd be closed up — "

"No, no!" he interrupted decisively. "The works will not be closed!" The muscles of his big, lean, salient jaw stiffened. "They will not be closed! I'll keep them going!"

III

THERE was scarcely the murmur of a leaf in High Grove's royal mantle of foliage. The air itself glittered in the open with little tremulous gossamer waves of heat. From Johnson's front yard the stretch of river shone like burnished metal, and the

plow works, for all their rude glare of red brick, had an oddly insubstantial effect, as though they were painted against the water. On that Sunday afternoon in August, High Grove was motionless and voiceless.

Nevertheless, Dyer walked rapidly. He wore a shirt-waist, white duck trousers broadly reefed at the bottom, and he carried a wide sunshade, to the languid amusement of persons in the lower town who were lounging in their scant door-yards as he passed. These persons held him in unconcealed contempt as a dude. But Dyer's long, thin, clean-shaven face and his rapid stride showed no infirmity of purpose.

Johnson, on his elbow in the unmown grass, which he liked better than a trim lawn, saw the owner coming, and got up as Dyer turned in at the gate. The two men shook hands briefly and sat down on the rustic bench under the largest oak in the yard. Dyer went straight at the business.

"You know how it is over there." He nodded towards the works.

Johnson knew. The trust had been in operation sixty days. The competition was like this steady, unrelieved glare of the August sun. The Malden works were losing money every day. With all their losses the trust was taking away their trade. They must put prices still lower and stand still greater losses.

"I got back from Chicago yesterday," Dyer went on rapidly. "Blair renews the original offer. He

will take the works for the trust at $400,000. They are sensible people. They want peace. Mr. Malden knows the situation now. He knows that we shall simply ruin ourselves if we keep on fighting the trust. They can make plows cheaper than we can. They have a longer pocket-book. For every dollar that we lay down they can lay down five. You know of the plan to reduce wages ten per cent?"

"As a matter of course."

"Suppose the men accept it?"

"They will accept it."

"Very well," Dyer went on. "That will reduce the cost of production by six or seven per cent, we will say. The trust will simply cut under us again. We will make them lose a little more money. In the end it's simply their millions against our thousands. You know that. Mr. Malden knows it now. But he has taken his stand on a matter of principle. It's a point of honor with him now. He's stuck on that point of honor, and he's going to ruin himself and ruin his family."

"What do you mean?" Johnson demanded.

"Exactly this, Johnson," — he flung it out with the air of a challenge, — "Mr. Malden holds only forty-eight per cent of the stock of the company in his own name. I hold forty-six per cent. Six per cent of the stock stands in your name. Of course I know the arrangement between you and Mr. Malden. Your stock is only a quarter paid for, and

Mr. Malden looks upon it perhaps as essentially his property until it is paid for. Even if it were fully paid for, I have no doubt that under all the circumstances he would take it for granted it would be voted, on any vital question, according to his wish. You know Mr. Malden. The idea of anybody in High Grove entertaining a plan in opposition to his plan does n't readily occur to him. The point is that this stock was transferred to you. It stands in your name. You have paid something on it. You have every legal right to vote it as you please. I believe you are clearly entitled to join with me and use the stock for the trust. You and I together can muster a majority against him. I don't yield you anything in regard for Mr. Malden. You know how I stand there. But he 's stuck on his point of honor. Although he knows that he 's ruining himself and his family, he won't give in. I don't know why you back him up in it. That 's your affair. In my judgment, a man really devoted to him could n't do better than save him now in spite of himself. After all, ruining a family is a hard fact."

Johnson sat very still, his round gray eyes fixed on the bending stretch of the river. Dyer stooped and plucked a spear of grass. Then, gathering himself firmly in hand, he plunged on abruptly:

"See here, Johnson. You and I get on together better than any other two persons in the whole muss. We 've both got some sense — and some nerve. We 've always stood up square-shouldered in front

of each other, and understood each other, without nonsense. I don't need to say to you that I 've got money outside of the works. If the plant fell in the river to-morrow, I 'd still be comfortably well off. But I won't put another cent into the works under present conditions, and Mr. Malden has n't anything to speak of outside of the works. I could stand it if the thing went by the board. He could n't. What I mean is, that I 'm not considering any selfish interests in this." He flung it out in that challenging way.

"Oh, I understand that," said Johnson, quickly and harshly. "I mean, I understand your motive. I know you 're not plugging for your interests. As you say," — his round eyes fixed the eyes of the owner; the two men looked at each other, square-shouldered, — "you and I have got on better than any other two. We understand each other. I can do this thing that you propose; I mean I 'm capable of doing it; yet I am under many obligations to Mr. Malden. He trusts me fully. That stock which stands in my name he regards as his for the matter in hand. To use it against him would have all the appearance of the most detestable betrayal. If there 's any man in the world that I 'd hate not being able to look squarely in the eye, that man is Mr. Malden. You can understand that."

"Perfectly. It would cost you something, Johnson, to turn against him and overcome him by force. Maybe more than it would cost me. But

there are others. You know how much of a service it would be to Mrs. Malden — and Miss Malden."

"Does she know of this?" Johnson demanded abruptly.

"Naturally it 's not a thing for her to know — this proposition," said Dyer; "but she knows her father's situation and the situation of the works."

Again for a moment the two men looked each other hard in the eye. Johnson's eyes turned slowly to the works and came back to Dyer's face. "I am those works," he said slowly, in a low voice, eye to eye with Dyer. "I am that plant. I 've kept it going the last five years — not Malden. I am keeping it going now. I don't care a rap for the plant either. I mean for my job and the chance, possibly, to get in as part owner, and for the town and all that. It 's something else."

Dyer took a long breath, looking at the Superintendent with open admiration. "I know you 've kept the plant going," he said. "And I suppose I can understand" — he bent forward and touched the other's knee. "But don't you see, Johnson, you can do better to wind it up now?"

"Maybe. It might be worth while — and wind myself up with it," said Johnson, slowly. "Let me think it over."

He looked at the plant, then up at the shining bend of the river; and he did not look around as Dyer left.

IV

AT noon the men gathered in the wood-finishing shop, a long room on the ground-floor of the main building, bare save for the work-benches which ran around three sides, fitted with various tools and machines. The whole force came, four hundred, comfortably filling the room. There were a score of young women from the office and the label-room, neatly dressed in shirt-waists and summer skirts. The men lifted them to seats on a long high bench, with jokes and laughter, so that here where the girls were, there was a note of gayety, the contact of the sexes striking out its little play of comedy in spite of the heaviness which pervaded the room elsewhere.

Malden pushed his way through hurriedly, with a hasty greeting here and there, and mounted the chair at the farther end of the room. The President's large figure stood in sharp relief against the bare rough wall of whitewashed brick. Four hundred faces turned toward him in anxious silence, waiting the word from this master of their bread.

Malden spoke rapidly, earnestly. He recited briefly the original offer of the trust to buy the works, which had been rejected when it developed that the trust proposed to shut down the plant. The trust had been formed without them. It intended to dominate the field. They were bearing the full brunt of its competition. Doubtless

the men all knew that the works were being operated at a loss. The Company was willing to take its full share of the fight. It would accept the situation to the limit of its ability. It would forego every cent of profit. It would even stand a round loss. But it could not stand the whole loss without ruining itself, which would be to accomplish the purpose of the trust and wipe out the High Grove plant. They must go on selling plows as cheap as the trust sold if they were to hold their trade and continue in the business. He believed there was something in the High Grove plant worth preserving. The men knew what High Grove was as well as he did. Here was a community which worked out to the good of all its members. The children had the best advantages, were brought up in a clean, wholesome atmosphere, had an example of applied democracy before them. The works had never closed a day for forty years — since his father started them. Men felt secure in their employment. Wages were not violently reduced in hard times. At this moment wages averaged higher in High Grove than in the trust plants, although there had been a slight rise — widely advertised — in the latter. This plant had always been run as though the men had a right to share in its prosperity, as though they were partners in the enterprise. The enterprise was now confronted with an enemy which purposed destroying it. They must stand together in common

danger. He proposed a horizontal reduction of ten per cent in wages, pledging himself that the wages should be restored as soon as the situation improved, — as soon as the trust learned that here was a community which proposed to stand up for the good that was in it; which could neither be bought nor bullied into subjection to trust rule. He would like to hear from any of the men who had anything to say.

The President's fervent voice, wound up to an oratorical pitch, stopped in a dramatic pause — and a dead silence ensued. Thirty, forty heavy painful seconds passed without a stir. Then Packett, the foreman of the wood-finishing room, one of the best men in the plant, slid from a bench beside his daughter, stepped to the clear space before the chair, and faced the audience, — a tall, spare man of fifty with a long, limp, iron-gray moustache.

"We 've heard what Mr. Malden says," he began. "I 've been in the works twenty years. My children were brought up here, and I believe High Grove has been a good place for them. I 'd hate to see the works shut down. We know that Mr. Malden has been fair and we can take his word. It will be pretty hard lines for some of us; but for one I 'm willing to stand my cut. I think it 's the best thing we can do."

That was all — to Malden's secret surprise and chagrin. There was nothing of the enthusiasm, nothing of the ideal communal loyalty which he had

expected. Packett walked back to his bench. There was a little patter of applause from the older workmen, — the polite cheering of a comrade; then the oppressive silence again.

Lyman, a workman as old in the service as Packett himself, a skilful and steady man, with thick hair and a bushy beard, spoke from the centre of the room.

"How long will the cut last, Mr. Malden?"

"As long as the trust makes it necessary," the President replied with a touch of passion. He kept a clear face to the audience, but he was bitterly disappointed, half angry at the stolid attitude of the men.

Lyman came forward to the spot Packett had occupied, turning his hairy, intelligent face to the audience.

"I have been a long time in the works, too," he said slowly. "I think High Grove has been a good place for a workman. I will cheerfully stand the cut or double the cut if that 's all we need to keep from being turned out here; if the plant will go on then as it has in the past. Ten per cent off a workman's wages means a good deal to him; more than a wealthy man realizes. If the trust is going to gobble us up in the end, there 's no use in our making sacrifices. But if Mr. Malden says he thinks this cut will fix him so he can hold his own against the trust until the trust gives in, we ought to take his judgment."

Again there was a heavy silence, the men op-

pressed by the prospective loss of income, which meant a reduction in their already narrow scale of living, — oppressed still more by uncertainty as to the future, by lack of assurance as to whether this sacrifice would suffice.

"I can only tell you what the situation is now," said the President, quietly. The oppression reached his own heart. "One cannot see what the future holds. In my judgment the ten per cent cut will suffice. I have given you my best judgment. The alternative is to close the works."

Nothing more was offered. Malden stepped down from the chair. The men began leaving the room in heavy silence. When most of them were gone, Malden himself went out, keenly disappointed, gloomy, chagrined because they had met him with no more enthusiasm, feeling that someway they had belied his faith in them, half angry with them for it in spite of himself.

Going out, he saw Johnson by the door, talking to a knot of men. The Superintendent's big spare frame loomed above the others. His bent head and lean face gave an effect of power. There were force, conviction, authority, in the tones of his voice. The men were nodding their heads in assent.

"Yes, that 's so, that 's so," one of them said.

It lightened the President's oppressed heart. Here was something sure, solid, invincible, in a world which had somehow been getting all adrift. He felt Johnson like a rock under his struggling feet.

When Johnson presently went around to the office, he came upon Genslow at the corner of the building, talking with Biggs and four or five other ironworkers, recent arrivals, men from Chicago who had been through strikes and worked in unions.

"The old man's guff did n't fool 'em much," he heard Biggs say.

The Superintendent threw Genslow a hard look, and passed without other recognition. No courtesy was wasted between him and the editor nowadays.

V

In the days that followed, a new air pervaded High Grove. Two strangers arrived from Chicago. Soon every one knew that they were agents from the labor organization, come to preach among the men, seeking to form them into trades' unions. To this time there had been only the vaguest organization among the High Grove workmen. Now the air of the town was full of this new force, — the organized workmen banded to exert their power, a power great enough to overthrow the established order, to cause social upheavals. To the substantial people in High Grove this power suggested something huge, sinister, anarchic. But there were others among the townsfolk who upheld the unions, and still others — the younger and less responsible element — who sat back and hoped there would be a jolly good row, anyway. Genslow had the effect,

to the more stable townsmen, of being enthusiastically of this latter element. The "Messenger" criticised the Company and its President and openly gloried in the progress of the union. There was talk of driving the editor out of town.

Johnson watched. He could feel the drift of the men toward the union. In the loss of part of their wages, in the uncertainty as to the future, their sense of helplessness drove them together. Packett and some of the older men would have nothing to do with the movement, abstaining from principle and persuading others to hold away. Lyman and another thoughtful element welcomed the movement, likewise from principle. But circumstances, the sense of helplessness, swayed most and drew them toward the organization. A little while ago they were prosperous, contented, secure. Now, from no acts of theirs, this calamity of reduced wages had come upon them. Harder things might be in store. They must stand together, each lending his strength to the others. The way to do this was to join in the union. If they did n't like it, they could withdraw. In two weeks a hundred men had joined, and there was a guarded mass meeting. The men drew courage from a sense of the strength in their numbers. With courage and confidence the idea of their rights increased. Biggs and his ironworkers declared boldly that they must demand the old wages and strike if they did n't get them. Everybody knew that Dyer wanted to sell the works to the

trust. With the advantage of this ten per cent reduction in expenses he could get better terms from the trust. Then, like as not, he would persuade Malden to sell, and the men would be left holding the bag. Ten per cent meant bread and butter out of their families' mouths. Was Dyer taking any ten per cent reduction in his living? Was n't he living like a nabob all the time? Why did n't he sell some of his horses if he wanted to get money to fight the trust — not take the money from women and children?

Malden sat gloomy at the dinner-table. "The men have a perfect right to organize, a perfect right," he was saying to his wife, trying, not very successfully, to give it the air of a cheerful assent. "I can't blame them — if they think it will do them any good. But" — he looked up in a troubled search for sympathy — "I think I had earned the right to their confidence. Why, this talk of a strike is nonsense — idiotic. That would be too absurd — for the men to strike and close the works — the very thing the trust would like best!" He looked at his wife and at Julia for affirmation. The women were silent. "Johnson has great influence with them, — great influence. He 's one of them," he added, with a suggestion of helplessness which escaped neither listener.

The President's world, which had seemed so right and strong, so immutably founded upon what was best and most righteous, had received so many

shocks of late — since Blair, the trust-promoter, had stepped in — that he was beginning to feel a bit confused and at a loss, as though the sun persisted in rising from the west.

"It occurs to me, Frank, that Johnson would have done better if he had driven these agitators away and prevented the forming of the unions," Mrs. Malden observed presently.

She had that high, cracked voice, of a quality by no means unpleasant, which comes to some nervous women late in life. Her hair was puffed and frizzed in front. She had worn it that way ever since Julia could remember, with never a concession to the mode of the day. There was a bit of fine lace at the neck of her dress. She usually wore a bit of fine lace. She managed to convey and to maintain a singular suggestion of an ancient régime. Her view of the Superintendent's duty in respect of the union surprised neither husband nor daughter. Malden only smiled with a fond and admiring indulgence.

"Driving people away is n't so easy, Fanny," he said. "You have the only sceptre in town."

"All the more reason why I should keep mine," she replied, and in the lift of her head there was a hint of her pride of place. "At any rate, Johnson might drive some of the young men away from his sister. I suppose his mother is helpless enough," she added.

Malden caught an odd glance between mother

and daughter, and looked back at his wife for an explanation.

"We have had to drop the young lady," said Mrs. Malden, dryly, and Malden then comprehended that here was something between his wife and daughter which the wife had been waiting for a chance to notify him of.

"Not we, mother; you; you alone!" Miss Malden exclaimed. "I have nothing to do with it. I have begged you not to do it. But my wishes count for nothing, it seems. I 'm not pleading for the girl. Lena is n't bad; but she is foolish. Yet it is n't for her; but for William's sake — "

"We are not dropping William," Mrs. Malden observed with a quiet, acid touch of sarcasm.

"Yes, you are! Ask father if William has n't carried the works on his shoulders these last five years!"

"I fancy your father has been about — although you seem not to have observed it," said Mrs. Malden, with the quiet, acid touch.

Malden flushed slightly. "Well, I think I have been about the works some," he said with a heavier attempt at sarcasm. "H'm — what 's it all about, anyway?"

"I walked into the orchard last night about nine o'clock," Julia began, looking at him eagerly; "I came upon somebody at the pear-tree. After all, it was only a silly youngsters' prank. There was Jennie Presley and the fellow Genslow and another

lad — and Lena. The gallants were stealing pears for the girls. It was a silly youngsters' prank, — a bit of juvenile bravado. I called to Lena, but she ran away with the others. Mamma heard me call, and she asked me about it to-day. She is going to drop Lena and Jennie — not invite them to the harvest party. It is too high-handed — with me!"

Mrs. Malden, her gray, frizzled head erect, looked over at her daughter. "If I do not hesitate to be high-handed with my own child, why should I hesitate with other people's children?" she said, in her high, cracked, not unpleasant voice. "I trust that an invitation from Mrs. Malden implies something," she went on with dry deliberateness. "I hope that it implies at least passing respectability and the degree of good manners which you might reasonably expect from a sober hod-carrier. When it does not imply that much, Mrs. Malden will cease sending invitations. I hope I am not uncharitable; but I believe in this case in exercising charity on behalf of the orderly and well-disposed young women who believe that there is some slight significance in being invited to my house. If these affairs of ours, which are given because they are supposed to suggest certain standards to the poorer people, are to take the character of public picnics where anybody and everybody can forgather, we will stop giving the affairs."

At the bottom of his heart Malden was immensely proud of his wife's distinction. He wished

her to be the aristocrat that she was: it saved his democracy from becoming commonplace. There was no moment when he was not conscious of a difference between himself and the workmen for whom he took so much thought.

"I should n't like to hurt Johnson's feelings," he said in a troubled, propitiating way. "William is doing great work for us now. It might seem — h'm — unappreciative, unkind, you know. I wish it could be avoided."

"Do you wish your wife to send your Superintendent a list of her guests for his approval?" asked Mrs. Malden.

"Oh, not that, Fanny! Not that, of course, only —"

"Only it would come to that. We can give the party or not, just as you like."

"Why, certainly we will give the party. It has been announced. Of course, this is an affair of the house."

"And Johnson belongs to the works, not the house," said Mrs. Malden.

"I dare say Johnson will have the sense to understand it," said Malden, unhappily.

"I dare say," said Mrs. Malden, in her dry way; and Julia knew the affair was settled.

"He's an intelligent man," said Mr. Malden; "and a most useful employee," he added for Julia's benefit.

Nothing further was said between mother and daughter. The day for sending out the invitations

came. This was Miss Malden's task. The day passed with the task untouched. In the evening Miss Malden paced restlessly across her room. She looked anything but a weak woman. The beauty of her full, clear-skinned, colorless face lay in the square intelligent brow, the large dark eyes, the mass of black hair, and the mobile mouth. In the chin and nose there was a touch of strength which was, perhaps, insisted upon too much. It was not that her mother's will imposed upon her — still less her father's. An intricate and irresistible mass of things compelled her with its slow, stupid, unanswerable weight. She went to the desk, took out the bundle of invitations, neatly done up from the stationer's, a package of envelopes, and the list of guests. She sat back in the chair and put her hand over her face with an unusual gesture. The hand dropped. Her large dark eyes searched the wall a moment, as though its blank, dead surface might abruptly disclose a way out. Then she took a corner of her lip between her teeth and began addressing the envelopes rapidly. When she came to Lena Johnson's name on the list a quick blur of tears dimmed her eyes. A drop fell on the blotter. But she skipped the name and went on without a pause.

VI

JOHNSON sat in the front room looking over the "Messenger." He did not care to be seen on the porch

with it in his hand. He knew that Mr. Malden had rather conspicuously banished the sheet from his house. Yet what it had to say about Malden affairs found its way to the President. The paper appeared twice a week, Thursday and Saturday afternoons. It was the Thursday issue, still damp from the press, which Johnson unfolded, — a blanket sheet of four sprawling pages, ill-printed, blotchy with big type, straggling, its dampness giving it the effect of a rag. The second, third, and fourth pages were mostly patent-inside and advertising. On the front page Johnson found three items to read. The first:

"There are rumors of an approaching marriage in the very highest social circle. This is an event to which High Grove has been looking forward with deep interest for several years. Dame Rumor says it is to happen this time. The 'Messenger' begs to tender the happy couple its best compliments."

Then further down:

"The great social event of the summer, the Maldens' harvest party, is to be given next Thursday evening. The handsome mansion and spacious grounds on the hill will be lavishly decorated. We are told that the party, while given in the most recherché manner, will be on the same broad democratic lines which have marked so many other splendid functions on the hill, making them not mere social affairs in the restricted sense of that term, but public events in which practically the whole town participates, thus binding our people together, two or three times a year, on a common footing."

And in the middle of the page:

"It is reported that the trust has made another cut in the price of plows which are sold in competition with the Malden works. This will be bad news for the High Grove workmen. Meeting the trust's competition by reducing wages is a simple process for the Company; but it is quite serious for the men. The trust does not reduce wages, because, being a wicked combination, without public sympathy, it has to treat its men decently. How long the High Grove workmen can stand it to fight the trust remains to be seen. The Company, of course, can stand it forever under its clever plan of reducing wages. We learn that the organizing of the men is going on rapidly, and that another mass meeting of those who have joined the unions will soon be held."

Johnson turned to the last page,—that on which the local advertisements appeared. There were only the advertisements of Kohn, the clothing-emporium man, of the Silver Dollar and Workmen's Exchange saloons, and the cards of a quack doctor and two dubious lawyers. All the responsible concerns, without whose patronage the paper could not exist, had withdrawn from its pages in a body—and that meant the end of the "Messenger." To get rid of the "Messenger" was part of the fight to save the works. In that fight Johnson was giving quarter to nobody. He had won here. The "Messenger" was at the end of its rope. But as the Superintendent looked down at the blank advertising page which told of his victory, there was no elation, no satisfaction, in his mind.

That marriage in high life meant, of course, Dyer and Miss Malden. This young cub Genslow, hardly of an age to vote, with his air of blundering innocence, managed to say exactly what would hurt most. Genslow's blackguarding did not matter particularly, perhaps; and that Dyer and Miss Malden would be married was to be expected. Yet Johnson tossed the paper aside and stood up, his eyes dulled and hard. A challenge sounded in his brain. He felt himself inscrutably called upon to muster all his force, to strain every muscle, to grapple anew with his contrary world. His arms ached for action,—for something tangible and ponderable, that a man could clutch and struggle with.

Presently he put on his hat and sauntered out the back way, meaning to stroll across the flat and come around by the works,—for no reason except that in the savage struggle of his thought the works mysteriously drew him on. He passed out of the back gate. There was no sidewalk here, only a path in the tall grass with a screen of currant and blackberry bushes on the side next to the garden. Stepping out, Johnson came upon Genslow, who was strolling by, his boyish face, with its gallant little moustache, turned up toward the rear of the house; evidently he was looking for some one. Johnson knew who the some one was, and before this slim, trim young figure, gallant and debonair, with that advantage in its air which the adventurous have, he felt the hard belligerence of his mood concentrate

and take him in hand. Genslow recovered his poise first.

"Good evening, Mr. Johnson," he said. In the young fellow's handsome face, in his slight, tentative smile, in his boyish brown eyes, there was a certain softness, a tender of amity, a subtle offering to make friends.

That tentative, proffering softness instantly referred itself to Lena in Johnson's hard, hostile, jealous mind. The girl stood between them, and the older man, conscious of being burly and unromantic, felt a kind of sullen joy over the rude power of his body. His hard mood pushed him on.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

Genslow hesitated a moment. Again there was the slight, tentative smile which offered to ignore the affront; again that subtle offer of friendliness. But there was no response in the Superintendent's wrathful eye.

"Just walking on — the king's highway," said the cub.

"And trying to make trouble," Johnson added forbiddingly.

"Been reading the 'Messenger'?" The editor smiled more brilliantly. There was the note of gayety in his youthful voice. "But did you see the advertising page? The respectables have shut me out — cut me dead!" He laughed. "I suppose you did it, too."

"I think it 's a good precedent, Genslow. I 'm

going to follow it. I 'll trouble you not to loiter at my back gate. It is n't agreeable."

Genslow paused a second. "Not agreeable — to you, you mean," he suggested softly.

A flush of deeper anger overspread Johnson's face. He knew that he was behaving stupidly; but the hard fighting mood pushed him on. "No matter to whom. Move along!" he said peremptorily. There was no mistake as to what he meant.

At that moment a girl's voice, fresh, sweet, full of spring, breathing romance, trilled from the house. Genslow looked the Superintendent square in the eye. That voice gave him his triumph and he took it to the full for the space of two seconds. As he looked, he knew by that instinct which had come down from the time when the first man alertly watched the eye of a crouching beast, that the rush, the clutch, the elemental trial by strength of arm was near at hand. Lena's voice sounded, humming, in the little garden. Genslow took a deep breath, looked again meaningly into Johnson's ominous eye, and turned on his heel and walked away.

