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# The Pillar Of Sand

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**THE PILLAR OF SAND**



# THE PILLAR OF SAND

BY

WILLIAM R. CASTLE, JR.

Author of "The Green Vase," "Hawaii Past and Present"



NEW YORK  
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1914

MRS



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*To the  
Countess Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza  
in recognition of her loyalty to her  
friends, her country and her ideals*



**THE PILLAR OF SAND**



## CHAPTER I

MRS. MANDELL'S house was a place of peace. From the restlessness of the modern world, people passed through its doors into the lavender-scented quiet of by-gone years. The house was the true and dignified expression of its owner's nature; of her instinctive refinement, and of an intellectual fastidiousness that was sweetened by charity.

There was an air of spaciousness about it that made one instinctively draw long, satisfying breaths. The walls, everywhere, were hung with old, beautiful, glowing pictures before each of which one could stop, and be happier for stopping. The chairs seemed to hold, still, the impression of the honest gentlemen and the beautiful ladies who for generations had sat there in erect and dignified repose. There were marvellous old clocks, which had chimed the hours of their going out and their coming in, of their dining, and of their dying. It was a house where lingered the ghosts of a stately past, communing with the one who had inherited their grace and their dignity. For they had left her not only their possessions but themselves, since only by one who was a new flowering of themselves, a mod-

ern expression of their splendid old ideals, could their possessions, the outward manifestation of their own loveliness of character, be held in the honour which was their due. The house was beautiful, aristocratic in the best sense, but it was not un-American. Nor was it merely a survival of an elder time, but rather a forecast of a truer, finer America — a country emancipated from its restlessness, its materialism, daring once more to admit as its own what really was its own, its past, finding there much of the spiritual for which it was vaguely seeking, and through it able to grasp the old ideals and to make them a part of its life.

It was on a warm afternoon in May that Mrs. Mandell sat in her library, drinking tea with her friend, Mrs. Warren. They were talking about Hugh Brandon.

“He might at least do something to earn a living,” Mrs. Warren said decisively. “They are charming people, the Brandons, but poor, my dear, really quite desperately poor. Since the days of old Major Brandon there has not been a successful man in the family. He left a good, bulky package of bonds in the safe but even bonds melt away, you know. My husband used to say of the Brandons that when two bonds matured Cyril — that’s Hugh’s grandfather — used to buy one new one to propiti-

ate the ghost of the Major and a cashmere shawl to propitiate his wife. And quite naturally when one's income is cut in half sufficiently often one finally discovers the problem of existence to be difficult. May I have another cup of tea, my dear?"

Mrs. Mandell took the cup and nervously refilled it. "You take cream, I know, and one lump? No, two is it? I never remember. People are so different about their tea. And as to Hugh Brandon — Don't you think you are a little hard on him, Bessie? Remember that he is only twenty-three."

"Twenty-three, my dear, is quite time for him to be getting down to serious work."

"But he only graduated from college last year. He took honours, you know."

"Then he ought to be doing something with them — if there is anything one can do with such things. My boys never took honours but they married nice girls and they're good men. They don't write poetry and they're not beautiful to look at, like Hugh, but they have made a place for themselves and that's more than Hugh will ever do." Mrs. Warren put her cup on the table and settled herself comfortably in her broad, soft armchair. She seemed to belong there. She was a large woman, with rolls of delicate pink fat on her neck and wrists.



She had still, although she was seventy years old, the most exquisite complexion of any woman in Boston. The fading of her colour, instead of leaving her encased in wrinkled brown leather, had made her skin almost translucent, a pale, clear honey colour over which lingered persistently the rosy bloom of youth. She loved ruffles and no imported styles could banish her billowy skirts and her soft bows. "It is useless to try to disguise my body," she once said. "All I can do is to embellish God's handiwork." She filled the chair and her dress frothed up around her, a mass of chiffon as light as sea foam.

Mrs. Mandell, a few years younger, was small, and dark, and nervous. Her hands moved with the quickness of mice among the tea-cups. Her right shoulder twitched as she talked. She thought the best of almost every one, believed every pathetic story, no matter how improbable. And yet, where her emotions were not concerned, she was a wise counsellor. She had never been known to desert a friend. In the matter of Hugh Brandon, her nephew, her sympathy was very keen and she rummaged her mind eagerly for excuses with which to defend him. "I know," she said, "that so far the boy has not exerted himself very strenuously on the material side of things but he has certainly done

well intellectually and all he learns now will stand him in good stead finally. More men who graduate with honours, I am told, do well in after life than those who merely skim through college. After this year Hugh will go to work and his year in the Graduate School will surely help him."

"You don't know what you are talking about, my dear," Mrs. Warren put in. "This year for him is mere intellectual debauch."

"Why, Bessie, how can you?"

"I don't know how I can, but I certainly can. The browsing about among pleasant books while some one else pays the bills — I'm sure poor Evelyn Brandon can't do it — is morally degrading — yes, degrading is the word because it's what I mean. That boy has no idea of the difference between work and play. He imagines there will always be some one to pay his way, and there won't be. At least I hope not."

"He may marry a rich girl."

"That's the danger, since he's good looking. I believe it's the looks that take in even you, my dear, who ought to be old enough to see beneath the surface. But you are as susceptible as a girl of eighteen. When that boy does something I shall have more respect for his handsome face."

"He has published a volume of poems."

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“ Yes — and what did the reviews say of them? ‘ As slim as the volume that held them,’ I remember, and ‘ as pale as its covers.’ That was the trouble. They were charming, but mere trifles, *jeux d’esprit*. They weren’t even worked over. They came without effort — otherwise they would not have come at all. And with the publisher he had a friend at court.”

“ The first edition was sold out. The public must have liked them.”

“ The first edition was sold out — a very small one — but have you heard that another edition is forthcoming? I haven’t. It isn’t the first edition that the public buys. It’s the second. This being Boston, there are Brandon friends and relatives enough to dispose of a good many copies. Didn’t you hear it often last winter — ‘ Have you seen dear Hugh’s poems? A sweet little volume. You must buy one to encourage him.’ I had three given me at Christmas and I gave away several myself to people who had to have a little more than a card and not quite a real present. Christmas, and Evelyn Brandon’s sympathetic friends sold those poems.”