Johnson looked after him, the muscles of his jaw stiffened, his brain given over to the stupid fighting wrath. Lena was close at hand. He heard the soft humming of her voice across the hedge and the swish of the bushes as her hand moved bird-like among them, gathering berries. At once he

seemed to see himself clutching, striking, rolling on the ground like a fighting dog. An abject fear of meeting Lena's eye overcame him. He hurried away overwhelmed with shame. What good would that do — to act like a truculent drayman? What good would that do? What made him a bully? He hurried on, astonished at himself, ashamed, confused. What good would that do? How he bungled things! Above all, how he wronged Lena! He felt an immense dejection, in which he appealed confusedly to the mellow dusk of the evening, the warm, whispering air in the leaves, the smell of earth's green fecund things. Why was he left aside, heavy, rude, alone, bungling? He hurried on, mechanically taking the direction he had planned, but without noticing his surroundings.

The dingy frame building occupied by the Silver Dollar saloon fronted on River Street. As Johnson hurried abstractedly around that corner he came upon Biggs and two others emerging from the saloon. At the first glance his mind aroused, the confusion slipped away, he was alert, practical, ready.

The Superintendent looked up and nodded grimly. In the mere instant of looking up he observed the man at Biggs's right, — a young fellow with a degenerate face, now somewhat flushed with drink, — and his eye caught an odd, fearing, startled arrest in this man's face as their glances met. Johnson identified the young fellow as a stoker. He went on

three rods, then looked around quickly. The three men were standing on the saloon steps looking after him. Even at that distance he could see that the stoker's mouth was open as though he had not fully recovered his breath.

Johnson walked on, alive, attentive, his mind at work. Only a vacant stretch of the flat lay between him and the works. At his right the river flowed serenely in the dusk, softly lapping the stones that built up the roadway on its bank. The fiery crown of the forge danced in ever-changing motion. One end and the long perspective of the flank of the big building were in Johnson's view. It seemed absolutely empty, deserted, at peace. When he came nearer, his upturned, searching eye caught the flash and glimmer of a watchman's dark lantern in the top story. He went on, skirting the long side of the parallelogram. All was still, orderly. Through the windows of the squat, detached smithy, he could see the forms of the half-dozen men of the night shift at their sweaty work. This long flank of the big building was unbroken by any entrance save the big double iron doors opposite the smithy. The other flank was exposed to the view of the town. The iron doors were securely locked. Johnson stopped. The stoker persisted in his mind, and he turned back. The engine-room occupied a little addition, a mere brick-box thrown out like a toe from the foot of the big building. The lifting ground had been cut away here for a

level foundation, and the box of the engine-room huddled against the cut bank so that it was almost hidden from the town.

Johnson remembered something more. The room in which crates were made occupied the corner of the main building immediately adjoining the engine-room. A small door, always locked, opened between them. This position of the crate-room was convenient for shipping. A spur of railroad track ran along the town side of the plant. But the proximity of the combustibles to the engine-room was not satisfactory. A sequence of ideas was forming in Johnson's mind. He quickened his steps like a man who had forgotten something. The box of the engine-room seemed still enough as he peered uncertainly in at the dirty window-pane. From the bunch of keys in his hip pocket he selected one, applied it to the small door next to the wall of the main shop, and entered the cave-like room which contained the boilers and the engine. The smell of smoke and burning wool assailed his nostrils. In a moment he saw it, — a pile of oily engine waste flung down on the two wooden steps leading to the small locked door which communicated with the crate-room. The pile was smoking in a leisurely sort of way. A breath of air came through the opened outer door, and a bright little tongue of flame curled up from the waste.

One could not say what that heap of oily wool might contain. Johnson was upon it in a second,

seizing it with both hands, flinging it out on the cement floor. His grasping hands encountered something rough, hard, heavy, and piping hot that seared the flesh; then they got into something wet that bit the burns. A mere five seconds' furious work finished it. On the cement floor a fierce little bonfire was burning harmlessly with the crackle and fury of an inflammable oil. The odor of the oil was in Johnson's nostrils. His seared hands reeked and stung with it, — turpentine.

A couple of big, rough, hot cinders from the furnace lay on the cement beside the bonfire. It was quite plain, — two hot cinders wrapped up and smothered in dry waste; waste saturated with engine oil put over it; then, on the top step, against the door, waste soaked in turpentine, the whole making a clumsy but fairly trustworthy slow fuse which might smoulder on for an hour, possibly, before the turpentine caught. Johnson stooped and smelled of the door — turpentine. He put his finger in the crack under the door, and it came out wet and smarting. He had no key to that door. It was always locked.

It took him perhaps ten minutes to go around through the various shops to the crate-room and find where the turpentine had been spilled on the floor and over the loose shavings. The palms and fingers of both hands were seared where he had grasped the hot cinders. He found some dry waste and wrapped them up clumsily. Then he went

over the plant carefully and cautioned the two watchmen.

It was after ten when he finally turned toward home. Across the railroad tracks he stopped and looked back. The long bulk of the works loomed, still, dark, safe. His burned hands stung and ached. He was conscious of that as he looked back at the looming plant.

He was that plant! He, Johnson, was the brain, the will, the soul of that pile of rough brick! He had kept the works going! These last three years of fierce competition, while Malden, aging, relaxing, more and more infatuated with his doctrines, more and more loosened the master's grasp, it had been he, Johnson, who bore the brunt and pulled the thing through. When destruction impended, it was he, Johnson, who was at hand to leap in and ward it off, — not Malden! A strange, grim exultation filled him, as though he could diffuse his mind through those various bare shops; as though he could incorporate those rough brick walls with himself. He hated the works, — never more than just now, — but nobody could take them away from him! They were himself!

The house was dark when he reached home. He opened the screen door and entered the living-room in front. As he stepped toward the door of his own room, a shadow beside the window stirred. He paused, aware that Lena was sitting there alone in the dark, — she was such a little, young thing.

"All alone?" he called cheerily.

She did not answer for a moment. Then her sweet, fresh voice sounded in the dark. "Mrs. Malden is n't going to invite me to her harvest party," she said simply, yet with an odd quickness. There was an indefinable pull on Johnson's nerves as he caught the effect of her suppressed excitement. "I've just been up to Jen Presley's. She is n't invited either. The other girls got their invitations two days ago, and Jen and I are not to be invited."

"I'm sorry, Lena," was all he could think of to say at the moment. He referred it to Genslow.

"Everybody will know about it," she added. He comprehended the effect, to her, of a publicly pronounced judgment, of a brand conspicuously applied. It seemed abominably cruel,— femininely cruel. Some hot words came to his lips. Then he remembered Genslow and himself at the back gate; and he suspected that Lena knew of that.

As though his mind lay open to her, she said in a moment, "William, did you forbid Ben — Genslow to come here?"

"Yes, I did, Lena," he said, with an odd reluctance; and he spoke in his kindliest voice. "You know what I think of him. But if he would come to the front door like a man —"

"So you could kick him out, William?" the sweet voice asked.

Johnson felt the wall rise between them. They would only quarrel. He went on to the little room

especially his own, behind the living-room. It took him some time to light the lamp because of his bandaged hands. Lena's sweet, childish voice rang in his ears. What were those strange noises they had been making at each other, — those vocal utterances which the brain seemed to interpret, but which served only to alienate them? Why had n't he simply barked at her and trotted by? Why must it always work out to her injury?

It was the Maldens who had worked that refined cruelty upon her, — stupid and useless. That is, the feminine Maldens, for it was a woman's cruelty. That blow, aimed at his sorest and tenderest spot, had been delivered by the fair hands on the hill! He looked down at his own bandaged hands, and for a moment he wished to laugh. He felt the stir and uplifting of a big wrathful power within him. For a moment it seemed that he might clutch the walls of the plant with the arms of a Samson and crush them. That long bulk of rough brick, empty, dark, peaceful, serenely stupid, yet holding the soul of his passion, — why did not this intolerable tangle of human lives become dynamic and blow it up?

He went over to the desk, fumbled out an old envelope containing the certificate of his stock in the Company. He stood with the envelope in his bandaged hands, staring down at it. Had not the time come, as Dyer said, to wind it all up?

But Dyer might have his own interest —

VII

THE stir grew in High Grove. No night but Johnson went over to the works, surprising the watchmen at odd hours. He went about among the men continually, working with the better-disposed to prevent the strike which everybody felt trembling in a balance. It was the crisis.

Malden himself was half bewildered. These strange, new forces which had abruptly shouldered their way into his well-ordered world perplexed him. He relied more and more upon Johnson. The Superintendent had succeeded in several instances where the President had failed. The men must believe in Johnson, — one of themselves, brought up in the Malden system, a living testimonial to its efficacy.

The mass meeting at which the strike would be again debated was to be held Monday. Sunday evening Malden and his wife sat on the deep veranda. Dyer and Miss Malden had been there a moment before. They had talked over the situation very frankly, as in a family council, all under the sense of the impending crisis.

"If they strike, I suppose it means ruin," said Malden, quietly.

The ominous word brought a silence in which Dyer, lounging against a pillar, studied the floor.

"It may mean ruin for the Company," he suggested. "But ruin is n't the last word, fortunately."

He strolled along the porch and sat down at Julia's feet. "A good deal may come after the bankruptcy court," he added, for her.

Presently the elders, busy with their money trouble, were aware of the young ones loitering across the lawn. Here and there, at farther and farther spaces, they caught sight of the two figures walking near together through the shrubbery. Syringa, rose, and lilac bushes and dwarf evergreens grew near the gravel roadway which skirted the edge of the grounds and led from the street to the stables. Dyer and Miss Malden had been standing still for some minutes, his straw hat in his left hand, in his right a white rose with a long stem. There was absolute silence save for the murmurous voices of the night.

"It always had to be you — from the very beginning," she said presently, looking up at him. "That was inevitable."

"Yes; it was inevitable!" he repeated quickly, with a note of triumph. "Only — dear woman! — I wish I might have come sooner. I wish we might have come sooner. You were a long time on the way. And I know you had a bad time!"

"I suppose we all, except you, dreamed something else a long time ago. It was a beautiful dream; but it would n't work out, it would n't come true. I tried honestly to live up to it, and I 've tried other things; tried them with all my heart; but they would n't work out true. Sometimes I seemed to be

succeeding; but something always stood in the way — the inevitable, I suppose — and you. Everything else failed finally. And now — I 'm glad, dear! I 'm glad!" He felt in her eyes, her voice, her whole person, the great rest, the sinking back to peace.

"Truly glad?" he insisted.

"Truly glad! If — only William will understand — now."

"He will understand," said Dyer, comfortingly, with the victor's easy magnanimity. "He is one who is capable of understanding."

There was the rustle and brisk swishing of shrubbery near at hand. The large figure of a man revealed itself coming through the bushes. Dyer dropped Miss Malden's hands. The intruding figure halted abruptly; began mumbling something apologetically; was already backing hastily away from the tableau which obviously was not posed for spectators.

"William! William! Is that you?" Miss Malden's voice called.

"Come on, Johnson," Dyer's voice seconded.

The Superintendent paused, looking back at the two figures standing close together.

"Were you coming to the house — to see father?" Miss Malden encouraged.

"Yes — I was coming," said Johnson. They were waiting; and he came slowly back, facing them, waiting also. He saw that Dyer was regarding him with an open, friendly look; that

Miss Malden was bending toward him, eager, inviting.

"Father is on the porch. Arthur will tell him you are here," she said.

Dyer regarded Johnson with that friendly look, then spoke under his breath to Miss Malden. "Shall I tell them?" he asked.

She considered swiftly. "Yes," she said quickly, with a swift upward look which subtly put herself into his hands.

Dyer turned lightly away, disappearing through the shrubbery, leaving the others alone.

"Mr. Dyer and I are engaged, William," was the first thing she said — softly.

"I'm glad of it. It should have been long ago. I'm glad of it," said Johnson, rapidly. "I've been expecting it four years. It's fit. It winds the thing up. I'm going away myself. I came up to tell your father. I'm going to leave the works." He spoke all this like a man delivering an unpleasant message, nervously. Then he added, in the same abrupt way: "My sister has run off with Genslow."

"Ah — Lena?"

"Lena. I got the telegram this afternoon. They were married in Illinois City yesterday," he said in the same quick, hard voice.

She took a step nearer, bending toward him, agitated, her face drawn. "I could n't do anything!" she cried. "I could n't do anything to help you even there! Even with Lena, where I

might have helped so much, I never helped at all. I 've never really helped in any way!"

"Well — the snub — over the party — cost me something — " he began.

"And I did it! I did it!" she exclaimed. "My mother determined it — and I let myself go. I felt helpless to go back, then, and tell her what had happened — long ago. I felt myself bound. I did that meanness — to your sister. Imagine that! Then you 'll begin to understand us Maldens. You don't know the family, William — nor me, either. Selfishness paralyzes me in the end. I 'm glad you 're going away, where you 'll have a fair chance. I 've hurt you enough."

Her humility touched his hard mood. "Don't blame yourself," he said simply. "I have felt hard and fighting sometimes, I admit. But it melts when I see you and hear you. Never mind. The dream was good if it did n't come true. I thank you for it, Julia."

"No; but you — you, William. You 've been true. Everything has been put over on your shoulders. You 've even kept the works going. I 'd have known that myself if Arthur had n't told me so. Somebody has to pay, and you 've paid, paid, paid all the time. When the one thing comes along where we might do something — Lena — what is it we do? What do I do? You 've been empty-handed all along. It 's you who are empty-handed and cheated in the end."

"Do you think that? Do you believe it?" he demanded swiftly. "Don't you ever think it again! Don't you ever believe it! Don't I know right now that you 've paid most, after all; that my hands are most full? See! When I knew you, then your cheeks were pink. You had the air of spring. There was an evening in the orchard under the apple blossoms, and you were just like them. That was eight years ago. It was soon over, maybe, — our dream. But the bloom, the fragrance, the spring, were for me! That can't come back: it 's only once in a lifetime. You 're wiser now; richer probably in every other way. But the spring has passed. Nobody that ever sees you in a garden again will think that you 've just been shaken out of the apple blossoms. You understand, Julia? I want you to know how much I 've had. You can't ever again sit on a bench with a man in overalls, and glory because he is poor. I knew when it began to fail, and you knew. I suppose neither of us knows just why it failed. Maybe I got too ambitious and too prosperous. My mother and your father and mother were in the way. No matter. It might have ended there. I might have gone away. It might have faded out. But it was big and vital enough to hold us both. I turned to the works. I made you the works, — you and me. I kept them going for you. They 've been kept going because they had to go. I made them go, and I lived in that. It ended for you

first because it had to. This thing eats one up; destroys one. I lasted longer because I was all hard bone. It 's eaten me. But was n't it great? Do you think it has n't been worth while?"

"William!" she bent toward him, her eyes shining, speaking low. "I 'm glad I 'm old! I 'm glad I look old; glad there 's no more color in my face! Maybe that is a strange thing for a woman to say — especially one who has just become engaged, and who is very fond — But it is fit. If it had faded out easily for me, I should have been abject before you now. I 'm glad that other time belonged entirely to you, and that you took it all, every bit! That time had to belong to you, as much —"

He nodded encouragingly. "Yes, as much as this time has to belong to somebody else. At last we 're free —"

The complaint of the shrubbery, parted by a hurrying, heavy figure interrupted, and Malden came out before them, joyously impatient over the news Dyer had divulged.

He went straight up to Julia and put his hand on her shoulder, beaming at her.

"Stopping to talk business — now?" he asked jokingly, and turned urbanely to Johnson, holding out his hand.

"Something new, William?" he asked cheerily.

"Yes; something new. I 'm going away. I came up to tell you."

Malden's eyebrows moved, — a slight sign of annoyance. "It's hardly an opportune time. Something urgent?" he asked.

"I'm going away for good. I'm going to quit the works," said Johnson, simply.

"What! Leave? Desert?" Malden stared at him incredulously.

"I hope you'll not call it that," said Johnson, mildly.

"But I should call it that! Nonsense! What! Leave the works? Now?" Malden exclaimed vehemently. "Nonsense! I expect to get in some more money now. We're in the very thick of the fight. The crisis is right at hand. And the men — explain yourself, Johnson! What do you mean?"

"I mean simply, Mr. Malden, that I am offered a position at Illinois City, and I think it best to take it."

"Illinois — with the trust? The trust? It's shameful, Johnson! You're selling me out!"

"Oh, father!" Julia expostulated.

"Julia!" the patriarch warned, in his deepest voice. "I call it ingratitude!"

"Father! Please!"

"Julia! I've taken this man up; pushed him along. What! A man that I've made and that I trusted as much as my own flesh and blood! At the very crisis, when Arthur might put in more money, he sells me out."

"Hardly that, Mr. Malden," said Johnson, patiently. "I 'm merely resigning my position. I suppose any man has the right to do that."

"Oh, the right! The right! I had the right to let you and your mother starve! I would n't have believed it of a dog."

"Father!" she stepped between him and Johnson.

"Be still, Julia!" he commanded wrathfully. "Don't interfere between me and one of my workmen. It is not the province of my daughter. I'll tell him to his face —"

"Your daughter and your workman were once engaged to be married. Consider that before you tell him!"

Malden stared at her, his eyebrows working up and down, utterly unable to take in the sense of her words, confused as though she had spoken in a strange tongue.

"I loved William Johnson, and promised to marry him," she repeated with a little stress on each word.

Malden's jaw dropped. He still stared at her like a man paralyzed, bereft of the power of speech and action, his eyebrows moving in that odd way as though his brain were visibly laboring to take in this stunning idea.

"Oh, father! father! Can't you understand?" she cried, with a burst of heroic impatience and pity. "It was you who always insisted upon the glorious possibilities of democracy. You talked of the noble

condition of the workman. You preached our sacred duty to the poor and lowly. You grew enthusiastic over applied Christianity. And while you were in the library preaching to your friends, William and I were outside dreaming of living it. What could have been simpler or more natural? Can't you understand? I had n't the least doubt then that I should marry him."

"Him? You?" Malden articulated.

"We were sincere, and you were not. For we knew it was no use asking your consent — and mother's — then. The dream would n't come true. But it was so fine — he was so fine — that I honor him apart from all other men. It is n't for my father to insult such a one."

Malden, still groping and gasping mentally, perceived enough so that his eyes fell. "I'll say no more," he muttered. But he looked up at her in an instant with a fresh trouble.

"But Arthur?" he stammered, quailing before the new fright which might now come out of this pit.

"Why, naturally, Arthur knows all about it. He has known from the beginning. He knew at the time," she said patiently.

"All along?" he repeated incredulously.

"All along. Arthur could always understand," she said.

Malden looked at her with a fixed, pathetic blankness, while the perception took its full form in his

mind. His daughter engaged to William Johnson; Arthur Dyer — almost one of the family — knowing it for years; these people about him, touching his life at every moment; all this going on in his snug, good little world that he had seemed to know so thoroughly and to be guiding so surely!

"Well, there seems to have been — h'm — to have been a lot going on here that I never dreamed of," he said with simple, bewildered helplessness.

"Oh, dear father, such a lot! Human nature — the big forces that have their way in spite of everybody! Dear father, you see it has all come out right, if not as you planned. Dear father!" she held his hand between her palms.

"Yes — certainly not as I planned. You 're going, William, — to Illinois City?" he asked meekly.

"I think it best. You can't win this fight, Mr. Malden. A number of the men are going with me."

"And I suppose the rest will strike," said the manufacturer.

"Perhaps. But all the capable ones can find work at Illinois City. The extension to that plant is nearly finished. They 're taking on new men to run it. There never would have been any trouble about the men finding work."

The manufacturer was looking at him, trying to assort this new idea with the other new ones.

"Mr. Malden, let me tell you. As long as five years ago, conditions that no man could hinder

began writing off this plant. Illinois City was the place to make the plows. You held out against it. I fought it, with all my might, night and day — because she was in my mind then. You understand? It was only a question of time. But a man in a corner, with his back to the wall, likes to grit his teeth and make the time as long as he can. Now, don't you see, there is no longer any reason — any motive — "

Malden looked at his Superintendent with a humble and melancholy smile. "Because my daughter is engaged to Arthur Dyer!" he said. Suddenly he threw up his hands, like one utterly giving it up. "Let it come! Let the trust come as soon as it likes! One man's plans, after all — what does a man know? I used to think my plans important, too. Oh, well — h'm — will you come up to the house, William?"

"I've a good deal to attend to to-night. I must get back," said Johnson, quietly. He glanced at Miss Malden.

"Good-night," he said, going.

A pressure from Julia's hand stayed Malden as he was about to turn away. He stood beside her silently while she watched Johnson's big figure out of sight. Then they turned to the house.

IV

THE CHAIRMAN'S POLITICS

IV

THE CHAIRMAN'S POLITICS

I

THE thick glass panel of the office door bore the modest sign, "D. O. Emmet, Lawyer." Miss Prescott stood by the broad window in the outer room, looking idly down upon the roofs of the passing street cars in Washington Street, a hundred feet below.

The door to the inner room was wide open. Miss Prescott had sauntered out five minutes before, because it had occurred to her that all the business of the interview respecting the Children's Playgrounds Bill was really done. That had occurred also to the Secretary of the Prairie Avenue Social Settlements League and to the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Cities. Still they lingered in there. As for Emmet, lingering had got to be a vocation with him whenever this tall young lady was concerned.

"I wish that Electric Consolidation Bill was well out of the way," he was saying, with preoccupied abruptness. If he looked worried, it was so fleeting an expression that the Secretary could not be sure. He came back at once to his confident manner. "But I mean that it shall be; I'm sending a man to work on it now."

Somewhere in the background of Miss Page's mind flitted a question as to what the Electric Consolidation Bill had to do with the Children's Playgrounds Bill; but she let it flit. Other things were more interesting, and she knew that she was lingering.

She was smiling at him, a little vaguely. "Well, I shall go to Springfield, Tuesday — I hope it will go through." She looked down and brushed her neatly gloved fingers along the edge of the desk.

As a kind of discovery, Emmet found her, in that small, abstracted action, inexpressibly feminine.

"It 's pretty hard for you down there," he said — so personally that there was a little commotion in the Secretary's pulse.

"Yes; sometimes it 's pretty hard — and not always quite pleasant with some of the people. But —" she smiled — "a good many things are pretty hard."

The Chairman stepped over to her, his head bent slightly, his eyes glowing down at her so that she felt the big nervous force in him beating against her polite defences, and an underthought complained

that he was a dreadfully ardent, uncontrolled sort of man.

"No! Don't go down there again," he said abruptly. "There's no need. It's just getting your bill reported by my committee. Leave it to me. I want to do something!"

"But I've engaged to go," she protested nervously, steadily looking down. "Mrs. Randall thought I ought to."

"No!" he repeated. "I know better than Mrs. Randall. If you don't leave it to me, I'll beat your bill! The committee sha'n't report it at all!" He was laughing; but the laugh did not allay the obtruding self-consciousness of either.

"Oh, if it's a question of life or death, of course I surrender!" She laughed too, in the same nervous way. "If you think that's best," she added rather humbly, for the laugh would not hold out; and she started for the door.

As Emmet took the first step beside her, his hand brushed her sleeve, so that it could scarcely be said whether he had touched her or detained her for the wink of an eye.

"Thank you! I won't forget!" he said tremulously, under his breath; and they got to the door together.

Returning to the inner room from ushering the two ladies out, and closing the door behind him, Emmet kept assuring himself, amid the endless turmoil in his mind, that nothing whatever had

happened. There was that thrill in his veins from the mere gossamer touch of her sleeve, and it turned his brain volatile; but he assured himself that nothing had happened. So he sat down by the window and looked into the street without seeing anything, and in ten seconds jumped up and began pacing the room. A chair drifted his way, and he dropped into it only to spring up again. Once he found himself gripping the top of the low bookcase in his two strong hands, as though he were going to coerce it into acknowledging that nothing had happened. He kept thinking of himself in odd, disconnected pieces.

When the "Clarion" published its estimate of city candidates for the legislature, this paragraph appeared under his name and senatorial district:

"Democrat. Age 27. Born in Cook County. Lawyer. An unknown quantity. Well educated; good speaker. But owes his nomination to Johnny Gallagher. Has some respectable friends, who say he is better than his sponsors. Looks dubious."

It looked dubious to Emmet himself just then. He had told her once that he believed in practical politics. He thought he had never been a bad fellow. But there had been a certain carelessness, a certain free-handed liberalness, in his politics. Especially there was this affair of the electric bill. It came back to him in a kind of lump. Also she came back to him just as she had stood there be-

side the desk. It seemed to him that a wise and just Providence might well personally prevent that presence from coming any further into affairs that looked so dubious; and he made a little prayer to her, or to the Providence, or to both, to the effect that, if she would come in, he would get himself all spotlessly cleaned up and be worthy of her.

II

It looked rather more than dubious to Mr. Gordon Prescott, President of the Consolidated Light and Power Company, — a stocky man of fifty, explosive at times, with a patch of close-cropped red whisker on each ruddy cheek. Even his bald head was pink, as though to carry out the sanguine color scheme.

He was explaining it to the men in the smoking-room after dinner: "So this gang in the City Council got up a paper concern that they called the Metropolitan Electric Company, and passed an ordinance for it. Then, when they could n't sell it out to me or to the South Side Illuminating Company, they turned it over to Johnny Gallagher. He got some money and built a shed that he calls a power-station on the west side, and strung some wires, and pretended to go into the electric-lighting business. Well, my company and the South Side Illuminating get around to the point where we 're willing to go in together, to consolidate. We can

save $200,000 a year by it, and give just as good and cheap a service to the public. The lawyers look it over, and find that there 'll have to be a little amendment to the State Incorporation Law. They fix up the amendment and introduce it into the Senate. Then it 's referred to the Committee on Cities, instead of to the Committee on Corporations, as it should be, and we find out that Johnny Gallagher owns that committee, body, boots, and breeches, and we 've got to make terms with him, and buy out his rotten Metropolitan Company at his price, or our amendment will be hung up. It 's just damnable. Nice mess for ladies to be mixed up in with their Playgrounds Bill! And this fellow, Emmet, that Miss Page quoted to us, is chairman of that committee! He 'll pick her pockets if she don't look out!"

III

NEVERTHELESS, the fellow Emmet bore no outward marks of degeneracy as, on Monday about noon, he entered the inner room on the upper floor of one of the least pretentious buildings in La Salle Street.

This inner room was a mere closet, with only a desk and a couple of chairs. The man at the desk wore a Derby hat tilted back on his globular head. He was middle-aged, with broad shoulders and a firm, flat chest, leanly muscular. A dark-reddish beard, cut short, grew high over his cheek-bones.

He merely glanced up as the shining presence burst in.

The Chairman never had his effect of sparkling more perfectly. Such was his air of youthful buoyancy and vigor that it seemed simply optional with him whether he stopped or kept straight on through the wall.

However, he dropped at once into the chair at the end of the desk, bending forward in his eagerness.

"They 'll give $350,000 for the Metropolitan, John," he said. "I 've just had word from Winthrop. He makes the offer." There was a vibrant quality in the young man's voice. His eyes shone happily.

The shrewd eyes of the elder, lustreless man twinkled a little in his unanswering face. Even then Emmet was the dearest joke of his humorous heart. But this was business.

"Three fifty, eh?" he said calmly.

The coolness irritated Emmet's heat. "Of course I 've taken this up on my own motion," he said. "I sent a man to Winthrop because I wanted it settled and out of the way. You know I don't like it. Whatever we may say among ourselves, we 're using a public position for our own advantage. Now, good gracious, John, this is a handsome offer, a generous offer! We can just take it and get the thing cleaned up and off our hands."

Gallagher looked at the young man imper-

turbably. "Did you accept their generous offer, Dan'l?" he asked softly.

When he said "Dan'l," it was always subtly a gibe and a reproof.

"Of course I did n't," Emmet flung back impatiently. "You know I can't do that. But I did tell my man that Winthrop had made a good offer," he added challengingly.

Thereupon a series of deep wrinkles came lengthwise in Gallagher's forehead. The edge of his scalp moved down. His eyebrows arched and moved up. His large mouth expanded on lateral lines until his strong back teeth were exposed, and a mighty grin stood revealed. It seemed to go so deep that it interfered with the production of his voice, which came out strained and hoarse.

"That shows your kind heart, Dan'l," he gasped out of the grin. "I 'm sure it would comfort Winthrop to know you told your man that. He 'd know he was right, even if I do turn him down."

Emmet stared coldly at the grin. The check to his plans touched his fiery impatience to anger. He was bent so ardently upon getting this one affair of the electric concern out of the way. He thought he had succeeded. Now this big, bull-like will stood in his way.

"You don't mean you 're going to be such a fool as turn the offer down?" he said quickly. "It 's the best you 'll ever get. You 're overreaching yourself. Your partners won't thank you for it."

He knew he was insulting; but in his anger he did not care. Gallagher's anger was different. He compressed his lips. He narrowed his steady eyes. He waited.

"Besides, I tell you," Emmet added boldly, "there are public questions involved."

When Johnny had himself firmly in hand, he said calmly: "You ain't got over being a kid yet, Dan'l. What you want is a rattle. You 're a toddler, and you slobber on your bib, talking of generosity. Where is any public question? We 're in the electric business, ain't we, same 's Winthrop's men? Prescott and the South Side Illuminating are going to consolidate because they see a chance to make a couple of million or so out of it. I 'm a sociable person, Dan'l; I want to be consolidated with the rest of the boys. When they get good and consolidated, they 'll come over and try to take my little electric business away from me. It 'll make hard feelings. Let 's all go in snug and friendly and get consolidated together, and let 's all get a whack at the two millions. Those fellows have gone into the stock market and loaded up with Consolidated Light and Power and South Side Illuminating stock, and they 're all ready to turn the trick — only" — his strident voice shot out — "they can't do it until I say so. Generous! I 've got 'em in a corner, ain't I? I 've got 'em by the scruff of the neck, ain't I? They can't wiggle unless I let 'em, can

they? And you talk about their generosity to me, Dan'l? Tell 'em I say, 'T' hell with their generosity.' When they get ready to offer me half a million, I'll talk with 'em. You want a rattle! Mr. Gordon Prescott and Mr. Thomas Frederick Winthrop — my old friend, smooth Petroleum Tommy — and the rest, course they 've got a right to make as much money consolidating as they please, because they 're all prominent citizens, riding in carriages and throwing flowers at themselves. They can rig the stock market and play horse with the minority stockholders, and make all the money they want to. But if I want to get in on the game and make some money, they hold up their hands in holy horror because my clothes ain't ally mode and I was brought up over by the stockyards. It 's your idea, Dan'l, that, if we want anything, we must go around to the back door with our hats off. It sort of jars you to think your Uncle John 's going to kick open the front door and walk into the parlor and demand pie. You 're afraid they 'll consider him rude and never let him auction off the boxes for the charity ball. You think if you take the sandwich and don't ask for butter, they 'll like you for a well-trained lad, and give you a certificate that you 're respectable. But you watch your Uncle John win their heartfelt respect, — which he will do by handing it out to 'em so fast and strong that their heads swim and their knees knock together."

"What do you propose to do?" Emmet demanded shortly.

"You wait and see," said Gallagher.

"But I don't want to wait!" Emmet cried hotly. "I want to know. I want to clean this thing up, John, and get out of it."

"Seems to me you kind of take it to heart, Dan'l," Johnny observed coolly.

"Oh, drop that, will you?" Emmet roared. "Treat me as a man, will you?"

The preliminaries of the grin appeared. "When you grow up, Dan'l; when you grow up."

"Then, you understand, I'm out of this!" Emmet sprang up. "I'm out of it. I'll have nothing more to do with it!"

Gallagher's eyes again narrowed, and again he waited a moment. He stood up also, and compressed his lips. "T' hell with you, Dan'l," he said cheerfully. "The Metropolitan is a grown person's game. If you don't like it, get out. Go back on me, if you feel that way. I can get along without you."

"Get along, then!" said Emmet, and burst from the room so impetuously that he brushed against one of Gallagher's lieutenants.

The lieutenant entered, staring; found Johnny still standing by the desk, his hands in his pockets; asked, "What's the matter?" under his breath.

Gallagher's narrowed, leaden eyes looked steadily

by the lieutenant for a moment, then came gloomily to the man's nervous face.

"Oh, these colts, Jakey! these colts!" he said wearily. "Dan Emmet is nutty and full of oats. He's bound to run away. He's going to run right into a stone wall, and there ain't going to be any upholstering on that wall, either." He reached over and closed the rolling top of his desk. "I'm going to hand Dan'l a little package," he said, still most gloomily, "and after the explosion, if he lives through it, he'll know more."

When he got home, to a very snug house on the west side, where there was always the romping of lusty children, his wife noticed the overcast mood. In the front room, where Johnny smoked his cigar and read his evening newspaper, Mrs. Gallagher finally asked, "Anything wrong, Johnny?"

Gallagher glanced up. "I'm bothered about Dan Emmet," he said.

"Oh! about Dan?" The plump, comely, motherly woman waited a moment, her anxious heart in her throat. Johnny smoked thoughtfully, then took up his newspaper, and she knew he would not tell her then.

IV

Mr. Winthrop had been notified of the failure of his offer, and Emmet had taken the evening train for Springfield.

Thomas Frederick Winthrop, who was Prescott's attorney, received the notification with his habitual blandness. But there was the sense of a painful swelling in the region of his heart. Standing in the centre of his private office on a rug of price beside a desk of carved mahogany with shiny silver trimmings, his startled eyes travelled with slow aimlessness over the dull red walls which matched the mahogany so beautifully. In fact, Mr. Winthrop was personally "long" a big line of South Side Illuminating and Consolidated Light and Power shares, and his margins were so uncomfortably thin that he could easily see ruin through them if anything happened to the consolidation plan.

There was a small mahogany cabinet in the lavatory off his room. He hurried to it, got out a beautiful cut-glass decanter, and took a large drink.

Wednesday, his confidential agent at Springfield wired: "Row on this morning in Senate Committee on Cities. Emmet tried to get the Playgrounds Bill reported out. Committee slaughtered it. Emmet mad. Talk of row between Emmet and Gallagher. May affect the Electric Bill."

Then his broker called up on the telephone. Somebody on the Stock-Exchange was selling Light and Power and Illuminating to beat the band. They said there was a row at Springfield and the consolidation bill was mixed up in it some way.

Evidently something must be done. So Mr. Winthrop applied himself to the decanter for an

inspiration, and to make his nerves stop feeling so sick.

Miss Page, shopping on State Street and mainly intent upon the new patterns in waists, heard the cry, bought a copy of *The Express*, and went into Field's to read it.

For firm ground the correspondent had only the fact that Emmet called up the Playgrounds Bill in his committee. Smooth sailing had been expected for it. But the committee had ruthlessly relegated it to the files. Emmet had left the Capitol and gone to his hotel, where he refused an interview. The report was that the Chairman and Gallagher had fallen out some way because they could n't agree on the electric matter. But others said it was just a dodge. An unnamed "Democratic Member" was quoted: "When it comes to making terms with the electric companies for letting that amendment go through, you 'll find there won't be any row in Johnny's camp." The newspaper's headline read: "Is Johnny Turning a New Trick?"

Miss Page felt a little sick. She scorned the imputation of sordid treachery. But there was this nameless touch of corruption and cheap rascality which every one seemed to take for granted. Especially, there was the picture of him, going off alone to his hotel as though he had no friends. And if he was angry, it must be a little bit at least on account of that promise — Ah! if some one had the courage to help him. But what could a woman do?

She sat in a very comfortable wicker chair in a long row of like chairs occupied by waiting, or resting, or merely lounging women, presumably with the patterns in waists on their minds. Her chair was next a court that cut through the huge shop from ground-floor to roof. Elevators laden with women plied up and down. Above and below she could see sectional vistas and glimpses of the immense busy establishment crowded with hundreds of her sex shopping, examining fabrics, gossiping, loitering, — the moment's phase of a perpetual women's fair. She remembered that she herself had put in two hours spending eight dollars in dry goods. Oh, she might send him a ribbon or a shirt-waist, and write him, on a nice little piece of tinted notepaper, in a nice slanting little hand, that she was so sorry!

She arose and swept to the elevators. A timorous lady, who was about to step into the cage at the same time, looked up at her high chin, instinctively murmured an apology, and drew back.

When she entered the anteroom of Mr. Winthrop's law office, she was aware that a broad-shouldered man in a Derby hat, whom she had overtaken and passed blindly in the hall, was at her heels. Mr. Winthrop was at the door of his private room. She saw that his glance took in herself and the man with a kind of perplexity. Nevertheless, the lawyer bowed urbanely and stepped forward.

No very tangible programme had come to Mr. Winthrop's mind during the afternoon, but he had

frequently resorted to the little cabinet in the lavatory. His face was uncommonly red, and he was looking at his trouble through an optimistic fog.

Miss Page moved forward quickly, impatient to get separated from this strange man. "I wish you 'd tell me the news from Springfield," she said quickly in a low tone; "I know only what the newspapers say. I don't understand it."

The rosy mists in the lawyer's brain were not a help to clear thinking, but they helped to jocularity.

"Why, could n't Mr. Gallagher enlighten you?" he asked, at his blandest, looking over her shoulder at the man and sounding his mellow laugh.

She understood at once that it was Johnny Gallagher, the "boss." She took the occasion hardily, as she found it, and turned, politely smiling. "Perhaps Mr. Gallagher can," she said, with a kind of sociable brightness. "I am trying to find out what has happened at Springfield to the Playgrounds Bill, and why it happened."

The fact that she was a pretty woman and looked amiable made a certain impression behind Johnny's gloom, but the shell was immobile. He thought she was a newspaper reporter. No, he knew nothing; politics were always too deep for him. In a half-mechanical following of the lawyer's lead, they drifted up to the door of the inner room. "But why don't you go to Emmet?" Johnny suggested. "He seems to know all about it. Have somebody interview him."

Miss Page glanced down. "I thought Mr. Emmet would do all he could for the bill," she said; "in fact, we counted on his help. We rather left it to him."

"Oh! You 're one of 'em — one of the Playgrounds women — er, ladies?"

"I 'm Miss Page. Mr. Emmet told me he would undertake to get the bill favorably reported."

Johnny's interest suddenly roused. "Dan did? When? When did Dan say that?" he demanded in his harsh voice.

It seemed almost like a question of veracity. Miss Page held up her chin. "Last Saturday," she answered firmly.

Gallagher looked hard at her. He was sensible enough of her beauty and style. It was occurring to him that Emmet would have been sensible enough of them, too. Perhaps, after all, he had punished the youngster more than he had meant; had hurt his pride more than he had intended. But the thought subtly evoked his belligerence, too. What business had beauty and style to get mixed up with politics? He seemed more gloomy than ever.

"Well, I guess he thought he could do it," he said stolidly. "I reckon he was n't calculating to play horse with anybody but me."

The form of the speech was baffling; but Miss Page jumped to a happy conclusion. "Then you and he are really at outs?" she said eagerly.

"We ain't singing 'Comrades' to each other," said Johnny. "He sends me word he's going to pitch into me."

"Pitch into you?" She was finding it very confusing.

Without verbal reply, Gallagher pulled a crumpled telegram from his overcoat pocket and handed it over. She read:

> "I shall speak on the electric bill under privilege to-morrow forenoon. I shall throw all the light I can on it.
>
> EMMET."

This was more baffling than anything else. She looked her perplexity at Gallagher. Meantime, Mr. Winthrop blandly read the telegram in her hand.

"Why," said the lawyer, with his large air of amiability, "a man came to see me about the electric bill day before yesterday, and he told me" — the lawyer paused, smiling urbanely — "that Emmet sent him here."

"Yes," said Miss Page. "Mr. Emmet told me that he had sent a man to see about the electric bill." The fact simply floated up in her confused mind, and she handed it over blindly, as a possible help to elucidating the puzzle.

"He did?" cried Mr. Winthrop with animation. He held up his distinguished head and sounded his mellow laugh. "Why, it's a clear case! He tried to make us buy out the Metropolitan Electric

Company, in which, I suppose, he 's interested, and now he proposes to denounce Mr. Gallagher, who has never, I can vouch, tried anything of the kind!"

The puzzle suddenly became dazzlingly clear to Miss Page. Her senses reeled a little with it. She turned to Gallagher with a kind of swift, fleeing, startled helplessness. "Does he mean that? Does he mean to denounce —" she asked breathlessly.

The boss was looking at her with hard, narrow, unfriendly eyes. "I read it that way," he said in his harsh voice. She felt that he accused her.

"Well, if he does," said Mr. Winthrop, looking at them both with urbane enjoyment, "we 'll explode a mine under the young man's mine. With what I know and what Miss Page knows, I guess Mr. Gallagher won't be the man that 's blown highest."

When Gallagher walked out, Miss Page murmured a polite, empty word to the lawyer, and followed.

"Mr. Gallagher! Mr. Gallagher!" she called, in the hall.

Johnny turned around stolidly, and she whirled up to him breathlessly. "What would you advise me to do?" she panted.

"About what?" the boss demanded in his stoniest manner.

"About — Mr. Emmet." Johnny still waited, immovable and with as little sympathetic help as

a post. Before that rock-like attitude the young woman felt her courage evaporating. "I don't wish to do him an injury," she said evasively; "all I care about is the Playgrounds Bill."

"Then I'd advise you to go home, and keep away from Winthrop if you can," said Johnny, gloomily, as he turned away. If she had been a little different, he would have advised her to go soak her head.

V

WHEN Gallagher stepped from the train at Springfield next morning, he saw Winthrop and Prescott making their way to the street ahead of him.

At the same time, Mrs. Celia Randall, President of the Prairie Avenue Social Settlements League, Chairwoman of the Committee on Political Action of the United Women's Societies, Treasurer of the Association for the Suppression of Objectionable Posters, and a Director of the South Side Wagner Club, emerged from the last Pullman car.

"Here's Johnny Gallagher just ahead of us," she said in an aside. "You see you came down in excellent company, Helen. I suppose there'll be nothing fit to eat," she added, and settled her double chin over her collar in a manner that was eloquent.

"Oh, I guess so," Miss Page answered with a vague attempt at cheerfulness. In the stress of her mind there was a subcurrent which dimly did

justice to Mrs. Randall's injuries. To be swept away bodily from an agreeable dinner, thrust into the discomforts of a Pullman car, and carried to Springfield in a cause one does not understand, was surely trying to elderly nerves with a liking for ease.

Alighting from their cab at the hotel as an omnibus was discharging its load, they encountered Winthrop and Prescott. Gallagher stood apart, his hands in his trousers pockets, his overcoat on his arm, and looked on uncompromisingly while the other men bowed. Politer Mr. Winthrop stepped into the hotel with the ladies. Gallagher turned his hard, challenging glance to Prescott.

"Do you know that young lady?" he asked in his harshest voice.

"Miss Page? Certainly I know her," said Prescott, out of his surprise.

Johnny's gloomy eyes dwelt questioningly on the sanguine man for an instant. "Come now, Prescott," he demanded, "just man to man, is she on the square?"

Mr. Prescott flushed angrily. "You must be drunk," he said.

The politician's hard glance still rested upon him a second. "T' hell with you," he growled, and went into the hotel.

Inside, Mrs. Randall was settling herself with a sigh of relief at the breakfast table, and Mr. Winthrop was disappearing from Miss Page's straining eyes. It was half-past nine — when Emmet would

soon be starting for the Capitol; and these men were free to find him. To have a man's freedom of action for ten minutes! So far she had carried things — but to what end? Why, to sit down and eat breakfast, while the opportunity escaped. She had the sense in every nerve of his walking into the trap which she had prepared for him. At moments it seemed quite probable that she should be suddenly håled out somewhere and compelled to reaffirm the ruinous admission she had made to Winthrop, while Emmet was dragged away to some everlasting disgrace. She detained the waiter, got a card from her purse, and scribbled: "Let me see you a moment in the parlor at once — please."

"I 'd like to see Mr. Emmet a minute, before he gets away," she explained to Mrs. Randall, trying as hard as she could to keep her voice quite steady. She thought it sounded a little faint, and a wave of color came over her face.

"I should have done no such thing, Helen," said Mrs. Randall, with an addition to her injuries. "It's quite useless. Mr. Winthrop is going to arrange a conference for me after breakfast. If Mr. Emmet chooses to come, very well. Be sure the chops are hot," she added, for the waiter had returned.

The minutes dragged interminably. A boy of many brass buttons, bearing a tiny tray, came into the dining-room. Miss Page's heart missed a beat or so. The boy inquired of the usher; was wafted

in her direction. She remembered to try to look calm. He was at her side. Her own card lay on the tray. "Mr. Emmet ain't in his room," said the boy.

She attempted to sip the coffee, which seemed likely to choke her.

"I'll wait for you upstairs," she said, reckless of the chin, and, without looking around, arose and walked from the room.

The dining-room was on the ground-floor. She walked deliberately by the elevator on one side and the stairway on the other into the hotel office, where she drew the eyes of a dozen lounging men. There was a little smoking and writing room off to the left. She walked coolly and with a negligent ease through the office to the front windows that gave upon the street, looked out a moment, and calmly sauntered back. Going and coming, she threw a swift glance over the writing-room. But she saw no one she knew.

The elevator boy leaned against the wire lattice by the open door of the cage. She stepped in. The boy followed and started the machine. "Parlor floor," she said, and they stopped at the first landing. The lock of the wire door did not yield at the first pressure of the boy's fingers.

"They been goin' to have this door fixed for a week: goin' to put in a automatic opener; guess it needs it," the boy explained sociably.

The sociability made its instant appeal to her suffering nerves. There was no one else in sight.

"Is Mr. Emmet on this floor?" she asked. To get the lay of the land would be something.

"Mr. Emmet? No'm; on the fourth floor; number four twenty-one." The boy had begun to close the door of the cage when she spoke, and was turning the lever of the machine. Now he brought the lever back, and held the door open as though he were uncertain whether she would get in again.

"Oh, I was mistaken," she said without the least hesitation, and stepped into the cage. She did not know why. She did not know whether the boy would take her up to the fourth floor or down again. The cage started up. It occurred to her that she had quite lost her head and was doing something dreadful. But that did not seem to matter much.

"Straight ahead to first corridor on your right; about halfway down; number four twenty-one," said the boy.

"Thank you," said Miss Page, as she stepped out, and the cage disappeared.

A pier mirror stood in the wide hall before the elevator landing. In the glass she saw a tall young woman with her own face, except that there was no color in it. The empty corridors stretched before her. She dared not go a step further. Already she had thrown away her dignity and self-respect. She felt herself standing miserable and useless at the last brink. She simply waited in a kind of agonized helplessness.

This face and figure struck upon Emmet's eye as he came dully along the corridor, his overcoat on his arm. In the first moment it seemed not so remarkable that she should be there, for a figure of this sort, reserved, accusing, condemning, had been rising in his thoughts through the night and morning. He had even supposed that she would be coming down there.

He came up. "I lost your bill," he said. "I'd like to tell you how." When he took off his hat his hair was seen to be rumpled. His face looked a little haggard, which helped on the forlorn note in his voice. Such was the effect of this forlornness that Miss Page did not trust herself to speak. The way his big hands hung limp at his sides took away her voice for the moment. She only nodded.

"I let Gallagher give me an interest in a concern called the Metropolitan Electric Company," he said. "It wasn't an honest concern, and I knew it, but I didn't care much then. We pretended that my interest was to pay for my legal services. There wasn't any prearrangement about this Consolidation Bill, for that was before I was elected; and I had done some little legal work for the company, and we were all good fellows together."

He had been trying most of the night and morning to arrange the order of his speech; but he had not been able to do it. Now, unconsciously, he took up the simple facts as they had been in his mind.

"John just thought I was a good fellow, and he handed over the stock, and I took it because he was a good fellow. Then he got me into the chairmanship, and when this Consolidation Bill came up he had it referred to my committee, because he 'd been a good fellow to me, and I was to be a good fellow to him. He wanted to make Winthrop buy out the Metropolitan, as a consideration for letting the Consolidation Bill go through. Well, finally, I wanted to get out of this electric business, which I did n't like any more. I tried to arrange a compromise between Gallagher and Winthrop, to get it out of the way, and John and I fell out about it. Then he upset your bill, just to remind me that he was the boss. At first I was simply in a rage. It stung my pride. I told him I 'd denounce the Electric Bill, because I wanted to hurt him any way I could. But that 's all gone now, and I 'm going to do it because it 's the truth. John has been the boss. The dishonesty has been all around me and all through me; and I want to tell about it just as it is. Of course, I know it won't do any particular good, — at least not now. It is n't for the public. It 's for myself. Everybody knows what the conditions are, I guess; and everybody seems to tolerate them. But it 's — spoiled everything for me. And I want to say my say about it — some people will understand it, maybe, and then I 'll drop it all — go away somewhere else, I suppose. For the untruth has ruined me. Nothing can alter that."

"I don't think it's ruined you at all," she protested, with a passion which, perhaps, was a little petulant. As he had gone on speaking, she had felt in a blind, wounded, accusing way that he was cutting all the ground from under her feet. Her own drama seemed to be left dangling in mid-air. "Why should you give up — anything?" she demanded. Suddenly she felt her eyes smarting.

He started a little toward her. "If I thought you cared!" — He stopped abruptly, as though ashamed of the touch of impetuosity. His advancing hands fell helplessly against his side.

"If I cared!" she flashed at him — then, with a quick imploring: "Oh, don't be a miserable MAN! If I had n't cared, would I have followed you to Springfield and come up — almost to your room —"

"Helen! Helen!" — warningly, under his breath.

"No, sir!" she stepped back from the inviting hand. "I'm going to tell you. I told Winthrop and Gallagher what you said about getting somebody to settle the Electric Bill — not thinking it would hurt you; and they were going to use it against you if you made your speech, or Winthrop was, for I think Gallagher is your friend, anyway. And do you think I could endure that? I came down here to tell you about it. Do stop now; I can't back through the wall. You are a miserable MAN! Oh!" Since retreat was now impossible, she suddenly leaned a little closer, threw up her chin,

which brought her face near to his. "You know I could n't endure that I should be the one to hurt you. I was n't ready to let it all go — to see you hurt your career. I was n't ready to sacrifice *my* career — for truth or anything else. What 's truth, anyway?"

"Truth? Why, I guess it 's you!" said Emmet. He would have said more, fatuously, but she stopped him.

"We must go downstairs," she said with a kind of fond refusal; "they 'll be expecting me."

Down in Parlor C, Johnny Gallagher leaned over the back of a chair and glowered at Prescott and Winthrop before him. Mrs. Randall sat a little apart, and her double chin seemed to defy him to impeach its respectability.