Mrs. Mandell darted across the room to lower the window-shade a fraction of an inch. “ The reflection from the river is very bright at this time in the afternoon,” she said. “ I thought it might

bother you. What you say about Hugh's poems is true, I suppose, in a way. The edition was small, but as to the public buying them — well, Americans don't read poetry in these days."

"Not that kind, certainly," Mrs. Warren assented. "And there never have been many who read verse that has watered milk instead of blood in its veins. We want something to rouse us in these days. Hugh is too soothing. It is pleasant to know that the 'nightingale sang to his love in the grey-green shade,' but after all nightingales aren't very vital except when they typify something that is. Hugh's verse begins and ends with the pleasant, tinkling sound of itself — and it rather makes one think the author a tinkling sort of person. I hope he isn't, really. I haven't seen him for months."

"You will soon. He's coming to tea. He ought to be here now. I hope you don't mind."

"Mind? No, why should I? He is always pleasant to look at and he talks decently — full of proper sentiments. It is only in retrospect that he is so irritating. Did you know that Francis Evans had been made president of the Botolph Trust Company? There is a real man,— and not more than thirty-two or three. He impresses every one with his power."

"I suppose he must have it," Mrs. Mandell said,

a little irritably. "But he tires me. I have the highest respect for him. I like his people — yes, they're boring, but good. And he must be able, of course. He's not a type I like, nevertheless. I know I am wrong, but it always seems to me as though he must spend his time devising schemes to impress people with his ability."

"Not with business men. They look only at results. You are unfair to him now, my dear, as you thought I was to Hugh. Here's the boy, probably. Wasn't that the bell?"

"I do hope you'll be kind to him, Bessie. Remember he *is* only a boy." Mrs. Mandell got up and then sat down again. Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Be calm, my dear," Mrs. Warren said, laughing. "Remember that you are nearer seventy than seventeen."

And then Hugh came through the door. "Hullo, Aunt Edith," he cried, kissing Mrs. Mandell on both cheeks. "Oh, how d'ye do, Mrs. Warren. I didn't see you."

"And yet I'm said to be a very visible person," she responded, holding out her hand.

"Visible always in a charming way," he said, "and not nearly often enough for our pleasure."

"No flattery, Hugh. That never leads a man very far. It's too French."

"I should not dare to flatter you, Mrs. Warren. You are too quick to see through any sham."

"Yes," she answered, "I am."

"How is your mother, dear?" Mrs. Mandell asked quickly. She was pouring his tea, and almost spilling it in her endeavour to watch him, to be polite to Mrs. Warren, and to manage the cups at the same time.

"She's well, thank you, for her. You know mother takes life pretty hard. The little things annoy her."

"She's had trouble, Hugh," Mrs. Warren said. "And you are all she has now to take care of her. Her happiness depends on you." She really had no sympathy at all for Evelyn Brandon's querulousness.

"You may be sure that Hugh is a devoted son, Bessie," Mrs. Mandell said with some asperity.

"I try to do my duty, Mrs. Warren," the young man added, flushing as he spoke. "I always get in twice a week to see her but we are very busy in Cambridge."

"Is the 'we' editorial?" she asked quickly.

Hugh blushed more deeply. "No, I meant with the other fellows. I'm not writing anything just now — nothing to speak of, I mean. I've been helping some of the fellows with the lyrics for the Pudding Play. They didn't seem to have any poet in

the class — at least none whose knowledge of rhymes went beyond cat and bat.”

“And studying, too, I hope. Writing lyrics will never bring in the bread and butter. I want you to be a success, my boy, worthy of your name and all that sort of thing. Study might help, though I admit I don’t see how unless you are going to teach, like Reggie Turner.”

“My family have never been very successful in the money line,” he said ruefully.

“All the more reason why you should be. They have always been gentlemen and a gentleman, at least according to my somewhat old-fashioned ideas, never shirks. Having delivered myself of which platitude,” she added, smiling, “I must go home. Don’t coddle him, Edith, and don’t let him flatter you.”

She sailed from the room, her voluminous draperies giving an extraordinary effect of lightness. With all her weight she stepped softly. It was one of the many lessons she had learned from her mother, and those who knew her realised that her mother had been a great lady.

“She’s the most unsympathetic person I know,” Hugh said, throwing himself into a chair. “You don’t expect any one who looks so pleasant to be so disagreeable. I’m sure she would criticise God Almighty behind His back.”

“Hugh!” Mrs. Mandell protested. “At least be fair. Mrs. Warren has a sharp tongue. She has no sympathy with inefficient people and does not want you to be one of them. But she never says behind a person’s back what she would not say to his face.”

“She’s a gossip.”

“Yes, if that means a woman fond of talking about people. But she is never malicious — or seldom. What she said of you and to you was meant for your good.”

“Oh, good Lord, Aunt Edith!” He jumped to his feet and crossing the room poked viciously at the fire. “I wish people would find something better to do than to discuss what is and what isn’t good for me. You are the only one who seems to have any idea that I am old enough to decide for myself. Other people think that just because I work hard at something different from what Francis Evans and unimaginative people like him take up that I must be idling away my time. It’s no joke, I tell you, to write verse that amounts to anything. And it’s lonely work, too. There is some incentive to hustle when one’s in the stock-market, surrounded by crowds of yelling men, all of them trying to get ahead of you. It’s quite another matter to sit down alone in your room at night with a locked door and try to catch the phantoms that float in the air, and



then to put them on paper so that others can see them, too."

Mrs. Mandell watched him a little sadly. He was leaning on the mantelpiece, his head resting against his arms, staring into the fire. It was a sensitive face, imaginative, but without a trace of effeminacy. The features were large but regular, without any suggestion of haste or of coarseness in the moulding. The eyes were blue, almost childlike in their expression except when Hugh was excited. Then they sparkled, or grew eloquent, or sad, following his mood as inevitably as his shadow followed his body.

"You can understand it, can't you, Aunt Edith" he asked, straightening to his full six feet.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "I can. But do you lock the door, and keep it locked?"