"Behave yourself now!" Helen whispered warningly. They had come through Parlor D, and were at the open door.

"Let 's be frank and friendly all around," — it was Johnny's strident voice, — "and acknowledge that we 're all brother pirates on the make, and not try to backcap each other's games. What 's the difference between rigging the legislature and rigging the stock market? I 'll admit I 'm a pirate. But who 's going to cast the first stone at me? Who 's going to say that politics ought to be better than other business? Other things being as they are in this world, what 's the matter with my running my politics the way I do?"

"'I'll admit I'm a pirate. But who's going to cast the first stone at me?'"

The answer came from the door.

"You would n't tell your wife what you do, Johnny," said Emmet. He was beaming in his most sparkling manner.

Johnny stared a moment. "Well, who 'd want to tell his wife?" he demanded.

"Why, I would," Emmet declared, and laughed shamelessly.

Miss Page looked demurely at the floor, and took a bit of her lip between her teeth, and colored.

For a mere instant Gallagher floundered. Then he walked over and confronted the two, his mouth shut, his eyes twinkling. After he had surveyed them an instant, he looked around at the others.

"The babes in the woods," he said solemnly. "You can't never beat 'em! A barbed-wire fence would n't keep 'em apart!" He stepped up to Miss Page. "But why did n't you tell me?" he said. "It would have saved all the trouble. I tried to get you to."

She bent a little toward him, quickly, eagerly. "I thought once or twice you did, too," she exclaimed. "But then — well!" As though the inflections explained everything.

"The babes in the woods," he repeated solemnly. "What about your speech, Dan?" he added abruptly.

"Speech!" Emmet repeated in a tone of surprise. He glanced at Helen in a confused way. "Why — the speech —" he seemed bewildered for a mo-

ment. Then he looked around in a kind of happy dubiety. "Why, I guess I 've made the speech already."

"I guess you have," said Helen.

Emmet seemed still somewhat confused. "It 's all wrong, John," he declared, with a doubtful shake of his head at Gallagher. "It 's thoroughly wrong. But — well — I seem to have got humanized sort of — maybe a fellow has to be rather unhappy before he can take a severe view of things. It would n't be right some way for me to pitch into anybody when I was so happy myself. I suppose if we were n't such good fellows we would n't tolerate so much badness. I 'm out of it now, you know, and I 'll just stay out and say no more about it."

"Well," said Johnny, philosophically, "I reckon you 'll have troubles enough of your own, if you 're going to get married."

"Oh!" Miss Page protested — plainly at the implication of marriage, so that every one laughed at her, and Mrs. Randall, who had come over that way, with a mollified chin, put her hand in a motherly way on the young woman's arm. They got out of the room, followed by Emmet.

There was a pause, full of the mellow, friendly air.

"This falling in love —" said Johnny, thoughtfully. "Still," he added, after an instant, looking at Winthrop and Prescott whimsically, "I suppose we men 'd get too tough to live if it was n't for

that." Again there was a little smiling pause. "Well," said Johnny, good-naturedly, "it seems kind of a pity to go on with the scrap after this. The innocents being out of it, suppose we sinful gents get down to business. I'll be reasonable with you."

V

THE LAME BOY

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LATHAM was about to take the aisle seat; but he remembered his wife and stood aside, smiling a good-natured confession of his absent-mindedness.

When they were seated, Mrs. Latham said, "How did you come to think of me?" She looked up at him, her eyes shining over the joke of his abstraction.

The man smiled again, but more vaguely. A light reply occurred to him; but his thoughts were running too strongly back to the absorbing coil of that problem which he had left, evidenced by a wide litter of papers and law books on his study table.

He was well enough aware of the scene, — the theatre-like hall, the stage in front prodigally framed in flowers, the people filling the seats about. He nodded here and there, and he was aware that other people glanced at him.

His face was easily recognized even from those variously caricaturing portraits which appeared in the newspapers from time to time. The short sandy hair, inclining from each side, ran together in a sort of snarl above the centre of his broad, sloping,

aggressive brow. This odd snarl was repeated in miniature in the meeting of his heavy eyebrows. The eyes themselves looked dim behind the gold-bowed glasses. From each side of his wide, blunt nose a deep furrow ran down, and a welt of tough colorless flesh lay over the furrow. The mouth was rather small; the chin square, with a cleft in the middle. His strong, well-made hands lay one on each arm of the seat. Mrs. Latham dropped her wrist across the hand which monopolized the arm between their seats, and instantly drew it away, leaning a little to the other side so as not to disturb him. Latham was trying to recall the precise language of that decision in the 32d Illinois,— a bore to be away from one's books. But he again supposed, in an undercurrent consciousness, that a Commencement was an affair demanding some sacrifice, if one had a son.

Music began, and banished the slight, superficial annoyance of the stirring and chattering about him. He approved of music. It made a good atmosphere to think in. Some other affairs went forward on the stage, to which he gave at moments a cursory attention.

Ah, the boy! Latham made a strong winking with both eyes. His big frame slid further down in the seat. He softly laid the tips of his fingers together. He was ready to listen.

A slight lad, about eighteen, was coming to the front of the stage, walking with a distinct limp.

"A moment when youth should be triumphant"

Abruptly, quite unexpectedly, a dull pang touched Latham's heart. Such a misfortune to be lame in youth!

The boy's stiff leg had always been a sorrow, naturally; but for years a familiar, accepted sorrow, like a death that had happened long ago. Now, as the slender young figure stood forth so conspicuously in a moment when youth should be triumphant — Oddly, Latham recalled the girl who had lately stood there singing; even out of his mental remoteness there emanated a sense of the joy of her young, vigorous, beautiful limbs, like a perfume remembered after it has passed. His boy's lameness became vitally of the present. There were his own huge, tireless limbs, his own bodily vigor that was equal to anything. He felt an impotent, pitying wish to give the boy a fairer endowment. Another thing struck him with new force, — it was the mother's face up there.

The lad was speaking. His subject was The Duties of Citizenship. Latham had smiled over it vaguely when his wife told him.

At first, as he listened, there was a slight movement of his lips, like the beginning of a smile. But very soon that ceased, and slowly, step by step, a large wonder took possession of him.

This essay was callow enough in the main, sophomorical enough, romantic enough. Latham knew that he could blow the thing over with a breath, that he could riddle it with a gibe, that a movement

of his finger would be enough to shatter it. But he was not thinking of that. The emotion in his mind amounted to this: Where had the boy come by those thoughts? This boy, who half an hour before had seemed so familiar, as thoroughly imbedded in the intimate environment of his life as the chair in his study, in respect of whom his indefinite and unformulated impression had been that he could draw his finger around the whole circumference of the younger existence, — by what miracle had he suddenly developed the universe of an independent mind?

For there was thought here. The lawyer's mind, without conscious analysis, recognized the independent intellectual force. Much was taken at second hand, much was false, much was flimsy; but the boy had thought. The father perceived, with extreme surprise, that the son had been standing apart in his individuality, trying, considering, pondering. Latham sympathetically translated himself to the lad's place. He understood that this speaker had been weighing and judging his father, and his father's world.

It occurred to Latham that he must have known this would happen, — but only "some time," a time far off. Again he felt a kind of immense pity. He had always proposed vaguely to do what he could about forming the boy's mind; and behold! while he slept the forming had taken place.

It touched his affection, and at the same time,

indistinctly, it stirred a self-pity in him, as though he had irreparably lost something. He looked around at his wife, moving his hand a little to touch her arm with an unwonted softness. But at the first light contact she drew her arm away, and bent a little further to the other side, just as she had at first when her arm disturbed his hand. Instantly, in the play of new-wrought emotion, Latham saw that this was simply her habitual, long-schooled, sweet sacrifice to the inexorable demands of his preoccupation. Then he saw her face more fully, and his hand slipped back from the arm of the seat. In a queer flash he felt a fear of disturbing her.

She sat well forward. Her rapt face was fixed upon the speaking boy so intently that she seemed to have entered into his being, to be speaking with him.

It was in a way the boy's face, with its soft dark eyes, short straight nose, and gentle mouth and chin, —still a well-preserved, pretty face, its comeliness dignified by the slight powdering of gray in the smooth brown hair. Her hands rested in her lap. Now and then they stirred with a slight unconscious nervous motion. Her lips, too, moved a little now and then. In a moment Latham perceived that she was in fact speaking with the boy. It came to him with sudden insight how the boy had often gone to her with this essay; how she had read and listened to it; how she had absorbed it as a part of his life. The words from the stage failed to impress him as he hung on this new wonder.

Soon he saw something else, — that it was the moment of the woman's tenderest and completest triumph. She had heard him speak a few times. He had humored her wish with good-natured tolerance. But now he knew that nothing he could do would ever move her as this boy's speech did. Though he should lay a new corner-stone of law or compel a senate, her heart would not be suffused with this tender exultation. He felt strangely lonely.

Getting into the carriage, he wished to sit by his wife, to feel her beside him, to touch her. But she and the lad took the back seat as a matter of course. He had already patted the boy's shoulder and mumbled something about the essay. As the carriage wheeled around, the boy said, with a kind of gentle boldness, "Did n't you like Rose's singing, father?"

"Yes," replied Latham absently, engrossed in his surprises. At once the mother and son fell to talking together in low tones. It wounded the man, although he knew well enough it was his own work.

When they entered the house, Latham went at once stolidly up the ample curving stairs, while the other two loitered in the hall. On the second floor he mechanically pushed through the door to his study, turned on the electric lights, and sat down in the big leather-covered chair before the long table, covered with its professional litter, from which he had torn himself reluctantly. His wife had appeared

at the door putting on her gloves, and said, "It's time now, Edward," and he had got up quickly, for she always gave him the last second.

Now, as he looked down at the pile of papers and the opened books, a singular repugnance filled his mind. How long he had toiled at those things! How many days!

He had succeeded. The house was spacious. There was money enough. His name was a host. But at this moment he felt a kind of disgust, a kind of anger, toward that admirable mind of his; that splendid, tireless, insatiable machine, which wrought ceaselessly day and night, and ground up his life. He was lonely. He got up and stepped to the small secretary in the corner. He explored a little drawer, then another, and drew out a yellow cabinet photograph of his wife, taken in the year they were married. It came to him just how she used to sit at the piano and play lightly and sing softly to herself in the evening, while he pored over his law books. There was not this spaciousness in their appointments then. He was just struggling up to his first small successes. He had not looked at this photograph for years.

Where had those years gone? He could count them in lawsuits fought, in fees won. They were written deep in those yellow-backed books about him. But he was getting old. He was old. His son had grown up unawares. His own wife, — how had that sprinkling of gray come into her hair,

when it was only yesterday that she was like this picture?

Suddenly that solid world of affairs in which he had lived seemed phantasmagorial, hollow, a dream in which somehow he had lost his life. For the better part of it was lost. Soon he would be bent, decrepit, joy would be forever behind him.

He slipped the photograph into his inner coat-pocket. He turned to the door with a kind of anxious despair, as though he felt the strength going out of his rugged limbs, as though he felt age overwhelming him. He wished most of all to take his wife's hand, to sit beside her, to feel himself again loving and beloved, to warm away the frost that touched his heart.

He crossed the hall, pushed open the door of his wife's room, and hesitated on the threshold. The boy sat beside his mother. They were talking together.

The son's presence was a shock. Somehow, to Latham's perception, that presence made his own simple, ardent outflowing of tenderness half grotesque, half silly, as though the lad had caught him in something unseemly. He felt embarrassed, almost sheepish.

The mother and son had stopped talking the moment he appeared. The woman looked up at him, serene, gentle, loyal, half ready to rise, expecting that he would ask for something.

Latham pulled a chair over, and sat down before

them. He wished to say: "I am very lonely; go on talking; let me hear what it is that you always have to say to each other." But what he did say was: "I thought I'd come in and see how the young orator felt after his effort." He spoke smilingly; but the words struck him as patronizing, as possibly suggesting a sarcasm.

The boy glanced down. The mother looked at him fondly. "He feels very well, I guess," she said. Her hand brushed the hair back from his forehead.

The boy turned with a shy eagerness. "Did you think I was right, father?"

Latham smiled tolerantly, and replied at once: "Oh, bless you, no. You were quite wrong. But you spoke very well, and it was fairly original. That is the main thing at your age."

The lad's eyes fell quickly. He put his hand, as by an unconscious motion, to the arm of his mother's chair. She put her hand over it caressingly.

Then Latham saw that he had hurt the boy; that the youth's thought was as precious to him as the man's to him. This perception wounded him. "Why can they not understand me?" he asked himself bitterly, half resentfully.

"I thought it was very good, Edward," said the mother, more to the lad than to him; and comfortingly, not contentiously.

Latham saw again how close they were to each other. It came to him that if she no longer played

and sung to herself softly, it was because the boy had filled up her life. Long ago she had been lonely many a time, just as he was to-night. But the human nature in her had taken its perfect revenge. The boy was all she required. The husband was left to the preoccupations on which he had insisted.

"Very likely it was altogether good. I am apt to be mistaken — about many things," said Latham. He felt that he spoke dryly, even that it sounded somewhat bitter. His wife looked at him with a faint surprise. There was a brief, awkward pause. Something else came to his lips; but it was not the right thing. He sat a moment, embarrassed, helpless.

"Have you finished your work so early?" Mrs. Latham asked.

He felt it to be simply a politeness, — the sort of speech that one makes when nothing else comes to one.

"No, I have more to do," he answered, and he rose from his chair.

For an instant the woman glanced up at him. The momentary sense of a loss, of an affectionate desire, stirred in her. But he had taken one look at her, and was turning away. It was the law of their lives. She said nothing.

It had come to Latham that, after all, he had nothing to say to these dear strangers in his house. His thought and their thought were a world apart, and he had lost the trick of interpretation, — lost it

somehow in those years of intense application that had worn his mind in grooves, so that, however well it went along its own path, a distraction had come to be painful to him.

He took his loneliness back to his den. His will was set now, and he bent grimly over his task.

Two hours later he stood up, wiping his glasses. He was tired, but content. The brief lay outlined before him. He knew the men were few who could have done it so well and so quickly. The old mill ground!

He touched something in his pocket, and drew out his wife's picture. He smiled over it a little mournfully, but without any bitterness. His manner of life was fixed. He was Latham. A sense of his capacity, of his power, stirred in him. He felt the solid structure of his success. Thank God, at any rate, he had made an enduring rock, in the shadow of which their lives were secure. Let him be the rock. There were not too many of them.

VI

THE SALT CROWD'S TRADE

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I

BURT, WESTLAKE & CO., brokers, were at last settled in their offices on the ground-floor of the La Salle Building. All was conspicuously new. The rough-hewn surfaces of the craggy granite which formed the two lower stories of the building glistened clean and hard in the sun. The broad cement flagging outside dazzled one's eyes. The twelve upper stories of buff terra-cotta fronted the dingy street in dandified newness. Time had put no speck or nick in the white marbles of the rotunda. The brass grills which enclosed the elevator shafts were as sharp as fresh-minted coins.

A side door, convenient for bashful speculators, opened from the rotunda to the broker's offices, which had a front door on La Salle Street. The rosewood, plate-glass, and cream-tinted walls of the offices were in pristine freshness. In the big back room where the customers of the house lounged and

watched quotations, the tall blackboards presented an even deadness of unworn funereal surface. In the small room at the front, sacred to the heads of the house and to weighty business, the rugs, tables, and chairs were almost too new to use.

Nevertheless the partners were not altogether happy. The firm had started modestly three years before in the upper story of a second-rate building. It had prospered. But this new lavish setting meant an expense account of ten thousand dollars a year, including the private wire to New York, and there was fifty thousand dollars for the membership in the New York Stock Exchange. The market had not picked up very fast after the slump of the spring. Trade, in fact, was dull — and the expense account was active.

Hartley Burt, the senior partner, sat on a table in the front room. He was a young man of large and full figure, — fat, some people called him. The heavy lids, drooping over black eyes, gave his broad, florid, large-featured face an odd cast. Westlake, of Burt's own age, lounged, sprawling, in one of the new chairs, and lifted a large foot comfortably to the seat of another. A Derby hat was thrust back on his partly bald head. He was smoking and staring out of the window at the passing show.

"Dull; yes, you bet," he said, without moving his eyes. "If it don't pick up pretty soon, I guess we'll be what Shakespeare called up against the real thing."

"Pshaw! It'll pick up," said Burt, confidently. "Blast it, it's got to pick up! We need the money." He laughed, in a quiet, deep-toned way.

"It would be an outrage to shut up as fine an office as this just because we could n't pay the rent on it," said Westlake, and laughed too.

"It pinches a little up at the house," the senior partner confessed, soberly. "We ought to get hold of some of that Salt crowd's trade."

The offices of the Illinois Coal and Iron Company occupied all of the thirteenth and fourteenth stories of the La Salle Building, — a fact which the partners had more or less in mind when they finally closed the contract for the expensive ground-floor rooms. Henry Salt, President of the Coal and Iron Company, walked by their side door every day, going to and from the elevators. And if they could get even a little of the stock trade of Henry Salt and his personal followers they would not need to worry over the ten thousand dollars a year. Salt dealt in stocks by the ream. The commissions on his business would take care of the expense account.

"That's a fact. We ought to get some of it," said Westlake. "The old man looked in at the door this morning. He said, 'You've got good offices. Is it going to rain?' I said, 'No, I guess it won't rain.' If we don't get his business after that, he's a lobster." The junior partner spread his face in an appreciative grin.

"If we don't get his trade," said Burt, with his deep-toned laugh, "we 'll send him a bill for looking in."

"Sure!" Westlake crowed. "Henry Salt, debtor, to one expert opinion on the weather, a thousand dollars!"

"We 'll get him some day," Burt declared, with quiet assurance. "We 'll be in a position to do him a favor some day; to tell him something he wants to know, and after that it will be clear sailing. The old goat! C. I. is pretty soft just now. Wonder what 's up."

"Say, that reminds me. There 's a suit of some sort pending against 'em — something about that Fox Valley deal, is n't there? I remember something about it. Dixon was saying to-day that there was going to be a decision pretty soon, and that 's what 's making the stock weak."

"Yes, there is a suit. Let 's see." Burt turned to the filing case on top of his desk. "Oh, yes. That fellow Bynum, don't you remember? Bynum had two hundred shares of Fox Valley Iron Works stock. Salt bought up the rest of the stock, but Bynum would n't sell. Then Salt leased the Fox Valley to the Coal and Iron Company, and after a while Bynum brought suit, — claimed the Coal and Iron Company was a trust, a combination in restraint of trade under the Illinois law, and asked to have the lease set aside. I remember it now. The Circuit Court found against Bynum, and he

took the case to the Appellate Court. A decision coming, you say?"

"So Dixon says. Wonder if it's Judge Martin? If it is, we might go up there to dinner and chloroform the judge and get the decision, and hand it over to Salt on a contract that he'd give us half his stock trade."

They laughed over this, in the way of men inured to chance, who cannot stay downcast very long.

"Wanted — recipe to catch Salt. Do you put a bird on his tail?" said Burt, and they parted, laughing.

II

At half-past one Henry Salt, walking back from lunch through the rain, made a wet trail across the white marble floor of the rotunda. A car was ready for the ascent. The starter had given the signal and the door was closing. The starter caught sight of this dripping figure and whirled back and caught the closing door, with a gesture to the conductor to hold the car. But the president of C. I. turned calmly aside and walked to the door of Burt, Westlake & Co.'s back room. He could see the figures on the blackboard from the door. Of the seven men lounging in the room, five were instantly aware that Salt stood in the door. Hartley Burt was one of the five. He nodded, smiling slightly, and for the sake of his dignity, took time to measure the figure in the

doorway,—a broad, bulky, high-shouldered figure, indifferently dressed, rain dripping from the brim of his soft hat upon his wet, unprotected shoulders.

Salt took off his hat, mechanically, and shook the water from the brim. His stiff, close-clipped, yellow hair was slightly sprinkled with gray. There were wrinkles in his broad face. But as he stood, heavy and bull-like, looking over at the blackboard, he gave the impression of inexhaustible vitality.

Burt walked across the room in a leisurely way. He carried himself well, with his chin up.

"Why did n't you stop in and borrow an umbrella? I 'd have lent you one," he said as he came before Salt.

The president of C. I. grinned a very little. "Market 's dull, eh?" he said.

"Yes,—dull and soft. The crowd seems mostly bearish—rather sell than buy."

"What 's C. I. there? Hundred and eight?" Salt asked.

Burt glanced back at the board. "Yes, hundred and eight—two points down from the opening. A good many people seem to be selling it. Afraid of the court decision, I suppose."

"Well, I don't know but I 'll sell some myself," said Salt, meditatively.

The broker waited, his heavy-lidded black eyes on the magnate's face. Was Salt going to give him an order? Two words now would settle that expense account.

"Can't keep a stock up if every court is going to take a fall out of the company," Salt grumbled.

"You won in the lower court," Burt suggested.

"Yes. And we ought to win now. But a court is uncertain. Wish I knew what this one was going to do." The slight grin reappeared. "I'd know then whether to sell or buy. You've got good offices."

Salt turned calmly and made for the elevators with his vigorous waddle. The saving two words were not spoken. Burt loitered a moment glancing after the bull-like, wet, indifferently dressed figure, and as he looked, the lust to succeed stiffened his will. "All the same I'll get you some day," he thought.

He was turning back to the blackboard when the young woman who sat by the door of the private room and did their typewriting, glided up.

"Mr. Martin — Judge Martin's son — is in your room. He wishes to see you right away," she said, in an aside.

Burt entered the front room holding out his hand, saying, "Hello, Eddie."

The young man within sprang up in nervous haste and seized the extended hand. "Say, old man, I want to see you," he began excitedly.

There was a certain suspense and aloofness in Burt's manner as he stood before his caller measuring him with steady, deliberate eyes. He had the advantage of five years' seniority and of the solid character as opposed to the light one. Most of all

he had the advantage which the presentable reputation holds over the unpresentable one. This young man was slender, graceful, and dressed like a dandy. His complexion was fair as a girl's; his blue eyes looked frank and merry; his lips were always ready to laugh, and there was no sign anywhere of the incurable scapegrace which every one knew him for.

"What is it, Eddie?" said the broker, steadily.

"It's straight business!" The blue eyes flashed out a laugh. "I've scraped some money together — forty-eight hundred dollars in real money; no stage greenbacks this time." He would have his joke on himself even amid his evident excitement. "I want you to take that for margin, and sell five hundred shares of Illinois Coal and Iron for me. Can you?"

"Yes. I can sell it for you," said Burt, secretly surprised at so fair a proposition from Eddie.

"Good! Say, do it right now, will you? The market's closing."

Burt stepped to the door and spoke to the stenographer.

"You'll probably lose your money, Eddie," he said coolly, as he turned back to the young man.

"Not on your life! Say, old man, it's a cinch!" The caller's excitement visibly rose. It shone in his eyes. "See here, now." He edged close to Burt, speaking rapidly. "You know there's a suit pending against the company in the Appellate Court — fellow named Bynum said it was a trust and all

that." Burt nodded. "Well, the old man 's writing the decision in that case. He 's doing it at home. I was rummaging through his desk little while ago, looking for a letter of mine he 'd collared — what you might call an incriminating document. Oh, he 's a regular pirate when it comes to collaring my things! Well, I ran across a draft of the decision. Say, it 's a Joe dandy! Court takes a fall out of C. I. at every turn. Sets aside that lease of the Fox Valley plant; holds that the company is a trust, an illegal combination in restraint of trade. It 's done in the old man's best manner; same one he uses on me about twice a week. Quotes the law and the decisions; makes a grand spiel about the duty of courts to enforce the statutes; says the attorney-general ought to proceed against the company and take away its charter; asks why the Grand Jury does n't indict the managers under the criminal section of the anti-trust act. Oh, it 's a peacherino! Say, that ought to knock C. I. off ten, fifteen points, ought n't it?"

"Maybe," said Burt, dully.

"Well, then, what do you say? Suppose we make that order a thousand shares instead of five hundred. I need some money infernally, old man."

"Better let it be at five hundred, Eddie. That 's less than ten points margin."

"Well, of course, if you say so," said Martin, reluctantly, and with a lingering hope. "But, see here, why don't you jump in and get short of a lot

of C. I. yourself? Make all the money you can out of it, old man. I'm willing!" The blue eyes and red lips flashed an engaging smile.

When Burt got back to the rear room he saw, with relief, that the market had closed. The lounging customers who wore out his new chairs so liberally and traded so meagrely were gone. He heard Westlake asking for him in the middle room, and heard one of the clerks say that he had gone out. He did not contradict it. He knew then — it was about the first thing he did definitely know — that he was not going to tell Westlake what he had just heard. Whatever was done he was going to do it alone. This decision to do it himself was not in any degree premeditated. It was simply the leading of an instinctive sense.

In this game of speculation all was as fair as in love or war. The only thing was to win. Information gained, no matter how, was part of the game. Without an instant's consideration, Burt knew that if Westlake had foreknowledge of the court's decision he would sell C. I., and tell his friends to sell it, and be no more troubled by a scruple than would a general who took advantage of the enemy's secret. That was part of the game. Burt's ambition was to be a successful broker, to build up a great house, to attract big operators — and, just now, to overcome that ominous expense account. Eddie Martin's disclosure presented itself to his mind, not so much as a "tip" for a specu-

lation of his own, as a bait to catch Henry Salt with. If he gave Salt this information, Salt would give him some trade. That was the bigger game. If the information had come to him in a little different way his course would have been perfectly plain; he would have told Salt, and he would have had no qualms about it. But a personal equation confused his play.

He knew Judge Martin and honored him as a sincere and upright man. He knew Judge Martin's wife and liked her. Judge Martin's daughter was his own wife's friend. She came rather often to his place in Edgewater. Some way a picture of her, close beside Rachel in the cool of his veranda, on his small, shady lawn, or upstairs in Rachel's room, persisted in his mind and confused his play. Rachel and the babies got mixed up in it. He sat staring at the blackboard, slowly smoking, not really thinking at all, but turning around in his labyrinth.

At three o'clock he got up. He wanted both to go home and to go anywhere but home. While he stood, undecided, Henry Salt stepped out of an elevator and started to the street with his strong, awkward gait.

This burly figure abruptly dramatized the difficulty. It was Opportunity personified. How very easy it was! The simplest matter of walking rapidly across the rotunda and speaking half a dozen words under his breath. Opportunity and

Success were passing his door. He felt a kind of rage against his scruples, as though he had been unjustly caught in some silly sort of trap. It was a man's game, after all! The strong fighting blood came up into his brain. To rush forward, trampling over the small things in one's way; to seize success, grapple with it, win it! At bottom the man who lacked the courage to do that never deserved success! All this stirred hotly in his mind. Yet he stood there, motionless, while Salt disappeared.

His place in Edgewater was modest enough, — a two-story red brick house with white blinds and a wide white porch, a foot above the ground level, on two sides. The abundant vines and the oak-trees about it, and the little thicket of shrubbery on the trim lawn, gave a secluded and country-like effect. Burt was rather proud of the place. He was proud of his wife. She came up to the porch from the lawn, in a dainty linen suit, the chubby little girl, and the chubbier littler boy clinging to her skirts and clamoring with infantile mirth. She sat down in the willow rocker beside Burt.

"How good the early summer evenings are!" she said, with a full content.

Burt noticed again her beautiful white hands, one of which rested on the arm of his chair. Suddenly he thought, "Her hands are beautiful; mine are strong. It's her part to have sweetness; mine to have force. I'd be doing better to go out and win

for her in a man's way, rather than try to have her gentle qualities. What am I hesitating about?"

He took the hand which lay on the arm of his chair, beautifully shaped, white, smooth as velvet to the touch, with pink nails. The pretty, soft fingers closed lightly over his broad, hard palm, and a singular power came from them, — something indescribable which yet compelled him. An odd thrill touched his heart. He felt that he must do right.

III

C. I. opened at 107½, moved up ¼, looked dull almost to the point of lifelessness. The market, on the whole, seemed a trifle stronger and more active.

Burt read this much from the figures on the blackboard. The house had not a single trade to make that morning. Westlake was a bit glum.

About eleven o'clock Eddie Martin hurried in. Jim (Jim Riner, his cousin and pal) had scraped up twenty-seven hundred dollars, and wanted to sell five hundred shares of C. I. Would Burt do it for him? They'd make it a joint account between himself and Jim. There would be seventy-five hundred dollars' margins on one thousand shares — and it was a cinch, anyway. The old man was working on the decision again last night. Had Burt sold any stock for his own account?

The broker accepted Jim's order to sell. He felt

an inexplicable helplessness to do otherwise. The thing played back and forth in his own mind. Maybe he was going to tell Salt. He could not say that he was n't. The possibility kept dodging about in his thought. He could say to himself calmly, "It 's quite likely that I 'll give it away to Salt to-day."

"He 's working on the decision, loading in more ginger. I saw it again this morning," said Eddie, excitedly, his eyes burning.

Unexpectedly Burt found himself seizing the young man's arm in a tight grip.

"See here, Martin!" (He had always called him Eddie before.) "See here! For Heaven's sake keep your mouth shut about this! Don't tell anybody!" He gave the arm a slight shake. "Don't you see your father's position?"

"Oh, that 's all right, old man! That 's all right!" Eddie laughed nervously. "I won't go around tipping it off. I 've only told you and Jim. Blast the old man! If he did n't treat me like a beggar, I 'd have some consideration for him. But I 'll keep mum — regular clam."

"C. I. 's soft as butter," said Westlake when Burt went into the back room. The price was drooping. It was not a break; not a sharp, decisive movement. The stock hung dully at 107¼; then slipped down to 107; presently there was a sale at 106¾. No further quotations came for twenty minutes; then it was 106½, ⅛, 106. Then

the quotations stopped again. The whole market had turned listless.

Burt was acutely aware of the approach of the half-hour between one and two. The moment Salt appeared in the doorway he knew it. He sauntered over, carrying himself well, with his chin up; but his very blood tingled.

"Soft again, eh?" said the fortune-maker.

"Soft," said Burt. "C. I. is down to 104." His heavy-lidded eyes were on Salt's face, and he had a strange sense of imparting the secret to him, as a man about to stab might see the knife in the wound before the blow was struck.

"Maybe somebody 's got a line on that decision. Court may have tipped it off to some friends," Salt suggested half jocularly. "I wish they 'd tip it off to me."

Burt was silent. How easy! Merely to whisper a word and the thing would be done. Even when Salt turned away to the elevators the thing seemed so near, so simple, — merely a motion of the eyelid, the crook of a finger, the gentle pressure of a noiseless trigger. But the thing was not done. When Salt disappeared, the first thought in Burt's mind was, "Maybe I 'll tell him to-morrow."

C. I. closed at 101. In the morning Eddie came in early. There was seven points' profit on his five hundred shares and six points on Jim's five hundred. That would make them winners by sixty-five hundred dollars if they closed the trade then.

But they did n't propose to close the trade with the decision undelivered, and the decline in C. I. only started. They wanted Burt to sell one thousand shares more for their joint account on the strength of their profit. That would make two thousand shares in all that they would be short, and ten points more on that, say, would exactly set them up in business.

Again Burt accepted the order because he felt helpless to refuse it. He and Eddie still potentially stood together. Maybe he would tell Salt that day. But again Salt came and went untold.

Saturday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, came and passed. The market was getting stronger and more active. But C. I. hung between par and 101 in a stubborn sort of way. Somebody seemed ready to buy as much as was offered.

At 10.45 Thursday morning the electric printing machine in Burt, Westlake & Co.'s back room ground out this bulletin : "Appellate Court decides Illinois Coal and Iron suit against the company." Ten minutes later an amplified report began coming in. The decision was sweeping, holding against the company at every point, declaring it to be a trust, illegal, in restraint of trade. There was a burst of excitement along La Salle Street. C. I. was sold right and left.

But the market was a puzzle. C. I. went off a bare two points to 99. There it stuck. Every share offered was promptly taken.

Friday morning C. I. opened at 100. Ten minutes later it was at 115. At the end of the first half-hour's trading it was at 125. Then everybody knew. The shorts were frantically trying to cover, and the stock was cornered. Of course Salt had cornered it. The Salt crowd had taken another trick.

It happened that Burt was over at the bank when the market opened. As he was coming out ten minutes later, Westlake was running up the steps wild-eyed. He clutched the senior partner's arm.

"Have you seen the market?" he panted. "Looks like a corner in C. I. It was up to 108 when I left the office and climbing. We're short two thousand shares for young Martin and Riner."

Burt hurried back to the office in time to see the boy set down the quotation 118 for Coal and Iron. He stood looking at the figures. That extraordinary confusion which had perplexed his mind for a week was upon him now. Something paralyzed the clarity and swiftness of decision upon which he had prided himself. He felt himself inextricably involved in a drama which was working itself out beyond his volition. The only refuge of his confused mind lay in doing nothing, as though he had someway lost the power of independent action.

"There'll be a reaction from this advance. The shorts are panic-stricken. It'll go off again," he said to Westlake. And he tried to comfort himself

with the words, although they sounded stupid even to himself.

"Well," said Westlake, dubiously, but accepting the senior partner's decision. He gave Burt an odd look. The senior's broad face was composed as usual. "Well," Westlake repeated, "if you say so." His own face cleared. Burt usually knew what he was about. At any rate a fellow must take his chances as they came.

C. I. stopped at 125 simply because the shorts stopped bidding for it. None was offered at less. There was no doubt about the corner. Salt had all the stock. The shorts could buy only on his terms.

It was simple arithmetic for Burt, Westlake & Co. They were short two thousand shares of C. I., on which, with the stock at 125, there was a loss of forty-two thousand five hundred dollars. Against this loss they held seventy-five hundred dollars in margins. The idea of calling upon Eddie Martin and Jim Riner for the difference was too ridiculous to be considered. The stock would drop back, Burt kept telling himself, to a point where the house could get out with little or no loss.

But C. I. did not drop. After a ten-minute lull the shorts began trying to cover. C. I. moved up ten points; then fifteen, without a sale between 135 and 150, where it stood at eleven o'clock.

To the senior partner, sitting in the back room, the thing had all the cruelty of a torture-chamber.

That movement from 135 to 150 was like a sharp turn of the boot, a sudden, powerful stretching of the rack. His heart turned to lead, and he slowly gathered himself up. With C. I. at 150 their loss was ninety thousand dollars, and that meant simple, complete ruin. A second and peremptory demand for margins came from their New York correspondents.

Burt wired back, "I am going to get the stock to deliver."

Probably that good, bold lie would carry them through the day. When he looked up from writing the telegram C. I. stood at 160.

It was ruin, good and plenty. If the correspondents would n't take his word they would close out the deal, sell his membership to pay what it would of the deficit and throw Burt, Westlake & Co. into bankruptcy. It was pretty rough to ruin Westlake as well as himself.

IV

At half-past three, when Burt stepped out of the elevator on the fourteenth floor of the La Salle Building, he looked as calm, as contented, and as well kept as ever. The suit of dark blue flannel, with a light linen vest and the white straw hat, were rather becoming to his large, full person and broad, large-featured face.

Such other possible expedients as he had been able to think of during the day had failed. This was the

forlorn hope,— a last resort before he went home to tell Rachel that he was broke.

He had never been up here before, and he asked the way to Mr. Salt's office of the boy who sat at a little desk in the corridor opposite the elevator landing. The door down the corridor marked "President" admitted him to a small and bare anteroom. The boy took his card to the next room. In a moment a thick-set, smooth-faced young man came out, palpably taking stock of the caller as he advanced. Burt's card was in his hand.

"You wished to see Mr. Salt?" he asked. "What about, Mr. Burt?" he put the plump question with a certain good humor, referring to the card for the name, as though it were perfectly understood between them that all sorts of impossible people wished to see Henry Salt.

"Our offices are on the ground-floor," said the broker, as though that constituted a sort of relationship. "I 've something to say to Mr. Salt. I think he will see me all right," he spoke with perfect good humor and smiled confidently.

"I 'll see," said the young man, who had caught the impression that the visit was for Salt's benefit rather than the visitor's. He disappeared with the card, and after a moment came to the door and beckoned.

The secretary opened the door of the third room from the anteroom. Burt took off his hat and found himself alone with the president. Salt sat at a large,

littered desk, in a spacious, well-furnished corner room with light on two sides. Burt advanced and took the vacant chair at the end of the desk. Salt looked up.

"Well, what is it?" said the president, without courtesy and without offence. He was ready to listen; but his time was valuable.

"I'm short two thousand shares of Coal and Iron for a customer who has no more margins," said Burt, calmly.

The president's heavy brows gathered in an angry frown. His hand moved toward the row of electric call buttons at the edge of his desk. "What the devil do you expect me to do about that?" he demanded.

"I expect you to sell me the stock at a price I can stand, or to lend it to me for a while, or to sell it to me at the corner price and take my notes, unsecured, in part payment. I can't get the stock to deliver. My customer can't get it. I can't pay 160 for it, because I haven't that much money. I'm broke at 150. I want you to let me out." He spoke quietly, looking the other square in the eye. He knew it to be the very crisis, and from somewhere within him there came up an ample power to meet it. He knew that he was not going to be afraid or to cringe. An inscrutable joy in his own readiness touched his mind. His broad face lighted with a frank, good-humored smile.

Salt stared at him, gloweringly. "Say, I like your

nerve," he declared. "What do you feed it on? I want the recipe. What do you think I'm doing here?" he burst out more angrily. "Think I'm running a crippled children's home?"

"No; it's plain business," said Burt, quietly, smiling again. "If I'm forced to settle at the corner price it will simply break me, and you'll get only half what's coming to you. If you give me time I can pay out. I can make money."

"The hell you can!" said Mr. Salt, with fine sarcasm. "How? By toddling into the first corner you find laying around loose?"

"No. What money I have, I've made. I can make more. What good will it do you to break me?"

"I'm going to do it for the good it will do you. Every young man who tries speculation ought to be broke a couple of times. It teaches him to respect other people's opinions a little."

"Well, I've had the lesson now," said Burt.

"Who are your customers? How'd you come to be short two thousand shares?" the president demanded.

Burt considered briefly. "My customers are Eddie Martin, Judge Martin's son, and his cousin."

"Oh! They knew what the decision was going to be, then!"

"Very likely."

"And you knew it, too!" Salt's hard eye was upon him. Burt said nothing, simply waiting.

"'I like your nerve . . . What do you feed it on?'"

"Yes, you knew it!" the president declared. "And — say, you have got the nerve! You would n't give me the tip; but you 'd come around here and ask me to help you out of the hole."

"Judge Martin is my friend. His family and mine are on intimate terms," said the broker, simply.

"Why don't you go to your friend to help you, then?" Salt suggested.

"Of course I should n't do that, even if he had the ability. I 'd look nice telling him his son went short of the stock with foreknowledge of the decision, and that I was the broker who made the trade for him."

"I see. Would n't like to hurt his feelings." Salt passed his hand over his stubbled chin and considered. His manner was not reassuring. "Naturally I 'm not so careful of the feelings of a man who says I ought to be indicted," he went on with an ominous softness. "It would work out all right if you went broke. Then, of course, it would all come out in the bankruptcy proceedings that Judge Martin's son went short two thousand shares of C. I. just before Judge Martin delivered an important decision against the company — and Judge Martin could explain that to the newspapers any way he liked. Would n't that be a rather pretty situation?"

"No, it would n't be a pretty situation at all." The broker spoke quietly, gravely, his heavy-lidded eyes steadily on the other's face. "You know, Mr. Salt, and I know, that there are people in the world

who never get into the game at all, — this money-making game, I mean. They have no idea what it is. With you in your bigger way, and with me in my smaller way, it 's a good deal of a muddy sort of scramble. We care enough for the game not to mind the mud. But the clean, fresh people — you would n't get along without them any more than I would. They 're mostly women, those people; but now and then there 's a man, too. Judge Martin is as sincere a man as ever lived, and his daughter and my wife are friends."

Salt folded his hands over his paunch, holding himself by a big, hairy wrist, and looked at the younger man with a calm scrutiny. "It would be a crime," he said gently, "to break a young man with your nerve. You come up here without an invitation to ask me to pull you out of the hole you 've got into by selling my stock short, and you tell me you knew the decision was coming against me, and then you tell me that I 'm a muddy person. You seem to agree with Judge Martin that I ought to be indicted."

"Then you 'll lend me the stock," said Burt, coolly.

"Lend you the stock? What good will that do?"

"Oh, I suppose it will go down again after the shorts settle," said Burt, easily.

"You do, do you? And you 're the man who 's going to make me some money in the stock busi-

ness! That stock will go up to 200, Mr. Broker. Why, you sucker, do you suppose this decision is going to hurt it? That was my suit. Bynum was my man. I had the suit started because I wanted these questions settled. Do you think I 've been sitting around here asleep all the time? We 'll simply reorganize in New Jersey. The papers are all ready now. If I lent you the stock at 160 you 'd be worse off than ever in ten days."

"Well, sell it to me then and take my notes for part."

"As one muddy friend to another, eh?"

"As a large man to a small one."

Salt studied him a moment. "We 'll put it as a weak old man to a youngster with a cast-iron nerve. I would n't break you for a million dollars. I want to see what that nerve of yours will do. I 'll tell my brokers to settle with you at 125."

"That 's very good of you, Mr. Salt," said the broker, quietly, rising. "I will not forget it."

Salt had already turned to his desk, and the caller turned to the door.

"Burt!" the president called with harsh abruptness. The broker turned back to find the old man's eye hard upon him. "I 've told you something — about what I 'm going to do with the company. Nobody else knows it outside the office."

The broker flushed slightly; he bent a little forward; his chin up. "I did n't give away Judge Martin's decision to you," he said.

"All right," said Salt, briefly, and satisfied. "Of course I wanted it understood that it was confidential." He turned his eyes to the work before him. "Before I tie up with a man," he added, as though he were addressing the papers before him, "I want to know about how muddy he 's likely to be."

Westlake was waiting in the office below. "Settling at 125 cuts deep just now," said Burt, after explaining that they were released from the corner; "but we 'll get some of Salt's trade."

He was cheerful to the point of gayety on the wide white porch that fine evening.

"Have the kinks come out of your business, then?" his wife asked, smiling. He had told her nothing; but she had easily guessed a trouble at the office.

"All the kinks are out!" he replied. He took her hand, — beautifully shaped, white, velvet to the touch. A dumb reverence for its soft power stirred his heart. He spread her fingers and kissed the pink palm.

VII

THE END OF THE DEAL

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I

THE day's trade was done. Along La Salle Street, from the Board of Trade to the Stock Exchange, brokers' offices were empty of customers. The big blackboards where quotations had been set down were wiped clean, ready for to-morrow's yards of figures. The ticker was still; the telegraphers' desks deserted. Brokers were getting into their overcoats and going home or to a club. The great banks displayed the sign "Closed." Tellers counted up the greenbacks in neatly corded stacks, the gold in pretty pillars of double-eagles. Bookkeepers lighted their pipes and paused a moment for sociability. Armful after armful of letters accumulated in the gaping bags, prepared for the post-office. Janitors were sweeping up the litter. The day's trade with its shift of fortunes was done. An army of underlings cast the accounts and cleared the board, ready for to-morrow's play.

The wide corridor which runs from end to end of the Board of Trade on the ground-floor was nearly empty. Brokers' offices flank the corridor on either side, divided from it by glass windows. A window toward the lower end bears the sign, " Lester Wells, Commissions, Grain, Provisions, Stocks, Bonds." The office is the usual affair, with its blackboards, tickers, bulletin boards where telegrams are posted, chairs, cuspidors. A space is divided off by a partition of stained pine and glass behind which the bookkeepers and telegraphers work. In the corner there is a little den whose door has the sign " Private." This is Wells's room.

Coming out of the den and striding to the corridor, Robert Harper brushed by three men standing close together at the door, talking confidentially.

He heard one of them saying: " The house is way long of wheat. Old man Wells is loaded to the guards with it."

"Well, what if he is? Ain't Bowles on the same side?" said another.

Harper brushed by. He was vaguely aware that their eyes followed him. He even fancied them saying, " That 's young Harper, Bowles's nephew, who got dropped on account of that shady business of mixing wheat."

This fancy troubled him only a little, because the other trouble was so much bigger and nearer. His interview with Wells had failed. He had gone to the business place on a forlorn hope of reorganiz-

ing his position with Laura. It had been more Laura's hope than his own; yet now that it had failed he was oppressed and disappointed.

His uncle, Jonathan Edwards Bowles, of the Bowles Milling Company, had been his patron, too; had put him through college and then taken him into the huge organization of his business. He had been made manager of the Bowles elevators. The young man knew well enough that Wells liked him little; but so long as Laura liked him so much he could be patient under the father's grumpy hostility. Then the business of mixing wheat happened. They had always been mixing the wheat so far as Robert knew. He went on cheerfully doing the things that had been done without a thought of certain dusty rules which forbade it. Of a sudden there was a scandal. The abuse had overgrown under long tolerance. A reform was due. The Board of Trade ordered an investigation. Bowles chose to make a statement to the press alleging his innocence. If anybody was mixing wheat in his elevators, he said, it was without his knowledge. He was rather shocked to find such a charge brought against his house. Harper read the statement half an hour after he received the summons from the Board to appear and testify at the investigation. It was clear enough. Obviously he was expected to shoulder the blame. Perhaps, technically, he was alone to blame, for there had been no specific instructions to him from

his uncle. He had merely gone on doing what had been done. But his youth and pride arose in revolt. He sent his resignation to the Bowles Milling Company, ignored the summons, and was expelled from the Board. Then Wells's hostility dropped the veil. The broker forbade him the house. This puzzled Harper, for he knew perfectly well that every one in the grain trade understood his essential innocence. It was, of course, only a pretext seized by Wells to vent a hostility based upon recondite grounds.

Meantime the young man knew that his uncle was not ill-disposed toward him. It was merely a point of discipline with the miller, whose vast business organization had its independent life and polity like a state, requiring, above all, loyalty and obedience to the needs of the concern. He suspected that if he should make his apology and submission, take a new oath of fealty, he would be reinstated.

But he never had less wish to be taken back. His eye ran up the cliff-like granite wall of the Board, took in the towering nests of offices which gave the neighborhood its gigantic effect, and he calmly repudiated the whole greedy scheme. He turned toward Wabash Avenue, headed for the office of the young and struggling automobile company where he was trying to make himself a foundation. That was good, anyway. Laura came back to him. The disappointment mellowed. The young people

still had their openly clandestine meetings by the sympathetic connivance of all their women friends. They had their complete assurance of each other, their perfect faith in the future. They could wait a little while for the cloud of parental opposition to pass; for the perfected automobile to roll up and wheel them triumphantly away to that sunny future which was already the present of their dreams.

II

An effect of this triumphal youth and love remained with Wells in his den after Harper went out.

The broker sat by his desk, staring at the door through which the unwelcome caller had disappeared, — a tall, bony, round-shouldered, grizzled man of sixty. He wore a rusty and torn alpaca office jacket. A black skull-cap was pushed back on his long, narrow, bald head. The shirt-collar, a size too large, stood away from his leathery neck, displaying the prominent Adam's apple. There was a patch of gray whisker in front of each ear. His face was deeply wrinkled. His large dark eyes fixed themselves upon the empty doorway with a glance of singular power.

Oddly, something about the young man's broad shoulders had suggested the presence of the girl, giving Wells a subtle feeling of his daughter clinging about the obnoxious young man like a rich atmosphere, her love for him pleading with his

tongue. The sense of a great loss oppressed the old man's heart. He felt a helplessness against this victorious youth and love which would presently thrust him aside like a troublesome supernumerary, leaving him old, lonely, empty.

At one point in the interview Wells put his finger on that sore spot of the wheat mixing. Robert, pained and embarrassed as he always was when that business came up, feeling that it touched his reputation, eager to exculpate himself so far as he could, had declared that his uncle held no grudge against him. Zealous to prove it, he had taken from his pocketbook and handed to Wells a little slip of yellow paper, of the sort used for memoranda, neither dated nor addressed, but bearing the loosely scrawled words: "If you need money come to me. I will let you have what you want." By way of signature were the scrawled initials, "J. E. B."

Now, glancing at his desk, Wells was surprised to see this yellow slip lying before him. Both men had forgotten it in what had followed. He took it up, mechanically, in his surprise, and stared down again at the scrawled characters. His impassioned old mind, moving in its deeply worn ruts, turned from the young lover and centred upon this slip of paper,—upon the magic of those scarcely legible initials.

Jonathan Edwards Bowles. When Wells was a youth and helped 'tend his father's "general store"

in the New Jersey village, another youth had come to them, the son of a widow, the poorest of the country poor. Wells, senior, had taken him half from charity, giving him board and a little wage. He did the rougher jobs about the store, mowed and raked the yard, — a chubby, barefoot lad with a round, red-apple face. His name was Johnny Bowles. He was frankly considered slow-witted, but he had the most irrepressible good-nature, an untiring will to oblige. He ran to do everything with his moony, beaming, red-apple face. Johnny soon got to do more in the store and less in the stable. The country women liked to buy of him on account of his tireless good-nature. Wells, senior, was the substantial man of the village, worth, it was said, $20,000. Young Wells was the village beau, the youth of position and prospects. When he and some others of the more elect made game of Johnny, young Bowles took it with his irrepressible good-humor. They knew Johnny was stupid partly because he was so everlastingly good-natured. When he started West, they told him the Indians would boil him for his fat. When Wells himself first visited Chicago, then only a big country town, he found that Johnny had escaped the Indians and was making a living shovelling grain out of freight cars.

Johnny Bowles. Even to Wells, for all his familiarity with the facts, some effort was necessary, some exertion of the imagination to make

it seem real that once upon a time the syllable Bowles, that word of power, was no more than the name of a ragged youth. It was like trying to grasp the idea that once the word Napoleon was only the designation of an obscure cadet, signifying no more than James or Thomas. For now Bowles was a magic word. Under its command legions of gold marched out. Its mere form and sound were so charged with power that men's minds changed at the simple sight or hearing of it. A whole world-wide trade acknowledged its spell.

Johnny had saved his wage and been shrewd. His first profit was a Jonah's gourd. His silver dollars were seeds of the giant's beanstalk, producing huge growths over night. He planted in the soil of the new western empire. His fortune shot up with an incredible rapidity, towering, spreading, finding new roots, becoming colossal with the huge growth of the empire itself. Grain was the line. As the new soil suddenly sprouted and produced harvests, Bowles's mills spread to receive them. He had warehouses and mills at Chicago, Minneapolis, Kansas City. An immense industry ceaselessly plying with its thousand wheels and ten thousand hands owned him its master.