Hugh hesitated. "No," he said at last slowly, "I do not. All I said a moment ago was hot air. It was defending a theory, not a practice, and if it had been true I shouldn't have talked about it." He pulled up a chair and sitting beside her, took her hand in his. She did not look at him now. Her eyes were misty. "That's why I came to see you, Aunt Edith, to talk about it. I haven't been fair to you."

She stopped him with a gesture. "We won't talk about that side of it, please."

"But we must. Haven't you given me the money to go through college? I owe it to you to make the best of myself — and I haven't done it."

"You owe it to yourself, Hugh, and to your mother — and to me, yes, as to all your friends, but because of the love I have given you — not the money."

"You make it very hard for me, Aunt Edith."

"It can never be easy to admit failure — no, not that — you are too young to know the word. To know that you have disappointed your friends is what I mean. Do you want to tell me about it?"

"There is very little to tell," he answered after a minute. "I have simply neglected my opportunities. And more than that I have failed in what I tried to do because I was not strong enough to be myself. There was not a single good thing in that book of verses."

She looked at him then, her eyes full of sympathy. "You wrong yourself there, Hugh. The verses were not great, but you are very young. What troubled me was that I felt they might have been better."

"They were not original."

She drew away with a little gasping cry. "You don't mean —"

"No, no," he said. "Not as bad as that. I was saturated with poetry and other people's melody came without my knowing it. Do you remember the one about the dead girl, the one that began 'A red, red rose, On a bosom of snows'?" She nodded. "Well, last night I was playing cards late and Reggie Turner came into the room. He is very clever and he was drunk. He made fun of every one, and when he came to me he began to recite my verses, all mixed up, of course, and along with them the poems they resembled. The one I just spoke of I remember particularly, and then he said line after line of Shelley — 'Arethusa arose, from her couch of snows' — you remember." Mrs. Mandell nodded. "Well, the fellows all shouted, but they were embarrassed, too. It evidently wasn't new to them. I felt like a thief."

"But you didn't consciously copy."

"No, of course not, but that doesn't make it any better. I ought to have known that the verse was all inspired by the good work of other men, not by the gods. I rushed into print and now I regret it — bitterly."

"Does all this affect the course you are taking now?"

"It does, because I am simply soaking up more of other people's music and I haven't strength of mind enough to transmute it into a music of my own. What is more, as I said, I don't know enough. I haven't ideas that will rouse people. I only know a little of books, nothing of life."

"What are you going to do?"

"Resign from college immediately, as the first thing."

"Are you sure that is wise, Hugh?" she asked anxiously. "Isn't it better to make good where you have begun? Is that your only reason for leaving?"

He hesitated a moment and his eyes fell. "No," he said, in a low voice. "That is not all, Aunt Edith. I am in debt; I must go to work."

"In debt?" she questioned. "Didn't you have enough to pay your bills?"

He turned away from her. "I gambled the money away."

She cried out. "Oh, no, my boy! You couldn't have done that. You must have thought of your mother."

"I thought of nothing except my own pleasure," he said bitterly. "I have never thought of anything else. Now I am going to work. I saw Francis Evans this morning. He is going to take me

into the Botolph Trust Company. I hate him, because he is cold-hearted and calculating and painfully sure of himself. I don't know what he wants of me. But he evidently thinks he can use me somehow. I am going to do my best for him at any rate."

Mrs. Mandell got up from her chair and put her hands on the young man's shoulders. Still he did not look at her. "Do it, Hugh," she said earnestly. "Make people believe in you. Never let the drudgery of it break you — and at the same time hold fast to the dreams, to the enthusiasms, my boy. You want to be a poet. Be one. When you begin to help your mother pay for the comforts that make her life endurable, then you will see with a broader vision. We will forget the past and pin our faith to the future. There will be no failure, no weakness there."

"I don't know," he cried. "I am weak — but with you behind me, Aunt Edith, I should be a cad not to make good." Then, at last, he looked at her and took courage at the hope that shone from her eyes.

## CHAPTER II

HUGH went directly to his room in Cambridge, where he packed his books and clothes. For his dinner he ate some biscuits and drank a bottle of beer, both left over from a game of a few nights previous. He wrote one or two notes, including his formal resignation from the Graduate School and one to Francis Evans saying that he should appear, ready for work, on the following Monday. Then, intolerably lonely, he made for his club.

The only people there were four Seniors playing bridge. Hugh threw himself into a Morris chair next the table to watch. "Hullo, Hughie," one of them said negligently; "haven't seen you for days. What's the matter — work or whooping cough?"

"Neither," he answered gruffly. "I'm posted, so I can't charge things here, and — oh, just generally sick of life."

"You shouldn't have missed that trick, Mack," Harold Innes said. "You'll make *me* sick of life in a minute, and one like that's enough. Hard luck, Hughie. Forget about being a poet and you'll be more cheerful. It's your play, Denny."

Hugh watched the hand go out. When Mack was shuffling, he said shortly, "I'm going to —"

“Going to what? Quit the poetry? You mustn’t do that, really, you know. The literary reputation of the University depends on you. We expect you to be the founder of another New England School, if that’s what they call a bunch of writers.”

“No, no,” Harold cried. “Hugh would tell you that he couldn’t found a school until he’d found himself. Wasn’t there some such complaint as that in the late little lavender lispings? — the poem, you know, about how you were hunting for your muse in the ‘bare, blank sky,’ and for your soul in ‘the tumultuous waters.’ I read all the poems conscientiously because they weren’t prescribed in any course.”

“Shut up,” Hugh shouted at him. “I know as well as you what drivel the stuff was. Haven’t I just told you I am going to drop it?”

“So you did, rather ambiguously,” Mack put in. “And now stop talking. A fellow can’t play bridge with a lot of chatter going on. Shall I buy you a drink to fill your mouth?”

“Don’t be insulting,” Hugh answered. “I’ve a few pennies in my pocket to buy myself one if I want it.” He pulled himself up from his chair and wandered out of the room.

“Don’t get a grouch,” some one called after him, but he paid no attention. Downstairs a fire was

snapping in the living-room fireplace and Hugh threw himself on the long sofa in front of it. He felt acutely that the evening marked the end of a chapter. Much that seemed of the utmost importance looked now, in perspective, useless and mean. He had been proud of making the Varsity crew, proud beyond measure to stroke a winning boat. He had secretly gloried in his own popularity, not vainly, but in whole-hearted delight in the fact that so many found him worth liking, worth admiring. Perhaps more than anything else, though he never showed it, had he been proud to be a first group scholar. But now! Sensitive as he was, he realised with a kind of impotent rage the changed attitude of his friends. They were no less cordial, outwardly. They still trooped into his room of an evening to drink his beer and smoke his cigarettes. But he knew it was the food they came for, not as formerly, to be with him, to hear him talk, to think, each to himself, how splendid it was to have him for a friend. It was only when the satisfaction faded that Hugh knew it had once been there. He had lost all simplicity of outlook. And most of all, perhaps, did he recognise the futility of his success in scholarship. At the time that, at least, had seemed to have solid worth, but now he saw it as it was, in line with all his other honours, something



that had come to him without effort. His mind had worked easily, quickly, superficially. He had enjoyed the work because it was not really work at all, but only another kind of play. Never had he vigorously and consistently exerted his mind. He remembered now, with painful acuteness, the times when he had been satisfied with results a little less good than his best, because his best meant the giving up of some pleasure.

“It’s been all a miserable failure,” he said to himself — “from beginning to end a failure. And will it ever be anything else? Hasn’t this eternal coddling sapped all the sound stuff there is in me?”

He lay flat on the sofa, his face turned toward the fire, that slowly burned itself out. He felt flabby, mentally and physically. The idea of the office on Monday, of the grind of real work among uncongenial men, appalled him. He wondered, with a kind of deep-lying irritation what Francis Evans wanted of him. That, too, had been easy — the finding of a place. Perhaps if he had been refused again and again he might have been less hasty in his decision. Perhaps it was foolish to leave college. But then the debts! It was all a miserable tangle however you looked at it.

He heard the outer door of the Club House slam, but did not move, even when two or three fellows

came into the room. "Hullo, who's the dead man?" he heard some one say.

They stamped across the room and stood between him and the fire. "Hughie Brandon again," one said, laughing. "Funny how poetry and drink go hand in hand."

"Nonsense," Reggie Turner's voice broke in. "That's a bad metaphor. Drink has no hands — it's all throat. And poetry — well, it's —"

"All piffle."

"Not at all," Reggie said. "You disturb me with your interruptions. Poetry, according to the dead man here, is disembodied passion, but as he has no idea what passion is he can't possibly realise that to disembody it is to kill it. Poetry, my dear friends, is —"

"Oh, shut up, Reggie," Hugh shouted, sitting up. "You're drunk as usual, and when you're that way you do talk rot without ceasing."

"But I'm not that way, as you politely put it. I'm rehearsing. Next year I intend to give a course in English poetry in the History Department — I mean the other way round — to give, in that Department, a course, and so forth. Now you must listen, Hughie. This is serious. The aim of the historian is to explode our childish beliefs. For example, the Plymouth Rock isn't the Plymouth Rock.

Mr. Washington never gave George a hatchet for Christmas. You must have documentary evidence of any fact. Among Mr. Washington's papers is no receipted bill for a child's hatchet. That's a negative proof. Samuel Bottomless Inanity got his Ph.D. for spending sixteen years examining the accounts of all the hardware firms in and near Virginia. He discovered no record of a child's hatchet being sold to the Grandfather of his Country. No record at all, I tell you. Another negative proof, and you all know that two negatives make a positive. So there you are! George Washington, granted that his father was an honest man, couldn't possibly have had a hatchet."

"Idiot!" Hugh said, smiling in spite of himself. "What has that to do with poetry?"

"Nothing, dear man. Don't get impatient. It is simply an illustration of the inspiring methods of my department. As to poetry—the game is to prove that it isn't or at least that it wasn't written by its author. Shakespeare is already disposed of. Bacon has gobbled him and he was a statesman, not a poet. I think that I can certainly prove some other interesting items—for example, that Benjamin Franklin wrote *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and that John Wesley penned *Don Juan* in his hours of idleness."

"You are an unmitigated ass, Reggie," Hugh remarked. "You waste more time saying nothing —"

"With intention, nothing," he interrupted, "than the rest of you waste in trying to say something that finally issues in nothing. I can hardly wait for my appointment as an instructor. Then I can fill the hours gleefully with pointed words and my auditors cannot get away. Now, Hughie — as to your poems!"

"Not as to my poems at all. I don't want even to hear of them again. I've dropped it, Reggie — all this word tinkering. I'm going to work on Monday."

Reggie sat down suddenly. "Get me a drink, some one,— quick," he shouted. "Hugh Brandon is going to work on Monday. Where? Have you got a position to read Swinburne to pious old maids?"

"I'm going into the Botolph Trust Company."

"Whew! With Francis Evans! I thought you didn't like each other."

"We don't."

"Then, why the devil —?"

"I couldn't think of any one else to go to, and as I happened to meet him in the street I asked him to take me in."

"I didn't mean, why did you go to him, you idiot. I meant why did he take you?"

"I don't know."

"I guess," one of the fellows hazarded, "that Hughie's social position may have cut some ice."

"That's a nice thing to say about a man in your own club," Reggie said scornfully. "Take the orders," he called to the steward who appeared at the door. "The drinks are on me to-night."

"I don't want anything," one of the boys said. "Come on home, Tom. It's late." They went out, leaving Hugh and Reggie alone with their highballs.

"There's something in what that fresh sophomore said," Reggie remarked. "But I didn't want to let him know I thought so. Francis is one of those fellows whose family one knows because he's made so jolly well good himself. But he never yet did anything on impulse and he never loses sight of Number One. He never liked you because you got as a matter of course what he had to work for. He never would have snapped you up for the Trust Company unless there had been something in it for him."

"You're not very complimentary to either of us."

"It's not worth while. He's not here and you

haven't done anything to be complimented about. The book of verse —"

"I know as well as you do how bad that was. Let's forget it."