Wells had finally come to Chicago, after the long delay in settling up his father's estate, and embarked as a broker. For thirty years he had sat in Bowles's growing shadow, and the shade had turned him sick. At first Bowles's success

had been his inspiration. If the slow-witted Johnny was such an alchemist, how much more could he do? He set out with a hot, impatient will to overtake the apple-faced boy. He had his successes. Half a dozen times the magic had worked for him. He had laid his eager hands upon a great possession. Like a man with a handicap, he had found himself finally coming into the stretch with his competitor. But he had had as many failures as successes. Each time the magic had given out; the possessions had suddenly slipped like water through his fingers; he had been hurled back, stripped, scarcely able to conceal his nakedness from the public view. And Bowles all the time had been going on in his colossal success. This success was too overwhelming, too persistent. Bowles at length acquired a power and prestige which steadily commanded success as though he had learned the secret of it. Wells's bitter soul accused the gods. An inappeasable rage grew in his mind. In Chicago the relations between the two men had never been cordial. Even at first Wells remembered the ragged, apple-faced boy a little too obviously. Bowles had his gift of humor. Some of his humor was carried back to Wells. Now they never spoke.

Robert Harper was Bowles's nephew and had been his protégé. Wells could not forgive him that. The blossoming of the ragged Bowles into the accepted young dandy hurt his soul. When Harper

entered his house palpably in quest of his daughter, it was as though he had come invested with the Bowles mantle of arrogant success. It was part of the inveterate and intolerable Bowles luck that this fellow should come after Laura, as though the miller meant to carry his triumph even to what was dearest to Wells. The broker's helpless anger chafed against it in secret. Then came the rupture between uncle and nephew. Young Harper left the Bowles fold. This only increased the broker's wrath, as though he were asked to take Bowles's old clothes; as though a man not good enough for the Bowleses were still good enough for the Wellses. The broker saw the miller sending a beggar for his daughter and triumphing over him anew. The rupture with Bowles gave him a tangible ground, for it reduced Harper, moneywise, to a shred, a tatter. No, he should n't get the girl!

Wells looked again at the slip of yellow paper. Without knowing why, he put it in his pocketbook, — an act proceeding from an inexplicable motive, a sort of vague voodooism, as though with that slip of paper in his possession he had a bit of Bowles within his power.

For a moment he had a strange sense of that slip of paper in the leather case in his inner vest-pocket, as though it possessed a living element. His deep, settled rage against the miller burned strongly up.

He had need of all his rage just now. Long ago he had given up the slow processes of commerce.

One could never overtake a Bowles that way. Just now, pulling himself up from the last bitter defeat, he was engaged in one of those speculations which were forever involving him — an enterprise to seize a fortune over night by shrewdness and daring. The passion held out. He came back to the play after each defeat fiercer than ever.

He turned to the affairs on his desk, the rage to win smouldering in his heart.

III

TURNING to his desk, Wells took up the details of business methodically, with experienced competence.

A hand was laid on the door to the dingy den. The office manager slipped in, silently handed a telegram to his chief, paused a moment for instructions, and slipped out. The broker looked down at the despatch, every faculty in a sudden, cruel arrest. As though a sponge had passed over his brain everything that had gone before was wiped out — Harper, Laura, Bowles himself — although the message contained Bowles's name. It was from Wells's confidential agent at Kansas City. It read:

> Learn from good sources that Bowles is going to ship his wheat to Chicago. He is already engaging cars. You can absolutely depend upon this.

It was not Bowles the man, the former barefoot, apple-faced boy that stood before Wells's mind just

then. It was Bowles, the power, the abstraction, the factor in the wheat market.

In playing for a rise, Wells had gone too far. The rage to win had led him beyond his depth. The rise must come at once or he would be defeated, ruined, hurled back more naked than ever. He knew that Bowles held a great accumulation of wheat in the Southwest. He had calculated that the miller must keep a certain part of this wheat to supply his mills. He had information that all the rest was engaged for export. Thus Bowles's wheat would disappear. The bears would be forced to buy back their options from Wells at his price. So he had calculated. With this message before him he saw that Bowles intended to bring on the Kansas City wheat, break the market with it, and, when prices had gone to smash, pick up the wheat again at his leisure. In short, the stake which he had thrown upon the table was now big enough to tempt the miller. The screen fell, and instead of the crowd of petty speculators whom Wells had thought to catch in his trap, there was disclosed the giant figure of Bowles, bland, invincible, with millions of untouched resources behind him, looking down at the exhausted broker with an amused smile, calmly reaching over his shoulder and picking up the stake. It was like a skirmish line suddenly uncovering an army in position. It meant instant reinforcements or unconditional surrender. And where could Wells find reinforcements? His own resources were al-

ready exhausted in margining the wheat he had bought. It would require three, four, five hundred thousand dollars at once to margin the wheat he must now buy from Bowles. Where could he get such a sum? The last defeat had not only swept away most of his fortune; it had hurt his credit, impaired his reputation for success. His prestige was weakened like that of a general who loses once too often. Men were no longer ready to back his skill and judgment. The old broker perceived his position with absolute clearness. It came fully back to him that he was broken, beaten, definitely overthrown, irretrievably ruined. He had passed through his Waterloo. There was nothing but blank desolation ahead. This perception came to his mind with stunning force. He no longer thought of Bowles as a man. He was only an obstruction, a fact, like sun, rain, frost. There was no rancor in his mind then. He simply stared out at that waste, that endless desolation.

The short winter day was passing. It was already dark in the little den, so that the broker had to fumble for his coat, overcoat, and hat. He left the office without speaking and walked slowly along the broad flagging, a lean, stooped old figure, more stooped than ever, huddled in his overcoat. The high granite wall of the Board of Trade loomed clifflike above him. Ahead, beyond the bank, the vast flanks of the sky-scrapers arose, the serried windows, aglow with electric lights rank on rank, high up into

the dark, giving an effect of multiplied and ceaseless human activity. The streets were full of people going home. Wells's blank eyes mechanically took in this familiar scene, which now seemed strangely alien to him, as though he had died and passed beyond the use of those things. As he glanced at the low, strong wall of the bank, it came back to him in an odd way how he had opened his first bank account in Chicago, depositing $5000, and how important the fact had seemed. He found a cab, gave the direction, and dropped back in a corner of the vehicle. As they rolled through the streets, aglow with lights and thronged with people, he kept looking out mechanically. There was a kind of infinite weariness in his eyes, as though they were tired with having seen too much. This brave show of life, — the thronged, lighted streets with their offices and shops, — how futile, how foolish it all seemed! It would be good to shut one's eyes. Only a dull habit of living persisted mechanically. The old man lying back in his corner of the cab still stared out at the streets.

IV

When the cab stopped before his house, Wells climbed out, handed up a bill, and turned away without waiting for the change. He scarcely heard the cabman's respectful acknowledgment.

The house faced Illinois Boulevard. It had been built before the last defeat, when the broker felt

himself far along on the slippery highway to fortune, with firm footing under him. Moreover Laura was just coming home from school. Bowles's splendid new mansion on the Lake Shore Drive had been in Wells's mind. It was a fine house. The architect had done his best by it. Now Wells and his wife lived in a little space on the second floor, and Laura did what she could with the costly emptiness downstairs.

Only the father, mother, and daughter sat down to dinner, — a simple meal, which, however, the butler served with due care because Laura was there. If she had been away, the man would have left the old couple mostly to themselves and the dinner would have been as plain as a clerk's.

Wells ate mechanically, in silence, his large, dark eyes downcast, replying in monosyllables, absently, to his wife's few questions.

Laura, too, ate in silence. In color the daughter was between the father and the mother. Her brown hair had glints of red, of which there was a reflection in her brown eyes. She had heard from Robert of the failure of his attempt with her father. She and her mother had had their talk. She had prepared herself to make her submission. She called up her power of love, fixing it upon this harsh old man, loving him in spite of himself because he belonged in the lovely world which contained Robert. She waited purposely until he was in the dining-room. Then she came, in her bright, slender

grace, her head slightly tilted back, her fair chin thrust out, a faint smile parting her lips, the great fact of the day in her mind, ready to make her submission, to love him in spite of himself.

Wells had already taken his seat at the table, oblivious alike to wife and daughter. He did not even look up. He was scarcely aware of the girl's entrance. Mother and daughter exchanged glances, conveying a world of meaning, — Laura rebuffed, wounded, indignant; the mother silently pleading for the man. Mrs. Wells's broad, flat face still had a certain faded fairness. Her light yellow hair had grown very thin and was thickly lined with gray. Of heavy, ample figure, wholesome, motherly, one felt her still the farmer's daughter. Her attention hung upon her husband with a fond, constant solicitude. She silently pleaded for him with their daughter.

Laura kept her eyes to her plate, pretending to eat. Once or twice, as Wells gave an absent, inept monosyllable in reply to his wife, Laura looked over at her mother, and again that world of meaning, the whole drama of the household, silently passed between them. The girl's eyes said: "Why does he treat us so? He cares nothing for us. He forgets our existence. My happiness, my love for Robert, my love for him — he does n't even know of it! Why does he treat us so?" The mother silently pleaded for him, her anxious heart aroused to keep the daughter's love for the father, — that

mother's legacy which she had seen in so much danger of late and had worked to preserve.

Laura felt the appeal. She felt her own power to love.

"Have you had a good day, father?" she asked presently. Her eyes shone on the silent man, the faint smile parted her lips.

"I don't know," Wells muttered mechanically, aware from the surface of a sound in his ears.

Laura dropped her fork. Her lips trembled. She looked at her mother with indignation, ready to leave the table.

In a moment it came to Wells, through the abstraction, that Laura had been speaking, and instantly a recollection of Harper's visit flashed upon his mind. Startled, in a whirl of confused emotion, he looked up at his daughter. She accused him. She was going to push him aside. He was old, alone, beaten, ruined. For a moment he felt her bright grace shining into his murky world. But he had someway played wrong here, too. He looked down at his plate.

Finishing the meal in silence, he went upstairs to the room they called his study, — a companion place to the den at his office. It was a mechanical following of habit. He did not know why he had come there or what he was to do. He got a cigar without turning on the light, drew his chair to the window and sat in the dark, staring out at the boulevard.

It seemed impossible to go to bed and leave the utter ruin impending. Yet he could do nothing. There was a dull, painful confusion in his mind, and he found himself thinking mechanically of inconsequential things in his helplessness and loneliness.

The hours went by. Mrs. Wells sat in her room, the evening newspaper in her lap, but unable to read. Twice she had stolen downstairs and gone noiselessly from room to room merely from the necessity of some kind of action. Twice she had gone up to the closed dark door of her husband's room, turning away each time, reluctant to enter. Her prescience had guessed a calamity which grew more and more menacing to her mind as the time passed. She had been to Laura's room, too, but had not entered, unwilling to alarm the girl.

At last, with the courage of her anxiety, she went to the study and opened the door.

"You here, Lester?" she called softly into the dark as she entered.

"Yes," a dull voice answered from the window.

At the sound of that dull voice the elderly woman's attitude suddenly changed. Her heart throbbed up with an odd pain and power. It was as though, long ago, one of her children had called to her, ailing, in the night. The hesitation disappeared. She crossed the room at once.

"It's late," she suggested.

Wells lay humped and sprawled in the easy-chair before the window, his long arms dangling inert

over the arms of the chair, staring out at the night.

Mrs. Wells pushed a chair close beside her husband's and sat down. Her motherly hand, bold in solicitude, touched his brow, his cheek.

"You ain't feeling very well, are you, Lester?" she asked in the voice she would have used beside the bed of a sick child, — cheery, but full of love. The old broker's stricken heart quaked for its sympathy.

"No," he answered dully.

She lifted his feverish hand and held it between her cool palms.

"What 's the matter, dear?" she entreated.

The broker, his hand inert in hers, looked slowly around at her. The rays of an electric lamp in the street dimly revealed her face, loving, full of sympathy. To Wells it was still the face of Susan Mills. He was scarcely aware that thirty years had changed it. In his habitual preoccupation he was still always aware of the atmosphere of her affection about him, even when he gave least sign of it.

"I 'm broke, mother," he said simply.

There was no need of more. She had known indefinitely of defeats, of fluctuations, of ups and downs. Hovering over the life of this dumb, absorbed man, she had caught the effect of that incessant battle uptown. She knew at once what this simple declaration meant. It was the final defeat in the long fight. She understood the depths of his misery. Her hands tightened over him.

"Mother" and "father" were the deepest words of their affection, knit into their lives long ago, in more articulate, less absorbed days, when the little boy had died, and later when the daughter came and was the big fact to both of them.

She waited a moment, clasping his hand in a silent outflow of sympathy.

"It 's too bad, father," she said, when the silent, caressing moment had passed. "It 's too bad for you. I know how you feel it. But it ain't everything. We were happy before you got rich. We can be happy again. You know, when little Lester was taken away, it seemed that we could n't ever care about anything less that happened to us. This ain't anything like that, dear."

A strange resurrection of the past took place in the broker's heart. It came up all the stronger because his long abstraction had left it untouched. In his woe he again felt himself simple, a man of affection, surrounded by love. The death of his boy oddly blent itself with this new misfortune, subtly ennobling it, lifting it to pure tragedy. His bound heart loosened. His hard old will softened under the resurrection of affection.

"I 've been in pretty hard luck lately, mother. I guess I 've lost the knack. Things have gone against me." His voice sounded weak, almost querulous.

"But it ain't everything, father," she insisted gently.

"I could stand it well enough myself," he went on, "but I hate to have it come now. You 're gettin' on in years, mother; and Laura —" His voice choked, and the old man stopped, stubbornly struggling with his emotion.

"Laura 's young, father, and the young don't always understand," the mother said eagerly; "but she knows how much you think of her. She 'd be the last one that would n't take anything like this in the right way. You 'll see that she does take it right. I know she will. For us, father, it just gives us a chance to help you more. Don't you fear about Laura."

"I meant to do mighty well by my girl," said the man, with pathetic simplicity. He felt the ruin of that dream also in his failure. The wife saw that tears were dripping from his eyes, and the tears restored him close to her heart, brought the old man home to her breast. Her own eyes were wet from sympathy. They were lovers again.

"Never you mind, Lester," she said. "We 'll get together what there is left. Maybe we 'll be better off."

"There won't be much left, Susie. It 's about all gone," said Wells. In his softened and loosened mood he began telling her about his money affairs, just as they used to talk those affairs over long ago, before his operations became too big and complicated, before he became immersed in his passion. He talked on and on, seeming to find a sad consola-

tion in putting it all before her. The talk rambled, touched on things far back in their lives. They were lovers again, sitting by the window in the dark room, holding each other's hands, sometimes weeping silently — as much over the precious resurrection of the past as over the present calamity.

Theirs had been a long engagement. For some years Wells held the plan of coming to Chicago. Settling up his father's estate and realizing on the property involved a delay. Again, after he came to Chicago, some years elapsed before he had got himself satisfactorily under way, before he had made a firm enough foundation. He was thirty when he returned to New Jersey, rich, according to the simple hamlet standards, to marry Susan Mills. This long fidelity, this coming back in his success to claim her, had always lain in the woman's heart as a romance. She cherished it with a touch of poetry. It seemed something fine and knightly to her. The tradition helped to keep her love fresh and strong during these later years of abstraction.

"I meant to do mighty well by my girl," he said again, when they came back to that.

"Laura knows that; she knows," said the mother, quickly. "Of course — you can't help a girl's falling in love." She made the suggestion gently, with a touch of anxiety.

It brought Harper to the old man's mind. "But maybe I ain't done as well by her as I ought," he confessed humbly. In this soft mood there was a

sudden immense yearning to have his girl close by his heart. "If Harper can take care of her, I won't stand in the way any more — if it 's what she wants," he said. "You tell her, mother, that if Harper can take care of her I won't say any more. Tell her that from me, mother."

"She 'll be very happy. She 's good, Lester," the mother murmured.

Wells arose as she got up. With a certain awkwardness he put his arm around her ample waist and kissed her. It was her knight come back again.

"Yes, I 'm going to bed in a minute; I must smoke a little," he said quite cheerfully, with an odd conscious fondness in his voice. He accepted his ruin. He felt himself made simple and good again, cleansed and purified by this reunion.

The woman's hand lingered on his shoulder with a touch of the sweetheart. She felt a joy, a good victory won out of this defeat. The money was little to the farmer's daughter.

"Don't smoke too long, father. It 's 'most morning," she said fondly.

She went out, happier than she had been in a long time. The happiness, the rekindled love, and the need of love turned at once to Laura. She went to the daughter's room and turned on an electric lamp. Laura lay asleep, her long hair in a thick braid. In the innocence of sleep, her hair in a simple braid, she looked to the mother almost like a little schoolgirl again.

Laura turned, wrinkling her brows on account of the light, and awoke. She sat up abruptly in bed, staring at her mother with the confusion of a person suddenly aroused from deep sleep.

Mrs. Wells sat on the edge of the bed. "Your father gives his consent, dear," she said.

"Consent —," repeated Laura, confused, unable to understand this summons in the middle of the night. "You mean — to Robert?"

"As soon as Robert can take care of you. He thinks it 's for your happiness. He won't say anything more against it — as soon as Robert can take care of you. He wanted me to tell you so. He 's good, dear."

A splendid dream dawned upon the girl. Her mind still scarcely comprehended, but her heart understood. She and Robert were to be married — that was what this call in the middle of the night meant. It seemed a kind of miracle, a sort of angelic visitation, which her mind could not comprehend; but her heart understood. Warm with the sleep in which all things are possible, she felt an immense love for everything.

"He 's good, dear," she heard her mother say.

"You tell him that I love him," said the girl. "Wait, I 'll go myself." She moved to arise, ready to go at once to her father as she was.

The mother's instinct understood the splendid dream, the will to love, transforming the girl's heart.

"He'll be going to bed now, dear. You can tell him in the morning," she said.

Laura accepted this, as she accepted all the rest, with simple, unquestioning mind. "You tell him that I love him," she said again, as though she could give her father her heart in her two hands.

"I wanted to tell you right away — so you'd know," said Mrs. Wells, softly.

"Yes," said Laura, simply. That was part of the splendid dream in which every one, everything was lovely.

She lay down again as her mother went out, looking into the dark, the warm languor of sleep gathering about her. It all seemed natural and simple because every person and everything was beautiful and lovely. Once she aroused with a sharp pang. The thought flickered in the dimness of her mind: "But it was only a dream!" At once she knew that the dream was true. She lay back again, smiling, and went to sleep with the dream rich and still in her heart.

V

LIKE an inveterate smoker, Wells felt in his nerves a strong craving for tobacco after the long talk with his wife. He lit a cigar and sat down again, meaning to smoke only a few minutes.

He had the consciousness of a state of peace. He felt good, affectionate, simple. He was at once

aware that the reunion with his wife which had clarified his heart had had a like effect upon his mind. The mere painful stupefaction of defeat had passed away. The feverish tenseness of the speculation was gone. There was a freshness and clarity in his thoughts as though the purification of his emotions, the turning back to the past, had swept all the febrile rubbish out of his brain.

As he sat slowly pulling at his cigar, his cleared mind turned back by a kind of inevitable habit, without any volition on his part, to the disastrous campaign which was ending in Waterloo. It lay before him like a map. He had a purely intellectual pleasure in surveying and judging it. He could see now with the greatest clearness where he had made his mistake; where the passion had run away with him and he had over-bought, when he should have been preparing himself against Bowles's coup, which would have been taken into a sound reasoning as among the contingencies to be guarded against. If he had turned just here! He saw it so clearly now. The point where the fortune had slipped away from him stood out so distinctly that his nerves felt a shock as though, in fact, the gold were even then running swiftly through his fingers. But for this fatal over-confidence the campaign was good. He even felt a touch of surprise and admiration as his clear thought marshalled its strong points. Yes, a man should have won in it. The veteran speculator surveyed it like a general looking over a

lost battle, recognizing the mistake which had brought defeat. Merely to have turned aside here, to have held a reserve there! The temperature of his mind was rising. Of course it was lost now. In one clear glance he saw that he was not of those timorous adventurers who sail close to shore, seizing a tiny advantage and hurrying to harbor with it. He must win greatly or lose. Well, he had lost. Yet, even now, with half a million dollars or perhaps somewhat less, he would win in spite of Bowles. His mind protested against Fortune's stupid injustice in letting Bowles win when in fact he was the better man. With half a million —

He looked at his watch. Half-past four. The new day was at hand, the day of his open acknowledged defeat. It flashed upon his brain that in only a few hours he would be going down to his office to shut it up, to confess himself a bankrupt, to publish his ruin. The nearness of this formal acknowledgment wrenched his heart anew with the full anguish of defeat. The minute-hand of the watch seemed to be inexorably pushing him up to this death, — dragging him along to be devoured by Bowles. Bowles would swallow him up at a gulp. He would be a luncheon for Bowles, dropped into that insatiable maw as a mere bite, over which Bowles would smile superciliously in his everlasting luck.

He got up and began pacing the floor, the fire slowly, steadily rising in his heart.

Abruptly, in an irrepressible rage, in a blind passion of resistance, he went to the house telephone, called the stable and ordered the carriage brought around at once. He changed slippers for shoes, and began pacing the floor again like a caged tiger, his impassioned mind reaching out, scheming, contriving with all its power and cunning. He slipped downstairs, in his impatience; put on his overcoat and hat, and let himself silently out of the house. When the carriage came around in the dark, the coachman saw the humped old figure pacing up and down the walk. The wife was vastly remote, a dim speck at the confines of his mind. He did not even leave word for her.

It was the most dead and dark and cold of all the hours. The streets lay still and empty, engulfed in night. A solitary owl car jingled dismally by, the horses' muzzles frosted with their breath. Here and there a lighted window showed wanly like a sleepy eye. A muffled policeman on his beat or a lone pedestrian stared at the carriage, driven rapidly through the bitter cold.

As the carriage rolled on, the slow dissolution of the dark, the cold transformation from death to life began. Bare trees with stark branches and buildings some distance off began to emerge in outline from the void blackness. The first electric car whirled by with the glow and energy of day. The world began revealing itself in form and color. The act proceeded more rapidly. The curtain was visibly

rolling up. The coachman, peering between his wrappings, the exposed strip of his face stony and stinging with cold, could see the red brick and the white stone trimmings on the house in Prairie Avenue before which he drew up.

Wells, plunging from the carriage, with no eye for the transformation, was vaguely surprised to find the day already near at hand. To him it meant only that he must hurry. His insistent summons roused the house. At length a man appeared, dull with sleep and angry at being called from his warm bed at that unconscionable hour. But he recognized the caller and carried his imperious word upstairs. Holiday, the retired wholesale grocer, a man of Wells's own age, was sitting up in bed, already awakened by the ringing, when the man knocked at his door.

Wells was in the hall, where the man had turned on the lights, still muffled in his overcoat, his hat in his hand, when Holiday came down the stairs. The merchant had on slippers, trousers, and night-gown. He had thrown a gayly colored dressing-robe over his shoulders, and was holding it together at his chilly neck with one hand. His flowing, iron-gray side-whiskers, which usually lent so much dignity to his appearance, were now oddly rumpled and tousled from the pillow. His suspenders were down, and with the other hand he held the unsupported trousers over his big paunch. He came down the stairs, peering for Wells, consciously trying to look

sympathetic. At this untimely summons a dozen calamities had rapidly presented themselves to his mind, — death in the family, suicide, an elopement, a mortal illness. Thus roused from his bed, his swift indefinite presentiments had been all of some domestic misfortune, some calamity of the household. At that hour of the night he had not thought about money. He put out his hand as far as he could, holding his trousers in place by the pressure of his elbow.

"Why, Lester, what is it?" he asked sympathetically. They had been friends for twenty-five years; but Holiday had never called him Lester except once, ten years before, when they had got over-jolly together at the annual dinner of the Chicago Commercial League.

Really touched by this friendliness, and at the same time with a vague, grim sense of humor which moved him to a slight smile, Wells went at the business at once.

"I'm in the hole, Marshall," he said, taking the other's personally intimate ground. "I've got to have some money right away."

Without pause he plunged into the details of the situation, which Holiday could instantly understand. He was long so much wheat; so much more was coming on the market which he must find the money to margin. If he could hold up the price and carry his wheat thirty days, a sure profit was in sight — as certain as the rising of the sun. The harvest in

Argentine had turned out poorly. She did n't have half a crop. Her exports in the spring would be only twenty per cent what they were last year. All the surplus winter wheat in Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma had been marketed. There was a famine in India. France was short and would have to import heavily in the spring. If this Chinese business should bring on a European war, as everybody said it was going to, wheat would jump forty cents; it would go to a dollar and a quarter in Chicago overnight. Look at the visible supply! It was thirty-five per cent smaller than a year ago. Even now, six months from harvest, the mills at Minneapolis had hard work to get what grain they wanted of the right grade for grinding.

The two men stood up together in the chilly hall, Wells muffled in his overcoat, Holiday holding up his trousers with one hand, gathering the gayly colored robe about his cold neck with the other, his eyes on the broker's impassioned face, slightly frowning, as much from the mental effort of following Wells's rapid exposition as from his reluctance to follow it at all; entirely on his guard and aloof at first, his suspicions and conservatism coming out the moment money was mentioned.