"In a minute, Hughie; I've made fun of that book and it isn't much good, but still, I couldn't have written it myself — and there's just the difference. Now for Francis. I don't see what he can gain except for the credit he'll get from all the Brandon tribe — by tribe I mean friends — for giving you a chance. That is only a limited glory. Of course, if you make good, every one will say that he has a superhuman knowledge of character, but nearly everything about him is superhuman, anyway, so that won't add much."

"Oh, I shan't mind giving him a lift on my triumphal car," Hugh interposed, smiling rather glumly.

"Of course not. But don't let him use you."

"Use me? How am I to go ahead unless he does? The man who makes a success in life like Francis is the fellow who knows how to use others, and the men he uses — well, I suppose if they're good enough tools they come finally to have an individuality of their own."

"Not often, if they allow themselves to be merely tools. But what I mean, Hughie, is that you've

got to look out for yourself. I think Francis is square, but he is more than anything else ambitious, and you can't afford to be a rung in his ladder. Push him up, though, if that seems to be the best game, because the man who pushes can't be very far behind. What made you decide to leave college?"

"Disgust — and necessity. We're not rich, you know. I've got to earn some cash."

"Bridge not profitable?"

"Damnably expensive."

"It usually is. Are you thinking of getting married?"

"Good Lord, no. Love in a cottage is not in my line — especially when I couldn't afford even to have vines growing on the cottage."

"I don't believe, somehow, that it's just what the girl is keen for, either, Hughie."

"The girl — there isn't any."

"Isn't any? You don't need to be afraid of me, Hughie. I never talk — and she is a wonder, though a little old for you, I think, and with a face your mother would never quite approve of, because she would never quite understand what was back of it. I never knew a girl whose looks so thoroughly belied her as Louise Atwood's. But in the minds

of all the Boston gossips you and she were born to mate, as they say."

"I wondered who she would turn out to be," Hugh said, laughing. "You're way off the mark, Reggie, and will be if you think Louise or any other girl has anything to do with my plans. It's exactly what I said — debts and disgust with myself. Besides, Louise is very thick with Francis Evans."

"And altogether too keen to marry him," Reggie remarked somewhat viciously. "I wonder — I wonder if that had anything to do with — no, there are some things a fellow really can't say even to his best friend. So you begin work next Monday, Hugh?"

"Yes, on Monday at eight-thirty sharp. I'm going to hate it, Reggie, but by the Lord Harry I'm going to stick to it. Let's have another drink."



### CHAPTER III

HUGH was finding opportunity to test his theory that work on the street, in the atmosphere of work, was a very different matter from self-imposed, but usually not long imposed, solitude in his room in college where the poem might or might not be written as his humour dictated. It was easy to obey — his training in athletics assured that. It was easy to be at the office at eight o'clock in the morning, to clean the ink-wells, to see that every desk was supplied with fresh blotters, to run errands during the day. It was easy, but the tasks were irksome. At first there had been a thrill at the thought that he was carrying to some trust company a package containing a hundred bonds. His imagination filled the street with Apaches and he clutched his package feverishly. They seldom told him, after the first, what the packets held, and then, for a time, the mystery of the contents fascinated him. But that, too, wore off. The life of the streets became a mere routine and that routine a drudgery. And whither did it lead? That was the question which Hugh asked himself daily. He dreaded promotion, for promotion meant sitting at a desk on a high stool and poring over in-

terminable columns of figures. And then? Another promotion perhaps, a little more responsibility about matters that held no interest for him. He thought with longing that sometimes became very poignant of the College Library with its alluring rows of books, its surprises and its secrets. His fingers tingled for the feel of old leather, and strong, delicate old paper, for the lovely bits of verse, blossoming, like roses, in the seemingly uncongenial surroundings of those hoary tomes.

One thing surprised him. He could write as he had never written. At night, after his mother had gone to bed, when his body trembled with the weariness of the monotony of it all, his mind sometimes seemed preternaturally awake. For the first time there were thoughts crying to be expressed and the words to reveal them came almost of their own accord. His verse no longer sang the melody of other poets, but gained a kind of nervous rhythm of its own that throbbed with the breath of independent life. And his prose, too, acquired a vigour and a clarity that was the result of having something to say instead of having to say something. He found the people with whom he came into contact stimulating to his imagination, not individually, as a rule, but in the mass intensely so. He wrote a story, artistically crude, perhaps, compared with the dainty,

alliterative sketches of his college days. The bones of it showed, like the bones through the skin and rags of an old woman he had seen dragging two howling brats through the down-town streets. But the need to say things taught him, what no instruction could have done, that words are a revealing medium, not an end in themselves. He sent his story to a magazine, under an assumed name this time, and the cheque that came promptly in exchange gave him a thrill of real pride.

But he did not write every night. There were dances, theatre-parties, dinners, and there was always, and more and more, Louise Atwood. Hugh could not remember a time when he had not known Louise, nor yet a time, until recently, when she had invaded his thoughts. She had been simply one among dozens of girls he knew well and thought little about, in comparison with his men friends. Hugh had always been a man's man by nature and by choice. He had always been honest with himself, and so had preferred masculine contempt for his imitations of decadent poetry, to feminine effusions. Even more instinctive had been his shrinking when the girls had tried to exalt him on the trembling pedestal of an athletic hero. He knew, and the fellows knew, that he had played a good sound game of football, his best game, that he had rowed a

strong race, just as any one would have done, and there was an end to the matter. He had happened to have a sound body and good habits, so the training had meant no self-sacrifice.

But now it was different. There was nothing heroic about him, nothing either to idolise or to be sentimental about. He was just a struggling boy like all the rest of them, beginning at the bottom of the ladder and with every possibility that he would work his way up. If there was anything different in him, a little more distinction, a little less of the obvious — if there was a certain charm that was more than the disingenuous spontaneity of youth, Hugh did not know it, although it may have been just this unconscious difference that drew him more and more to Louise, as to one on whose understanding he could depend.

Joyfully, therefore, he ploughed through the snow to her house one evening in December. "Yes, Miss Atwood is at home and in the library, sir." Hugh knew it already, knew exactly how she would look, sitting before the fire, a book on the low table beside her, waiting for him, and his pulses quickened a little as he bounded up the stairs.

Louise Atwood was just Hugh's age, but she looked older, and was older, in a worldly fashion, as girls usually are, though young men never admit

it as possible when they remember their own illuminating careers. The pretence of vice, mildly spectacular, of the kind usually indulged in by college boys, is a sign merely of extreme youth, not of worldly wisdom, as they think, and even from the appearance of vice, Hugh, a naturally clean-minded and sensible young animal, had shrunk. He would not have admitted to himself that Louise was wiser than he, even so, but it amused him to let her think he admitted it. And his subterfuge, which she understood perfectly, amused her, and at the same time gave her a chance to act as his teacher more openly than was possible with most of his contemporaries.

She held out her hand as Hugh came in, but only smiled at him. She knew the value of that welcoming smile, knew it as an asset much more potent, more effective and intimate than the words of her friends. And Hugh appreciated it also because he thought it entirely spontaneous.

"You're the only girl I know, Louise," he said, "who makes a fellow feel right away that he's wanted. How do you manage it?"

"By looking as I feel," she answered. "Here I was, all alone, with a stupid French novel, and feeling terribly the weight of my years, if you must know it. And then you came, some one, young and unspoiled."

"I'm as old as you are," he said, a little peevisly.

"As old," she laughed. "Yes, in years, perhaps, but years mean nothing. It is the content of the years that counts, the fulness of life, Hugh. Some men live their years emotionally full — as most women do. My face shows it — not yours."

Hugh looked at her curiously and secretly agreed. Her face was not the face of a girl. It was pale, a little long in the oval. The pallor, that was intensified by her black hair and eyes, was cut vividly by the red line of her mouth. Her eyes were slow, the lids falling somewhat languidly, yet the light flashed when she wanted, and with an effect that always surprised, sometimes startled. She looked and was self-reliant. Her mother had died when she was a baby and her father, with whom she nominally lived, was usually away on business, and when he was at home spent his time at his club, giving her little advice, caring little what she did, leaving her to make her own life as she wished. Her face was not American, though she came of generations of Bostonians. It was not the face a mother would approve, when it fascinated her son, and yet Louise's friends found it easy, and truer, to translate the passion that it suggested into strength of character.

"Well," she asked, after a moment of silence, "do you agree?"

“About what?”

“My face — that it shows the years.”

“It will look as young when you are forty as it does to-day.”

Louise laughed. “That was quite wonderful,” she said, “for you — a real compliment because it was true and I know you meant it. Do you know what one of your friends, Reggie Turner, said of me? That I looked like the lady who takes the heavy tragedy part in the Americanised version of a modern French comedy.”

“The brute!” he exclaimed. “For a gentleman Reg does manage to say the most disgusting things.”

“Not at all. On the contrary, he hits off the truth rather picturesquely.”

“He never told you himself; who did?”

“One hears such things,” she answered. “It really doesn’t matter how.”

“Perhaps not — but I want to know.”

“You funny boy. It was Francis Evans who told me. Does that satisfy you?” A faint, quick colour dispelled, for a moment, the pallor of her cheeks. “That proves it was right to tell me, doesn’t it?”

Hugh swung round in his chair. He had seen the flush and it was a signal for the flame in his eyes that always darted out when he was angry. But

he answered steadily enough. "The identity of the speaker really makes little difference, I suppose, when the remark is unnecessary and inherently ill-bred."

"Hugh! When Francis has done so much for you."

He laughed shortly. "Yes. Oh, yes. He needed a man, and gave me a position. Any one would have done the work as well. It was very kind of him — vastly thoughtful and considerate I have no doubt it is called by the world of his admirers. I've heard enough of what they say to know it meant another feather in his cap. It was an act of charity, this time. But perhaps — I sometimes wonder whether he is not a seeker of feathers."

"You are ungrateful. Why analyse motives when they issue in real kindness?"

"I don't," he said. "I am grateful for the result, though Heaven knows I loathe the work. But knowledge of the motive necessarily tinges one's feeling toward the giver, doesn't it, Louise?"

"You don't know the motive. You only suspect it, and that because you don't like Francis. Why is it?"

"Honestly, I don't know."

"Isn't he efficient?"

"That's as banal as it is to ask whether the Japa-



nese are not a 'wonderful little people.' You don't love a man because he's efficient."

"On the contrary," she said quickly, "that is one of the strongest reasons for loving — so far as women are concerned at least."

Hugh glanced at her and felt his throat contract queerly and quite inexplicably. She sat with her hands clasped on her knees, leaning forward slightly, and staring into the fire. The light gleamed gold against the dusk of her hair and he felt suddenly and for the first time a fierce desire to seize her, to hold her always. Perhaps she knew it, for she shot one look at him from under her slow eyelids and then went on talking.

"Efficiency, Hugh. There's something splendid in it, something that stirs me deep, deep into the spring of life. The ability to do things, to achieve, to bend other men to your will — success, I suppose it is — that counts — oh, tremendously — with a woman!"

Hugh, sitting back in his chair, his strong, clean-cut hands gripping the arms, felt that she was speaking, not to him, but to the night and to the winds, expressing her own ideal, measured against which he was pitifully small and weak. Then he remembered that she was speaking of Francis Evans and a hot spasm of anger shook him again, leaving

him calm, detached, critical. "And all this," he asked satirically, "all this you find personified in Francis Evans? His stenographers agree with you. They glory in the perfect machine."

She sat back quickly and in the quiver of her eyelids he saw that she was laughing at him. "Yes," she said, "I've noticed that,— that curious unanimity of opinion about him. It extends through all classes."

"And the dissenting voices? You never listen to them?"

"Never — because they never speak out clearly. They have nothing to say. Even you, who think you dislike him, have no accusation to make."

"I have," he said quickly. "I accuse him of being a paragon."

"It is an unfortunate word, surely," she responded, "but is it more than a word? Is it ever used in connection with Francis? Does he covet the title?"

"He is too clever. It would ruin him. But he covets applause, position. Nothing he does is without thought of self."

"That is really an accusation," she said. "Prove it."