As Wells went on, laying out the game before his friend, his passion grew. The vehemence with which he insisted upon winning augmented his own

faith. His exaggeration increased his own conviction. As he spread out the game before his friend, his own rage for the play became hotter. His bloodshot eyes looked more angry. He had a veteran air. The atmosphere of a hundred battles of finance seemed to blow about him.

This vehemence slowly infected the colder blood of the older man. This passion a little fired the more cautious brain with the lure of the game. Holiday's own ample fortune had been made in the prosaic way of trade and by an enormous advance in the value of a single plot of ground on State Street which he had bought twenty years before for a price which now represented merely the annual rental of the lot. Cautious, even timid where money was concerned, with little faith in himself, he had a high reputation for conservatism and sound judgment. Several times at long intervals and in an almost furtive way he had tried a tiny speculation in stocks or grain through Wells — the small matter of buying 200 shares or 10,000 bushels. In these occasional timid little ventures he had neither lost nor won. But secretly he had long nursed all a timid, cautious man's envy for those bold operations, those big plays, in which an immense profit, a whole fortune was seized at a stroke. He was more or less in the atmosphere of speculation. Half his acquaintances speculated more or less. He had a real friendliness for Wells, a will to help him — if it could be done safely. Under the fire of the broker's passion his

colder blood warmed; the lure of the game appealed to his secret desire.

"Let 's go into the library," he said, his fat person shivering from the chill of the hall.

In the library he lighted the gas grate, holding his hap-hazard draperies about him as best he could. Wells went on. He told more exactly of his position and needs.

"I came to you," he said, "and we can go to Bunner and Yocum. I believe they 'll go in with me, too."

The mere mention of these other names lent some assurance to Holiday. He was half won over; but from habit he kept up his skeptical, questioning attitude.

"But how does Bowles stand in the wheat market now?" he asked cautiously.

"Why, Bowles — Bowles knows what 's trumps in the wheat market as well as I do. He knows wheat 's going up. You 'll find him buying the wheat before long. He 's been picking up the stuff in Kansas for export this last month."

He knew at once that disclosure of Bowles's opposition would be fatal. Holiday would never risk a penny against that magic name. He felt that he had his man almost won over. Success lay just within touch of his fingers. His terrible anxiety, his rage to win — not only to escape Bowles, but to wrest a fortune from that man's hands — swept him irresistibly into an act which

was unpremeditated, yet which he had been unconsciously prepared for ever since he called his carriage. He saw it in a flash.

"See here!" he said, pulling open his overcoat. He plunged his hand inside his vest, drew out his pocketbook, took from it the slip of paper — a yellow slip, undated, unaddressed, saying: "If you want money come to me. I will let you have what you want."

"You know how Bowles helps a man out," said Wells. "He'd take my hide. But you can see how he stands."

Holiday looked respectfully down at the magic initials "J. E. B.," fully convinced at last.

Wells moved about the library with a constrained, subdued restlessness, while Holiday hurried upstairs to dress for the drive to Bunner's. The old broker's heart was hot with the stir of the fight which he saw before him, for which he was already planning. As to this preliminary skirmish of getting the necessary money, he felt that in winning Holiday, he had already more than half succeeded. With Holiday at his side Bunner would be half convinced at the start; and with both Holiday and Bunner, Yocum would not hold back.

It was as he calculated. They drove to Bunner's house, calling the rich lumberman from his bed. The mere presence of Holiday, the solid and conservative, gave the venture a secure effect. Yocum was already at breakfast when the three arrived at

his house, and his consent was won in twenty minutes' talk, Holiday and Bunner sitting one on either side of Wells. They left Yocum to his morning meal and drove uptown.

It was eight o'clock when the three men sat down to breakfast in a hotel. The streets were alive with the pulse and rush of business. Wells was in the best of humor. He was almost gay. He had $400,000 as good as in his hands. It was merely a matter of waiting for the bank to open. He had won the desperate preliminary skirmish against almost hopeless odds, and the sense that he had won lifted up his will and courage. He appeared at his office at the usual hour, alert, shrewd, resourceful, as full of fight as a ferret.

He went home to dinner that night, tired from the tremendous strain of the day, but in the greatest good-humor. He met his wife's anxious, questioning eyes with a ready smile. She knew from the coachman of his early morning quest, and now, from his great good-humor, from his triumphant smile, she guessed, in the main, what had happened, and resigned herself to his will.

Laura came gliding swiftly into the hall, her mind still in the radiant transformation of her splendid dream. She put her arm about her father's neck, her eyes shining into his with happy tenderness.

"I think you're good, papa," she whispered; and then, instantly from the old man's blank stare, she perceived that he had forgotten her.

It was only an instant before Wells remembered.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "Yes,—I hope you will be happy." He said it most awkwardly; embarrassed, secretly ashamed because he had forgotten. His whole stubborn repugnance to Harper came up in his mind. "Well, I hope you 'll be happy," he repeated mechanically, and hastily kissed her brow.

The girl turned away. In her pain at the moment, it seemed to her that she finally gave her father up.

VI

The Empire Automobile Company had a ground-floor room on Wabash Avenue, where several styles of horseless carriages, displayed behind the broad show windows, might tempt buyers. But the factory occupied the top story of a dingy brick building in that packed, smoky region of factories west of the river. This dismal loft was lighted with gas-jets even on the brightest days.

At the rear of the long, bare room, near the windows through which some light fell, a mechanical contrivance lay on two wooden horses. Five men were gathered about it. Harper had taken off his coat and vest, collar and cuffs. The shirt-sleeves were rolled up on his brawny arms, and his hands were black with iron and oil. His feet were firmly planted, well apart, his chin belligerently squared as he looked down at the machine. Tuf-

ford, the president of the company, stood next him, — a carriage manufacturer of some means, lank and grizzled, a bony Yankee; an enthusiast, as full of dreams as a boy about this automobile venture. He had unbuttoned his coat and vest, and he held his big soiled hands conspicuously away from his clothes, spread out like two platters. He raised the cleaner hand, and with that wrist absently wiped the dusty sweat from his brow. Barry, the foreman of the factory, burly in coarse blackened clothes and leather apron, grimy from head to foot, stood by, intelligently waiting. Hurd, the secretary, Harper's friend, trig and spotless as when he left the office, sat on an upturned box nervously smoking his cigar and glancing anxiously from one man to another. He alone knew absolutely nothing of mechanics. Frowning, he looked down at the mysterious contrivance of brass and iron which held their fortunes. Bliss, the inventor of the motor, a slight man with a beardless face, boyish-looking in spite of his forty years, was on his hands and knees in the dirt peering up at the machine. Beside him, their heads fairly touching, squatted Mercer, the expert sent by the omnibus company. This was the improved motor at which they had been working. If it proved satisfactory there would be a big order from the omnibus company, and the help of some additional capital — in short, smooth sailing for the automobile concern, which had been bobbing through troubled waters.

Bliss turned a stop. The mechanism began to move slowly, smoothly. The two men on the floor fixed their eyes more intently on the plying rod and turning shaft. Tufford opened his mouth and forgot to close it. Harper stooped over the machine, breathless. Hurd fastened his teeth, dog-like, in the butt of his cigar. Bliss opened the stop wider. The motion accelerated, the rod flew, the shaft whirled, smoothly, steadily. A tense moment passed. Bliss sat back on his heels, the tumbled hair over his forehead.

"There! Do you see?" he demanded.

The expert squatted and squinted a moment longer; then stood up, stretched himself, dusted his hands one against the other.

"Oh, it 's all right," he said conclusively.

Hurd sprang up in a quiver of excitement, and met Harper's triumphant glance. The two stood together, too content for speech, grinning down at the swift, smooth, live machine, for which they felt an affection such as a man feels for his horse which has won the race.

After Harper had washed his hands and arms at the iron sink used by the workmen, he came back, followed by Hurd, and stood over the machine, drying his hands on a rough towel. He liked to look at the thing, — to contemplate this beautiful contrivance of brass and steel which he had helped to create with his brain and his hands. At college he had been high in football, but only so-so in the

classes. He knew that he was intelligent; but he liked best to deal with things that were ponderable, upon which he could lay his two muscular hands. He liked to exert the strength of his big body. Drying his hands, he contemplated the motor with a full content. It meant success. It meant Laura. He wished that she could have been there to see how beautifully it proved itself. He had an odd feeling that she ought to love it for the splendid precision and smoothness of its action, and that her gratitude to it would be a full compensation, in the great economy of things, for this creation, this birth of power. Looking down, he fixed the aspect of the machine anew in his mind with the deliberately joyous idea of thus conveying it to her that evening, so that it might receive its due of her appreciation.

It meant success — and Laura. He had fairly won it with his hands and brain. The fixing of the wedding day was contingent only upon the success of this last test.

Crossing the river at Van Buren Street and glancing over at the towering nests of offices about the Board of Trade, he thought again how much finer it was for a fellow to help to make something with his own hands and brain. His success might not mean much money-wise as money was counted over there, but it would mean enough. He told himself that he was not smart enough for the big game — and that he was glad of it.

As he strode along Pacific Avenue under the cliff-like wall of the Board of Trade, the big bell rolled out an iron stroke, the solemn warning slowly reverberating through the building.

It lacked but five minutes of the close. Harper saw the sign "Lester Wells" on the broad window and glanced in. The lean, stooped figure of the broker bent over a ticker beside the window. The office was crowded with men. There was a tremendous wheat market. Argentine's wheat crop had turned out a failure. India had ceased exporting. Warmer weather had revealed ravages by Hessian fly in Indiana and Ohio. France was bidding up. The newspapers said that Germany's reply to England meant war. The Czar was massing troops in Manchuria. England had sent a flying squadron to sea with sealed orders. War meant dear wheat, and the price was climbing. Upstairs frantic brokers were bidding the sixteenths and eighths which flashed over the world. The strife of thousands of men and millions of money converged there; and Lester Wells was the prophet and captain of the triumphant bulls. His fortune grew in a noonday magic.

Harper knew these things from the newspapers and from gossip. He glanced into the broker's office, and up at the cliff-like walls whence he had been contemptuously cast. And the joy of the motor was stronger within him than ever. "A cheerful lot of lunatics!" he thought with happy

extravagance. What was it to him that May wheat was closing at 98½?

He glanced over at the huge brown cube of the Rookery where, high up, the Bowles Milling Company occupied an entire floor, fifty offices opening one into another, in one of which the miller sat at his desk, fat, bald, imperturbable. They told him that wheat had closed at 98½. The miller glanced up, slightly elevated his thin eyebrows, then laughed with the utmost good-humor.

"That beggar Wells is making this wheat cost me something," he said, and laughed again, really amused at Wells's success, fully appreciating the joke of being worsted by such an antagonist. His smile was singularly pleasing, lighting up the heavy face. But in his perfect good-humor one could perceive also his perfect assurance, — the unshaken equanimity of the man who knows how the game must end, believing in his power to lay down stake after stake, to bring up million after million and crush the opponent finally under the weight of his inexhaustible reserves.

VII

It was Laura herself who answered Robert's ring that evening and let him into the house. She wore a plain muslin dress. In her absolute assurance of that future which was so little beyond them, she delighted her heart by anticipating its simple conditions

in every way possible. Her costly dresses were put aside. When she went out of an evening in her simplest gown, she felt herself already joyously accepting the limitations of Robert's purse. Her ardor drew a happy inspiration from the fact that she was dressed less expensively than any other woman there. To go uptown in the street cars was an act of faith from which she derived the deepest happiness. When Robert called she listened for his ring, running to admit him herself; and meeting him at the door in this way was like meeting him at the veritable door of their future.

Robert stood a moment on the doorstep, not offering to enter, broadly beaming at her. He liked to have his wordless joke with her in this manner, over the running to the door, the muslin gown, the street-car rides; but he was sensible of the perfect faith which made her ardor full of dignity.

He had his other precious joke, — the success of the motor. Their automobile was ready for them. The marriage might now take place in April, as they had planned. He began telling her about it at once. They went to the second and smaller parlor off the hall, where they sat alone like a girl and her beau, talking it over.

It was an odd whim which moved Wells to walk in there.

The broker had spent the evening at his office. He had checked over figures, made calculations, written letters, left instructions, all in the manner

of the sober, self-contained reasoning man of business; yet all the while amid these ordinary activities a great hot intoxication glowed in the centre of his mind. He was winning. His profits were piling up thousands upon thousands. Fortunes were showering into his hands. He was winning from Bowles. Even the infallible miller, the acknowledged potentate, the undefeated favorite of the gods, now felt the touch of his power and bent beneath it. After his long struggle below he was now emerging high and far on the golden uplands.

But there was more than this. The scarcity of breadstuffs at home, the foreign demand, the talk of war, had at last infected all Christendom with a panic to buy wheat. Every man felt an irresistible power in the market, begotten of a sudden world-wide impulse. Wells was no longer the harassed adventurer hazardously struggling to devise a rise. The market rose of itself in response to an overpowering, universal movement, and Wells simply floated up with the great tide. No man felt this uncontrollable force which had come into the market more keenly than the veteran speculator himself. The converging of this irresistible, universal impulse beat upon his nerves, stimulating and intoxicating him. He walked in front, but there was the sound of a million feet behind him.

This afternoon one of the office men, bending over the ticker and shouting out the quotations for the crowd, who were too impatient to wait for them

to be put on the blackboard, cried: "Ninety-six for May — now a quarter — a half — sells at ninety-seven!"

The youth's voice vibrated with excitement, and to the crowd of speculators — Wells's followers — these cries were like the shouts of victory in battle. Hardened nerves thrilled at them. Wells's face was impassive; but a great red glow burned in his mind.

When he left the office in the evening, chancing to glance over at the white formidable square of the bank, — the Gibraltar of finance, — the inordinately drunken idea came to him that his power was as great as the bank's. In his mind there was the sense of an immense space, in which he stood solitary, commanding.

Entering the hall of his house, he saw the light in the second room, heard his daughter's low, happy laughter, and felt an odd impulse to put his triumph on a more intimate stage; to show himself for a moment in his victory. He stepped to the door, entered the room, his lean, stooped figure as ill-dressed as usual, his chin stubbled over with a two days' beard. Yet in his mien, in his dark eyes, something of his triumph showed, — a gleam through the hard crust from the great glow in his mind. He entered the room, and halted.

The two young people sat near together in the corner. They looked up, surprised at the entrance of this figure amid the intimacy of their talk, in the atmosphere of their dream, even embarrassed for a

moment as though some apology were expected from them.

Wells saw the two bright young faces turned toward him in surprise, with a touch of embarrassment which predicated the intimacy of their talk and the atmosphere of their dream; and again he felt the everlasting triumph of youth and love in respect to which he was helpless, which would push him off the boards as a troublesome old supernumerary.

The instant's check passed. Now Robert was coming forward, still a little embarrassed, but eager, solicitous. The men shook hands, exchanged some empty commonplaces; both self-conscious. Laura stood beside her lover, glancing at him proudly, and at her father, whom her eyes at once thanked and entreated. Plainly the young man was the important fact here. Wells understood it as he got himself away. For a moment he vaguely blamed the selfishness of her love, vaguely felt himself lonely. He went upstairs to his den. His dark eyes glanced out at the street. The feeling of power and victory returned. Again there was in his mind the sense of an immense space in which he stood solitary, triumphant.

Laura watched her father leave the room. That indefinable pathos with which he sometimes impressed her, and which she could not understand, came over her afresh. The departing figure, going out of the atmosphere of their dream, seemed old, bent, solitary. A sudden solicitude troubled her

heart. She felt herself some way to blame because she had let him go that way. In her joy she had not only the will, but the need to love him more. Yet that was so difficult. He was so hard, so absent.

"I'm glad of this!" Robert was saying to her.

She understood that, and was happy with him over it. The father's concession seemed really important, as though he were at last giving something more than a grudging consent. They returned to their joy. The wedding was to be on the last day of April.

VIII

The last day of April came singularly fair, a holiday, a Sabbath in the serene progress of the seasons. Wells, glancing from his study window about noon, caught the wide, bright effect. His shaken mind dimly and fleetingly conceived a whole sweet, sound, serene world apart from the murky sphere in which he lived. For an instant his eye rested with dumb, hungry sympathy upon a young tree growing in the parked way beside the boulevard. Then he came to himself with a little start, found himself staring vacantly at a mere tree; took up his coil of thought, and resumed the restless pacing.

The serene progress of the seasons had not been favorable to the wheat market. Argentine and the Northwest seemed to have discovered bottomless granaries. They poured forth their cargoes of

grain in endless processions. Spring had come, and everywhere there was promise of abundant harvest. The little threat of war had passed like a swift cloud. The Powers now smiled as blandly as this April day. And Bowles — in this crucial day of doubt — was marching up regiment after regiment of his inexhaustible reserves, steadily crushing the market with the slow weight of his millions.

Wells, in his triumph, had rushed on far, too far — caught in the lure of game, eager to seize the last possible advantage. He had seen the more wary of his followers slip away. Some of them had openly joined the other side. The commercial writers talked of a decline in the market, adducing numberless reasons. His money was exhausted; but even to himself he would not make the intolerable admission that the deal was going to fail. He stood with his back to the wall, inwardly consumed with rage to fight it out, rage against his cowardly followers, rage against the stupid prophets who talked of defeat, most of all, rage against Bowles.

Pacing with his shuffling gait, he began thinking of a stroke which might be executed in the Liverpool market. Somewhere in the cellarage of his toiling mind there was the painful consciousness of a special affliction, — why was he so far from the office, cut off from that instant, telegraphic touch with the markets which was so important at this critical time? He was trimly brushed and shaven. His lank figure was encased in a long black coat.

He wore gray trousers and patent-leather shoes. This ceremonial garb obtruded upon the hard coil of his thoughts — of course it was Laura's wedding which they were preparing downstairs.

He glanced at the little clock on his desk. It was almost noon. He wondered with a kind of anguish how long this interruption would last. Wheat might be anything by this time. He struggled painfully against the need to get to a telephone and find out what was going on. He heard the doorbell ringing, and knew that some guests were downstairs. Glancing out, he happened to see the young clergyman crossing the street with a vigorous, swinging step, in the bland sunshine, looking up smilingly at the house. He found that he disliked the clergyman, although he had never thought of him before. He was strangely loath to go downstairs. He wished to wait to the last minute so that there would be no delay and he would not have to speak to anybody.

There were only a score of guests, all intimates of the family or of Harper. Coming into the parlor with Laura, Wells recognized Holiday, who looked at him with a kind of gloom, and Mrs. Jamieson, who beamed with a moist fondness at everybody. The others were familiar, all standing up solemnly as though it were a funeral.

The little ineffectual snatch of wedding music was turned off abruptly. The young clergyman began speaking rapidly in a clear, fresh voice. This was

Laura standing before him. Wells was aware of her graceful figure in a brown travelling dress, of the mass of her hair. But he avoided looking at her. The dim black-coated figure beside her was Harper, of course.

The broker looked straight ahead of him, not moving a muscle. The clergyman's fresh, rapid voice ceased. Wells looked around involuntarily. He saw Harper stoop and kiss the girl's lips before the roomful, and his heart suddenly clutched together as though his girl were dead. The bridegroom, quite pale, inwardly agitated, solemn in his joy, looked up from his bride's face, and encountered his father-in-law's eyes, — so astonished, so full of pain, that the young man suddenly felt ashamed and guilty. Laura had turned to her mother. They were embracing and shedding tears. The guests were clustering up, nervous, agitated, some of the women tearful. Harper, in his agitation, took a step forward and held out his hand, with that odd sense of guilt, dumbly begging to be forgiven. Wells took the extended hand mechanically, looking into the young man's eyes with that deep expression of suffering, without anger or resentment, only with painful surprise as though he were asking helplessly: "Who are you, young man? What are you doing with my girl?"

But Laura was turning to him, pale and agitated like Harper. He felt the slight trembling of her body as he put his hand on her waist. Her agita-

tion seemed the visible motion of her spirit. Stooping to kiss her, her eyes upon his, her emotion subtly enveloping him, even a faint perfume of her hair coming to his nostrils, she was suddenly revealed to him — the blown rose — the woman, no more the girl.

At once he understood it all. She had grown up. She had come into the woman's power of creative love. An immense meaning passed between the father and daughter in a look — as though she, conscious of her power, asked him, "Why would n't you let me love you more?" and as though he, astonished, stricken with a useless regret, replied confusedly, "I did not understand — no, it cannot go this way — we must turn back!"

Mrs. Jamieson stood by, tearful, waiting to kiss the bride. Wells looked around at his wife, whose eyes were full of tears.

Every one heard the ring at the doorbell, and there was a little pause, a little expectant surprise. Was it a belated guest? A servant appeared, bearing a tray on which lay a letter. The man looked about, smiling slightly, uncertain; then offered the letter to Harper. It was directed: "Mr. and Mrs. Robert Harper." Harper glanced at the superscription, recognized the writing, and handed the letter over to Laura. The guests stood about, excited, expectant. Laura opened the envelope. It contained a little slip of yellow paper on which

was written, "With best wishes;" and, pinned to the slip, was Bowles's check for $10,000.

Instantly the spirit of the company changed. There were exclamations, laughter. At once the solemn air passed away. The tense nerves relaxed in jokes. The company became gay. Laura, coming back to her joy, and moreover wishing to make the present seem important because it came from Robert's relative, gave the check a little triumphant flourish. Robert was restored to his equanimity. He was secretly proud of his uncle's generosity. The $10,000 in hand was exactly what they needed to put their money affairs in satisfactory shape. It redeemed their position economically. He was happy to have this gift for his bride at so fit a moment. It quite wiped out that secret, humble feeling of guilt. The bride and groom and all the company came back to the joy, the gayety, which the wedding finally meant. The tragic moment was overthrown. They were restored to the society air.

Only Wells was not gay. A dreadful humiliation crushed him. It seemed to him that all these people, even his own wife and daughter, were comparing his conduct with that of Bowles.

He had given nothing but a niggardly consent. This shame was so great that for a moment he thought of running out and writing his check for a larger sum. But that would be a silly imitation. His shame was childlike in its poignancy. No

school boy whose ragged coat is suddenly made conspicuous could feel a keener, more crushing humiliation. He felt a mightier rage against Bowles than he had ever known before, — the fat miller, flourishing his wealth even at Laura's wedding and humiliating him this way, pursuing him with his invincible luck even here. He perceived that he was left alone. The tragic air was gone. These people were amusing themselves over Bowles's gift, over Laura's departure. And in a moment the whole wedding became contemptible to him, an affliction to be borne as patiently as possible. All other feeling for it died. The sting and burning of shame and wrath tormented his heart. He wished to have done with this thing and get back to his wheat.

The wedding breakfast dragged itself out. Wells kissed Laura good-bye; but she was excited by the departure, by the adieus full of expansive happiness. There was no meaning in the kiss.

When the guests were gone, Mrs. Wells turned to her husband.

"Well, I 'm glad they got the money," she said, smiling, recurring to the surprise.

"Yes," said Wells dryly, as he got his hat. Let them all go. Let them all admire Bowles. He was going back to his wheat.

He was aware that Holiday was waiting for him in the hall.

IX

THE men left the house together. The moment the front door closed behind them Holiday burst out, —

"What does this mean, Wells?"

The broker looked around in sheer surprise. He saw Holiday's stumpy barrel-figure, with its wings of side whiskers, in its ceremonial garb, topped by a shining silk hat, and he saw that the man was choking with anger.

"That note from Bowles that you showed me — it was a forgery! Bowles is against you. He's got you licked. He told me so himself. You tricked me. I want my money!" The old merchant's voice trembled with excitement.

Wells instantly understood. Holiday had been to Bowles. Or Bowles had been to Holiday.

The two men had halted before the door. Now Wells went down the steps and walked off with rapid strides, without saying a word. He could not speak. There was a terrible irritation in his brain. He knew his own guilt; but it seemed monstrous, intolerable, that this thing should happen just now at the crisis when every little thing was so important. They were all shooting at him at once, or Bowles, — Bowles was shooting at him from every corner. He could have broken into imprecations. He could have cursed Bowles aloud in the

street. Had not Bowles been delivering him inferior wheat, and had not the inspection department backed up the miller in thus swindling him? It all whirled furiously in his brain. He felt himself mightily shaken. He dared not stop. He hurried on without a word.

"Hold on there!" Holiday yelled, beside himself at this contemptuous treatment, feeling all the maddening fears of a timid, covetous man who sees a fortune in peril. "I want to talk to you!" he shouted. He ran along the street, puffing, hurrying, and trotting to keep up with the broker's rapid stride, quite beside himself with wrath and fear, wildly accusing Wells.

"You tricked me! Bowles says you 're an infernal old swindler, and I believe him!" he said, panting.

Wells halted abruptly. His mind grew black, enfolded in something ominous, sinister, beside which the merchant's fuming wrath was no more than the petulance of a peevish child. He was still conscious of that self-control to preserve which he was striving. Out of the self-control he spoke, in a very low voice, looking straight ahead.

"Your money 's in the deal. You put it in there. You can't get it out till the deal 's over. The deal never wanted money more than now. May deliveries begin to-morrow. If you had any sense you 'd be looking for more money to put in instead of trying to draw some out."

"What? More money? Not on your life!" Holiday cried, exasperated beyond control by the impudence of the suggestion.

Wells started off again, shutting his teeth on the words: "You're a fool!"

Holiday followed him to the street-railway tracks and climbed on the trolley car with him. The car was full and they could not talk in there. They took seats on opposite sides of the vehicle, Wells looking at the floor, Holiday glaring over at him. Once Wells glanced across, and there flashed in his brain a vivid picture of Holiday as he had looked that wintry morning when he came down the stairs, holding up his trousers with one fat white hand, the other hand clutching the robe about his chilly neck, his whiskers all awry; and at once the broker's mind was moved to an uncouth amusement. In spite of himself he grinned broadly, satirically. This was the last touch for Holiday. Speechless with indignation, he left the car.

In his rapid walk to the office Wells considered again what Holiday might do. Of course he was a swindler; yet he was n't. That was part of the fearful perversity of things. He felt himself persecuted by a universal stupidity, harked on by Bowles. It was so senseless, — this girding at him from all points at once. Luck had suddenly turned into a swarm of pestiferous flies which buzzed around him in a maddening cloud. All the flies in the swarm looked like Bowles. Good apple-faced Johnny had

a shot ready for him at every corner,—even at his daughter's wedding. There was a terrible irritation in his mind. But behind everything else was the stubborn, unbreakable will to fight it out. He stood quite alone now, his back to the wall. Let them come on! Let them come on! He would fight, fight, fight, to the last ditch.

The office was deserted save for half a dozen clerks. Wells went to his den and shut the door. The market had gone against him during the day. Wheat closed at 91. He was long in Chicago, in Minneapolis, in New York, in Liverpool. The decline had exhausted about all his money in margins. Wheat would be deliverable on May contracts in the morning. How much would be tendered him? Could he pay for it? He had arranged to sell his house, worth $100,000, for $75,000. There were some other odds and ends of his fortune. At his desk he plunged into the maze of figures and chances. A touch of the old intoxication, the old lure of the game came back to him. He still felt subconsciously that terrible irritation, that unsupportable vexation with everything. But with his work before him he could bring his mind into order. He was acutely aware that to-morrow would probably tell the story for him. His position had grown quite untenable. If he could disseminate a well-conceived canard in the morning—something, say, about a big order from France for wheat—and then buy at Liverpool to

give the price an upturn there, the bears might be stampeded into buying, and the result would be a market strong enough so that he could unload a good part of his line without ruinous loss. For it was now simply a question of unloading, of getting out. The thing was to trick the traders while he unloaded without their suspecting it.

He worked on in his den, calculating, scheming, devising. By and by somebody vaguely annoyed him by rapping at the office door. Presently he heard a key grating in the lock. A watchman clumped through the office, came to the den, looked in. Wells glowered around at him. The man apologized. They saw the light; it was so late they thought something might be wrong. The broker went on with his work.

The pencil dropped from his fingers. His weary eyes glanced over the half-dozen memoranda which represented the plan of campaign. Yes, it would be fought out in this way, — win or lose. He straightened up, his back aching. His eyes fell upon a sandwich, last of the three which he had had brought in for his dinner. He ate it greedily. He looked at the coffee cup. Not a drop left. Mechanically his hand went to his vest-pocket for a cigar. They were all gone. He got up with some difficulty, feeling old, cramped, weary, and went to the water-tank in the office. The water was lukewarm, but he drank a cupful. Glancing at the window, he was surprised to find that dawn

was at hand. He looked at his watch. Four o'clock. Well, it was too late to go home or to a hotel. He did not care much. He would as lief stay where he was. He went back to the den, tilted his chair against the desk, and lifted his legs to another chair. His head dropped forward. Once he blinked out and saw the shadowy form of the building opposite revealing itself in the dim, ghostly light. His nerves stirred faintly. It was the dawn of the day of the last battle. But he was too weary. His chin fell, and he went off to sleep.

X

Wells awoke abruptly. There was shouting and stamping of feet in the corridor where the janitor's forces were at work. It was broad daylight. His first impression was of the sudden burst of the new day. An immense fear seized him. He had an appalling sensation of sinking, and he gripped the arms of the chair, his wide eyes staring out. He realized at once that it was the opening of the crucial day. He got up lamely, with some astonishment over that awful visitation of fear. He was stiff and cramped. There was an odd lameness in his neck as though he had been hanged. He dragged his heavy limbs across to a restaurant. The food and two cups of strong coffee put him on his feet — but that horrible visitation of fear! He was still astonished over it.

The day came on with a rush. When the first telegraph operator came in, the broker called up New York, and arranged to disseminate that canard about a big purchase of wheat for export to France. Another operator came in, and the two instruments kept up a busy metallic clicking as messages passed to New York and Minneapolis.

Some traders dropped in, looking at the posted telegrams, glancing at the newspapers, gossiping about the market, about politics, about horse-races, still full of the cheer of breakfast and with freshened nerves for the new day. Up and down La Salle Street the brokers' offices were filling up, the brisk telegraph instruments were clicking incessantly. The telephone lines were busy bringing in messages to buy, to sell. The clerks were at their places. Floor-brokers were hastily looking over their orders.

The stock-tickers started to life, buzzing and grinding out their endless tapes. Opening quotations from Wall Street were put on the blackboards. The crowds stopped gossiping and watched the figures.

May wheat opened at 91¼. The game had begun. Wells, crossing the office floor with a telegram in his hand, heard the opening price, — a quarter up.

Three traders in a group in the middle of the floor were discussing that big order for France.

"You see the price," said Wells, with calm assurance. "They 've got to have this wheat.

The world can't eat bear theories. It 's got to have wheat."

Not one of the traders saw anything unusual in the old broker's manner.

He left the office without haste and went up to the trading-hall. The wheat-pit was a-swarm with brokers whose shouts and gestures were unintelligible to the uninitiated. Wells skirted the crowd and saw nothing to dissatisfy him. The market was strong, advancing. The bears had begun to buy just as he wished. The trick was working. One of his men found him, bringing a telegram from Minneapolis. It said: "Market higher. Looks strong." This was as he had planned. He gave the man an order to buy in Minneapolis in order to help on the strength there. He found that only a little wheat had been delivered in May contracts. This was in his favor. The intoxication mounted to his brain. He was aware in every nerve that the crucial moment had come. But he kept his head clear by a kind of iron power. The price advanced a cent. He judged that the time had come, and he gave the order to sell through those various agencies which he had carefully prearranged. The trick was to dump his wheat on the market while the excitement lasted; to slip from under his crushing load before the traders could find out what he was about. He stood at the edge of the wheat-pit in the swaying skirt of the crowd while the selling for his account began. Still the market

was strong, excited. The buying continued in full force. His wheat was taken readily. He felt his pulses pumping and a strong lift in his nerves. The trick was winning.

As he turned away, he was aware of that lameness in his neck as though he had been hanged, and he remembered with a dim surprise, as at something vague, far off, that dreadful, inexplicable visitation of fear.

Downstairs in the corridor he stopped to buy a cigar. Two of his customers came up and began talking about the market. Wells was willing to talk, as a general jokes in the tense leisure of a battle which is going his way. Besides, he knew that his words, repeated by these men, would have some effect. Thus ten minutes passed.

Entering his office, he nearly collided with one of his clerks who was rushing out with a telegram to find him. Wells saw the excitement in the young man's face as he reached for the message. It was from Minneapolis, and it read: "Flood of wheat coming out here. Market seems likely to break."

The broker looked down gravely at the yellow sheet. Had some one anticipated his stratagem? He walked over deliberately to the ticker which gave the quotations from upstairs, and at a glance he saw that the character of the market was changing. The upward movement was checked. The prices came lower. He stood by the ticker, unable to get himself away, watching the figures with a terrible

fascination. Another Minneapolis message was handed him: "Bowles is selling openly."

Yes, of course it was Bowles!

His own selling was going on upstairs; but somebody else was selling faster. The price was melting away with frightful rapidity. It came, 92, 91¾, 91½, 91¼. This would soon be a rout, a panic. He gave word to stop the selling on his account. At once the marker hesitated, rallied a little, turned feebly upward. In the hope of bringing about another advance, of definitely turning back the tide, Wells began to buy. But the Minneapolis messages kept coming the same: "Bowles selling openly." Soon every one knew it. The miller was selling. More wheat was delivered on the May contracts. New York wired a denial of the report that a big shipment was to be made to France. The marker turned downward again. The selling continued. The price sank. Wells felt the trap closing in upon him. He sent his own men upstairs to buy more in order to check the rout. He knew that he was taking desperate chances. His resources were already utterly exhausted. He could not pay for the wheat that he was buying, nor advance the margins on it unless the market should turn his way. He was using his credit to rob other men, making trades with them which he could not carry out. If the market kept against him, he might ruin them as well as himself. And as though his buying were a signal, the selling doubled. They had oceans of wheat to offer. The

price still sank. It must be Bowles who was doing it. The broker felt the miller's vast power steadily closing in upon him, tightening about him with its slow, irresistible coils. The miller's heel was upon his neck at last. An uncontrollable rage seized him. He gave orders to buy right and left, knowing it was simple robbery. If they drove him into a corner, so much the worse for them! There was nothing left of him except the ferocious will to fight.

Still the oceans of wheat poured out. His reckless buying could not stop the rout. The coils tightened, tightened, crushing the life out of him. At one o'clock Bowles gave out a cablegram from France disposing of the canard. The word went round: "It was a trick gotten up by Wells." Wheat dropped to eighty-five cents.

Wells went into his den, his lean figure with its habitual stoop, his hands hanging at his side, his eyes glaring down without seeing anything. An implacable fury, in which that inexplicable visitation of fear was strangely blent, possessed his mind.

"I 'll kill him! I 'll kill him!" he said over and over to himself.

XI

The Wells summer-place at Lake Winnebago was built long before the house on Illinois Boulevard, — a simple, comfortable cottage, standing alone in the midst of the wood, about half-way from the village

railway station to the spacious procession of parks and villas along the lake shore, where the later, more pretentious comers have made their summer places. From the bench before the cottage the long reach of red-tile roof capping Bowles's château is visible through the tree-tops.

The road from the village to the château and the villas lies along the lake shore, and is bordered with shrubs most of the way. From the shore the land rises in a thick wood, here full of underbrush, there cleared and carpeted over with sparse, pale wild grass.

There is another road, a mere rude wagon track, higher up the slope, walking along which one is in the heart of the wood, with the water of the lake shining down below through the tree-trunks and bushes.

The sun was setting as Wells walked along the road, bag in hand. A serene mysterious life filled the woods, giving its veiled voice in the sounds of insects and birds, suspiring in the warm, damp air which was full of the smells of growing things. This serene, mysterious life touched the old broker's bound spirit. He dimly felt a great, calm, impersonal, indifferent nature which offered him everything and left him free to choose as he pleased.

A kind of light entered his bound mind whereby for a moment he saw himself in relation to all things, and he thought: "No, surely, I will not do this idiotic thing. How silly and pitiful for one old man

to kill another. That would be dreadful and so foolish!"

This had come to him dimly several times before, — when he was buying the things in his bag and when he was talking to the friendly passenger on the train; but never so clearly as now.

It comforted him to think that he could go down and throw the bag into the water. He walked along for a moment quite happy in this thought, — that at any time he could climb down and throw the bag into the water.

He presently felt again the serene, mysterious life of the wood, calmly observing him, indifferent to what he did. In a moment his heart clutched together; the leaden fear came upon him. He could not throw the bag into the water. He had no power to climb down from the upper road, swing forth his arm, and open his fingers. His will was locked. Well, if they drove him into a corner so much the worse for them. That cursed Bowles, who had ruined him! He walked on, a lean, stooped figure, hurrying along the rude wood-road.

Laura sat on the bench before the cottage, watching the lower road. Wells was almost upon her before she saw him. She sprang up in a flutter of surprise, and ran to meet him.

"Why, father!" she cried. Her arm slipped around him as she kissed him, her eyes shining at him. "How did you happen to come? Why did n't you let us know? I 'd have met you at the

station. Is n't mother coming too? Just a little lark of your own? Bob 's down at the village. You must have come by the wood-road. I was watching the shore-road for Bob. I 'm so surprised — and glad!"

Her speech bubbled forth in a happy effervescence. The old broker felt her joy in the way she kissed him, in her shining eyes, in the very motion of her limbs as she walked beside him, in everything about her. He felt her bright grace shining into his dark world.

"I 'm glad," she repeated. "I was lonesome to see you — really." From her glance, and the slight smiling which touched a dimple in her cheek, he understood what she meant. He felt the unconscious coquetry of a thoroughly happy woman, fondly reproaching him a little for not having let her love him, eager in her own happiness to make him happy. They came to the bench. "Sit down until Bob comes," she said; "I 'll run and see if the room is ready for you. Let me take your bag."

Without resistance, almost before he knew it, the bag was in her hand; she was carrying it to the house.

He dropped to the bench with one strange, swift look at his empty hand. How light it felt with that burden gone! How light his mind felt! He began thinking vaguely that they might arrange to live there with her through the summer. He had a hungry wish that Susan were there.

It occurred to him presently that Laura did not know of his scandalous failure on 'Change, with which by this time the city was clamorous; and it came to him with a start of surprise that the failure was only a few hours old. Yet it seemed to have happened so long ago!

Meantime Laura was upstairs putting the room to rights. The bag stood on a chair. In the wish to do all she could for her father, to render every little affectionate service, she started to unpack it. She sprung the catch, opened the bag wide, and lifted out a nightgown. A sudden, startled arrest locked her nerves. She stood, the garment in her hands, staring down into the bag. A revolver lay there, ugly, ominous in its passive deadliness. The polished tube of steel with its crooked handle held her eyes, — a thing so hateful, murderous, so far from her habit. Her startled mind asked, "Why should father be carrying that?" She shuddered a little without exactly knowing why. She could not bring herself to touch it, and as though she had uncovered a detestable secret, she hastily returned the garment to its place and closed the bag.

Hastening downstairs, still nervous and shaken, she went to the kitchen to see how the dinner was coming on; and in this commonplace occupation the equilibrium of her mind was presently restored. To have a revolver was no such extraordinary thing. She even laughed at herself for her fears. Her nervousness passed.

The matter of the dinner detained her for some time. When she returned to the bench, it was growing dusk. Robert was very late. Her fondness began to create fears for him. She talked to her dumb father; but now and then she leaned forward, peering toward the shore-road through the gathering dusk; now and then her speech showed the absent mind.

"Why, what can have made him so late?" she said. "Of course, it's quite safe here. Still there are tramps about. You know, they held up a man on the other side of the lake last week. One ought to use some caution. Robert himself spoke of it last night when we were sitting here. You know, Mr. Bowles still comes up on the 8.45 and walks home along the shore-road. I don't think he ought to — do you? And he said he'd be back for dinner at seven. Of course he's all right — only I wish he'd come. Shall we eat now, or wait?"

"Let's wait," said Wells.

He heard his own voice sounding in the dark. Her fear infected him in a strange way. Something vast, mysterious, impersonal, full of fate, moved in the darkening wood. He felt it moving, and was aware of a little hot, quick, rodent-like fear of it as he sat speechless, staring into the dusk. Pictures came and went in his brain — the wheat pit — Holiday on that wintry morning and Holiday on the street corner — four fellow-brokers to whom he had given buying orders coming into his office when his

failure was noised about and cursing him for a thief. All the time that living thing moved in the dark wood, drawing him on, observing him.

Presently Laura got up to ease her nerves and went to the house, where she tried to busy herself for a few moments. She came back, stood by the bench awhile, really frightened now; then went away toward the shore, where any moving figure on the road would show against a patch of shining water. Wells watched her go, leaving him with his fate.

When she came back she saw that her father had left the bench. Entering the house, she encountered him coming out. The rays of the hall lamp fell upon the two faces turned to each other in a swift, wordless glance. An indefinable shock passed through the woman. In the set look of the older face, with eyes singularly leaden, yet bloodshot, she thought she read a fear for Robert, justifying her own fear. She could not speak — as though speaking would bring forth the fear into an accomplished tragedy. Wells went out. Laura dropped into a chair, looking about her, trying to control her fear and think of something to do. She heard the far, faint whistle of the Chicago train — the 8.45.

It may have been two minutes later that she heard the strong, rapid step on the porch, sprang up, and rushed into her husband's arms.

XII

WITH Bob in her arms, strong and sound under the cosey light of their lamp, all her fears instantly became a dear joke — as though gay life had for an instant put on a horrid mask in a prank to frighten her, then whisked it aside, laughing at her for the start she gave. The mask gave a new inspiration, a new zest to joy. She laughed, hugging him and laughing again, smothering him with endearments while she scolded him for staying.

Then she saw there was something else. Harper took a folded newspaper from his pocket.

"Your father 's failed, Laura," he began; and he told her briefly what had happened. At once she understood her father's unexpected appearance. She stood looking up at her husband, wordless, stricken through and through with pity.

"Oh, poor father! Poor papa! He 's here, Bob, you know. He came here. Poor father!"

"Here? But your mother telegraphed. They gave me the wire at the station. That 's what kept me. Strange — nobody saw him. He must have jumped off at the water-tank. Your mother wired to know if he was here."

"Then she does n't know! You must go back at once, Bob, and wire her. At once, Bob! She does n't know where he is. Go at once, dear. Poor papa! He came to me — came to me in this trouble. How I love him!" At once she remem-

bered. She clapped her hands to her face, dropped them, stood looking at her husband a statue of remorse.

"Oh, I've failed! I've failed again!" she cried. "He came to me. I've failed! I was so full of you, so anxious about you I almost forgot him. Maybe he's gone away again. Maybe I've let him go away again. We'll find him! I'll go with you." It occurred to her that he might not have gone away. "You look for him at the station, in the village, Bob. Go to the hotel. Inquire. If you find him, make him come back. I'll wait there. We'll surely find him. But wire mother first."

In her eagerness she forgot the dinner. When Harper set off, she ran out to the bench. It was empty. She returned to the house. In a moment she picked up the evening paper at which she had barely glanced. Even the headlines told her more than Harper had said. She read hastily, but enough to see that it was more than simple failure. It was utter ruin, disgrace, dishonor. She read of Holiday's accusation and of the fellow-brokers who had cursed Wells in his office.

She dropped the paper, trembling, her lips apart, her face colorless, staring into a void. In the void there slowly gathered and took form an open travelling-bag.

At the door of Wells's room she struck a match, steadying herself with one hand on the door-jamb and peering in. The swift light brought out various

familiar things, — the bureau, chairs, the untouched bed. The room was still and empty. She lit the gas and turned to the bag, her heart laboring to beat. The revolver was gone.

Rushing downstairs and out of doors, bareheaded, she took to the wood-road without any reason, running as fast as she could over the difficult footing, striving to see through the gloom, every instant yearning with wild anxiety toward the human figure erect or prostrate which might be revealed out of each patch of shadow ahead or aside. The dark was populous with this solitary figure which faded each instant from her breathless haste. Bodily fatigue and the mockery of the dusk, which each moment silently engulfed the object of her search, imposed a certain perception of the order and relationship of things upon her distracted mind. Why in this direction rather than another? Still she hurried on from the original impulse. The dark and silence of the wood lay about her. Here she stumbled. Now and then an overhanging bough, dewily fragrant, whipped her face, like a feeler of the still, mysterious life within the wood reaching out to take account of her. Everywhere this wide, serene summer night, silent in its intense secret life, seemed to know what she wanted and indifferently to hide it from her.

She dragged wearily back to the cottage. The endless shadows were saturated with an impenetrable and sentient repose. The dark shapes of trees in the front yard seemed never to have stirred since

"The dusk . . . silently engulfed the object of her search"

time was — set to watch. The house itself was now dark, its dim form holding itself far and indifferently remote from her. Her limbs were heavy, but she had not found him. Everywhere the still dark, within some of whose impenetrable folds the tragedy was happening, baffled her search. It knew — it knew — but she could not find out.

She climbed up the steps and opened the front door, calling to the maid. There was no answer. Robert was not there. The tragedy had devoured them all. She crept upstairs to her father's room. Again the swift light brought up the familiar objects, — the bureau, chairs, the untouched bed. The inanimate repose of those homely things seemed to allege her loss. Their cruel changelessness held the secret, as though they were his body immutably resolved into that silent, sentient world which had swallowed him up.

She lay cuddled and shivering, wide-eyed, on the hall lounge, when sounds of human life abruptly invaded the silent, sentient void, — the breaking of twigs, a muffled noise of horses, a subdued voice. At the door she made out a carriage standing in the rough road before the cottage; human figures bearing a burden.

They brought him in — Bowles, Robert, and a servant — and laid him on the lounge.

She made out that Robert had come up with them just before they reached the house. Bowles was still explaining it to him.

"I was walking home, you know," he said, "and I thought I saw somebody by a clump of bushes. The man stepped out. It was Wells. I stopped short. He had a pistol. He lifted it up. I could n't say anything; I just looked at him. He turned it to his own breast and fired. I could n't say anything, you know. I just looked at him. He aimed at himself. It was just where the road turns from the shore."

The miller's voice broke and trembled over these short, labored utterances. His broad face was perfectly white. He stared from one to the other. In the intervals of laboring speech his nether lip hung loose, slightly quivering.

"He stepped out in front of me — " the miller repeated it, dreadfully shaken, half stupefied by his agitation. His fearing eye glanced down at the form on the lounge.

The old broker's composed and colorless face seemed to scorn the miller's agitation. Serene with its locked secrets and this final secret of death, it seemed to take an immortal triumph at last over Bowles with all his luck and power and money.

"The doctor must be here!" Bowles was crying in his agitation.

Laura sat beside the couch. In her first perception she had caught the faint movement of the breast, the slight sigh, the quiver of the lip. She had scarcely heeded anything else. Life was still here. Her whole concern bent itself to that with

single, tense regard. Without an exclamation or so much as a gesture she sat beside the couch, holding his inert hand, her eyes bent upon his face. His life had been brought back to her out of the mystery. The composed, colorless features, with their strange effect of scorn, locked in all his secrets. He whom love had missed lay in the state of his impenetrable solitude. What far, lonely, secret ways he had gone! The woman bent over him, her eyes yearning with the will to bring him home.

XIII

WELLS sat on the bench before the cottage, the hot woods droning under a July sun. Mrs. Wells sat just within the screen door to the hall, looking out every moment or two at the lean, bent, solitary figure.

The broker's bodily strength had returned slowly. The town house was closed and advertised for sale. Back in that teeming hive they were sweeping up the last litter of the failure which had already passed into history, excepting now and then for a belated wail over the meagreness of the débris. Wells had not been to town. There was no attempt to disturb him here. He had already passed from the stage, which was busy with other actors. His wife and daughter had been beside him continually. But now that he was stronger and able to get about they were no longer near him.

The little fiction which Bowles and Robert and the doctor had made up about an attack by a highwayman had been accepted politely, simply because it was so hopelessly transparent. Every one knew that the ruined broker had attempted suicide.

When the strength began coming back to his limbs, it brought in the inextinguishable shame of this fact. The failure was tolerable. Plenty of other men failed. But the humiliation of having attempted suicide. No one could know the dark struggle of his spirit which issued in turning the weapon against himself instead of against Bowles. But even the two loving women who watched by his bed, — their tender solicitude seemed to pity him for a weak, idiotic old man who had tried ineffectually to kill himself like a lovesick girl.

In his shame he wished to be alone. The whims of a convalescent must be humored, and the two loving, anxious women sadly gave him his way.

But the last two weeks a more alarming symptom had appeared. Daily Wells spent hours locked in his room. The helpless mother and daughter, met with the hard armor of his old aloofness and abstraction, knew what it meant. They already saw him giving himself back into the coils of his passion. They imagined him, in his locked room, spending hours scheming, devising, plotting, meditating, planning a stroke to recover his fortune, putting forth his practised old mind in preparations for a new campaign.

Wells arose from the bench and entered the house, stubbornly avoiding his wife's anxious eye and ignoring Laura's call. He mounted the stairs with labor and went to his room.

Half an hour later Laura went up noiselessly, as she had gone up before. But this time a narrow crack appeared between the edge of the door and the casing. He had forgotten to lock himself in. She put her hand to the door and entered the room, her heart beating high.

Wells sat in a large old rocking-chair beside the window. A broad lap-board lay across his knees. He had a deck of cards and was playing solitaire.

Laura halted abruptly, with an inexpressible shock. Wells jerked his head around, his wide eyes startled, defensive, guilty. For a big instant the glances of the father and the daughter hung dumbly together; and the truth lay revealed between them.

The broker's mind, still helpless in his weakness and amid the ruins of his business, but worn to old habits, occupied itself with this childish imitation of the old game. He sat in here by the hour shuffling and distributing the cards, childishly absorbed in the shifts of chance, like a ruined Napoleon playing with tin soldiers.

A dull, pathetic blush colored his lean wrinkled old cheek in the nakedness of his shame.

"Go away! Go away!" he commanded harshly, but in a voice which trembled.

Laura rushed upon him, flung herself beside his

chair, seized his trembling hands. "No! No! I won't go away, father! Never! I'll never go away again!" She bent over his hands, kissing them, her tears wetting them.

"Go away, girl! Go away!" his shaking voice repeated. "Go away, girl!" His own dry old eyes ran with tears. "I ain't worth it, Laura! I ain't worth it!"

"No! No! Never! Never! I'll never go away again, father!" She still kissed his hands, wet with her tears. "We'll never go away again, father! Mother! Mother!" she called loudly.

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