"I cannot prove what I feel to be true any more than I can prove religion."

“Yet religion is proved,” she said, “by universal need, by the common feeling of humanity. You are like the prophet of a new sect. You try to prove, through your individual impression, the opposite of the common belief. And you were never meant to be a prophet, Hugh.”

He had risen and she looked up at him, smiling. But he had no answering smile. This hero worship, in which he did not share, had been something to shrug his shoulders at and to admit as such, with reservations, before. Now Louise was at stake, was in danger of sacrificing herself on the altar of public superstition, and the question was one of burning seriousness.

“Louise,” he said sharply, “I can’t agree with you. I’m a boy, as you say, but I know — and when a fellow loves he makes no mistakes.” He had not meant to say it, but once said the hurried words became, to him, a solemn fact.

She drew away from him and her eyes opened. “I didn’t know, Hugh — I had no idea it was like that. And it mustn’t be. Why, Hugh, I don’t love you at all, except as a friend — a friend whom I trust, and who is going to make a name for himself. That magazine story proves it, Hugh. It was alive; it was the real thing; I knew you wrote it, although

you did not sign it, and that's what I wanted to talk about to-night."

"And instead we have talked about Francis Evans — and love — the two extremes. Do you love him, Louise?"

She rose from her chair and stood facing him, looking straight into his eyes. At first he saw something like triumph and then, as her gaze fell, indecision and almost fear. "I don't know," she answered, as though the truth were wrung from her unwilling lips, "I think I do. I am going to marry him, and then I shall know."

Hugh stood rigid. "It is a strange attitude for a girl like you, Louise."

She hesitated a moment and then looked him straight in the eye again. "I did not mean it, Hugh. I love him because he stands for all that makes life worth living — for strength, for success, for power. And more than that, he is good — and," — her voice faltered, then rushed on like a stream that has swept away an obstruction — "he loves me. He is the man of all men whom I most highly honour, Hugh. Isn't that enough?"

"It is not love," he answered gently. "Good-night, Louise."

## CHAPTER IV

THE office of the President of the Botolph Trust Company was one of those rooms which show at a glance the triumph of a careful financial policy. There was a calm about it that spelled safety to the rich old ladies who occasionally were ushered in to ask the President some trivial question that might have been answered with equal accuracy by any clerk. There was a kind of solid mahogany and leather changelessness that pleased ancient investors who could never become used to the marble and glass and lack of privacy of the newer offices in State Street. And yet to the younger generation there was no suggestion that the Botolph Trust Company was behind the times, that all the mahogany and warm leather were a mask of inefficiency or crabbed conservatism. To them the office seemed thoroughly alert, never letting slip any of the opportunities that the market might afford.

And the reason for this, undoubtedly, was the President himself. The directors had made a wise choice when old Mr. Newcome died. Some had said that they were greatly daring, but they knew their man.

Francis Evans, as he sat at his desk, was one to inspire confidence. Old ladies who had for years come to Mr. Newcome for advice, or encouragement, or consolation, made a point of calling on the new President and all went on their way rejoicing. They found in him the same sympathy and in addition a subdued decisiveness of manner that was immensely reassuring. What was more, the grey hair at his temples seemed to take away the stigma of youth, and his smile, as one old lady said, had in it both the reasonableness of age and the inspiration of young manhood. His eyes were what affected the estimate of his contemporaries. Francis Evans looked straight at one, almost through one it seemed, and there was a quality about his eyes of penetrating acuteness that saw everything — not only saw, but comprehended. He was one of those men who apparently miss nothing and for whom to see is to decide. Added to this, he spoke with the quiet assurance of three score years and yet with the voice of a young man. People listened because he was not a man of much speech, but always said what was worth saying. His manner, reserved but never stiff, was attuned, with the utmost nicety, to his companion of the moment. So subtle, yet so radical were its variations that more than one mother, going out with her son, had said, "How exquisitely he under-

stands women," while almost simultaneously the son had thought, "Funny that Mother likes him; he is such a man's man." It was all these things, but this personal adaptability more than anything, that had kept for the Botolph Trust Company its old depositors and had gained many new ones.

It was over his first annual report, which was sure to make something of a sensation, that Francis was working on the morning after Hugh's visit to Louise Atwood. He sat leaning over a mass of papers, his left hand across the lower part of his face. It was a position he never permitted himself when any one was in the room because his thin nose, with its rather delicate nostrils and his full, sensitive lips, were weak. His eyes needed the massiveness of his lower jaw as balance. Without it their expression was not convincing. His right hand wandered rather aimlessly among the papers. For once Francis found it difficult to concentrate. He had been to see Louise late in the evening, after a dreary meeting of the committee in charge of the Hopeview Rescue Home. She had been strangely unsympathetic, had held him at arm's length, refusing to talk except impersonally, or about Hugh, who had just left her. Francis had gone to his rooms dissatisfied with her and with himself.

He could not keep his mind on the papers and it

was a relief, therefore, when a clerk opened his door to say that Mrs. Mooney insisted on seeing him.

"Send Brandon in first," he ordered, and when Hugh appeared, tired-eyed and unusually reserved in manner, he spoke curtly. "What does this woman want with me, Brandon? I thought you were told a couple of days ago to collect her interest."

"I was. I went to see her yesterday, but she had no money. She is frightfully poor, Mr. Evans." Never during office hours was any familiarity permitted with the President of the Botolph Trust Company.

"Poverty has nothing to do with the matter. She owes the money and she must pay. If she chooses to be shiftless and extravagant, so that she cannot pay the interest on her mortgage when the time comes, she must get out."

Hugh straightened his shoulders. "You are mistaken, sir," he said firmly. "She is not shiftless and it is not extravagant to eat enough to keep alive."

"So you would suggest forgiving the interest, and pensioning her, perhaps?"

"I should postpone the payment certainly. Her son is coming home soon — he is a sailor — and he always helps her."

"You are new in business, Brandon," Francis said quietly. "We have no right to let our clients suffer



by reason of our own poetic sentimentality. I shall tell Mrs. Mooney that if her interest is not paid in full by next Tuesday I shall have to foreclose. Send her in, please."

Hugh grasped angrily the handle of the door. "The bit of land is much needed by the Beacon Collar Company, I think," he said bitterly. "They are rather important clients of ours."

Francis raised his head slowly and for a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes. Then Hugh opened the door and went out.

Francis sat very still at his desk. "I'm afraid," he whispered, "that I made a mistake."

The entrance of Mrs. Mooney interrupted his thoughts. "Well?" he said sharply. "Oh — Mrs. Mooney, I suppose. Sit down, please."

The old woman sat on the edge of her chair and watched him as he wrote on one or two papers and filed them away. When he turned he saw a woman of perhaps sixty, immaculately clean and obviously very poor. Her Irish face was sad, but not frightened, and she looked at him without flinching.

"It is about the interest, Mrs. Mooney?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "The interest that I can't pay this month, sir. It's kind you will be to me with a month's grace, I'm thinking."

“A month, Mrs. Mooney? That can’t be arranged, I’m afraid. You see —”

“Yes, sir, I know all about the poor people that give you their money to look after. It’s me as would do it, too, if I had any to give, and it’s not me as would turn a poor woman out of her house for want of a month’s grace, it isn’t, and I guess the other poor people are like that, too.”

“You don’t understand, I fear.”

“Understand is it? That I do, to be sure. But didn’t Pat’s wife die — God rest her soul — and leave me with four hungry childer to provide for, and me an old woman. It’s not complaining I am, Mr. Evans, but just askin’ you to wait a little month till Pat, their father, comes home and gives me the interest money that I’ve had to put in their hungry mouths. It’s a little thing I’m asking, Mr. Evans — only a month — and it means that me and the childer will have a roof over our heads.”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Mooney, very sorry, but we can’t run our business that way. What would happen, do you suppose, if every one asked for a delay?”

“Ah!” she said, “but they don’t. It’s only one in a long, long while, and it’s the Botolph Trust Company, sir, that’s kind to poor folks, as every one knows. Sure, with me, that’s been regular all the time, you won’t be hard now?”

“It is not a question, Mrs. Mooney, of hard or easy,” Francis said, irritated. “It’s a question of must. The money is due and unless it is paid by next Tuesday — and that is giving you extra time — we shall have to sell the house.”

The old woman struggled up from her chair. Her lips trembled, but her voice was firm. “If that’s your last word, Mr. Evans,” she said, “we’ll just have to go out into the streets — me and the child. But it’s cruel hard, Mr. Evans; it would not have been so in Mr. Newcome’s day and it would not be so now if the Collar Company didn’t want the bit of a house — that I know and understand.”

“That has nothing whatever to do with it,” he said sternly. “Remember what I said about Tuesday.”

She turned to the door and then, quite suddenly, broke down. “And Pat,” she wailed; “Pat, my poor boy, coming home to find his wife dead — and it’s run he will to his old mother — and she won’t be there to kiss him and sing him the old baby-songs to make him not so sorry. Oh, it’s cruel hard, Mr. Evans. Can’t you give me just a little time?”

He snapped a pencil between his fingers and at the crack the old woman suddenly straightened up and marched from the office, the tears still clinging to her cheeks.

Francis turned to the telephone. "Give me Beacon 2200," he said. "I want Mr. Severance, please. Yes. How about that little place of Mrs. Mooney's? Do you still want it? Yes, you can surely get it this time. She can't pay the interest. Yes. Sold at public auction it will have to be. The mortgage is \$2000. You ought not to have to pay much more. Nobody wants a place like that with the collar factory all around it. You're quite welcome. I'll have the notice drawn up at once."

He turned again to his papers and this time with mind alert and active, but had hardly got to work before his door opened again and the boy asked if he would see Mrs. Warren. Francis dug his pen viciously into the holder. "Yes," he said; "show her in." He arranged quickly the disorder of his desk and crossed the room to the door.

"It's not often that you honour the offices of the Botolph Trust Company, Mrs. Warren."

There was exactly the proper blending of cordiality and deference in his greeting, and, in his appearance of waiting for her to speak, a simple acknowledgment that he realised she had come purely on business. It pleased her because she liked to consider him as one of her protégés and she wanted him always to live up to her expectations. He had never failed so far and yet, unconsciously, her own

pride of ancestry made her abnormally critical. She thought she believed strenuously in the power of the American man — if not of the American woman — to overcome in every way his origin, no matter how humble. Francis Evans was the embodiment of this belief, but she could not prevent herself, when she remembered his vociferously aspiring mother, and his mouse-like sister, from watching him narrowly, in real trepidation lest he say something too highly coloured to be refined, or forget, if only for an instant, the natural bearing of a gentleman. She it was, more than any other, who had brought about his unreservedly cordial reception in society and yet at heart she was always horribly afraid. There was no doubt whatever about his mother's vulgarity.

So to-day, as she sank back in the leather chair among the billows of her soft, black silk coat, Mrs. Warren sighed gently with relief, as she always sighed after meeting him. "I came," she said, "to see you about Hugh Brandon and about a poor woman whose name you would not remember."

"Yes? What is wrong with Hugh?"

"Nothing very serious, I hope. He's been gambling again."

"Really! I thought he had dropped all that — learned that it was impossible for a poor man. I've

been watching him pretty closely too. When did it happen?"

"Last night — at the Exmouth Club. I wish you were a member and then he would never dare."

"But I'm not, Mrs. Warren. I'm sorry because I want to make a man of that boy. It would be an achievement worth while. He's the right kind — at heart." Francis spoke lightly but underneath, any reference to the Club jarred him. He could never quite forgive his father for having had no friends who could put him up at birth. Yet his father, good, hard-working man, intent in making money enough to free his family from petty cares, would never in the world have thought of putting up his baby boy for the Exmouth or any other club. "But I will do what I can," he added. "Talk to Hugh himself and to some of his friends in the Club. He is all right, as I said, at heart."

"That is quite natural," Mrs. Warren said a little coldly. "There is every reason why he should be. However, I hope you will do what you can." She was quite ready to speak of Hugh's shortcomings herself or even that Francis should discuss them with her but she resented qualified praise. Hugh's mother was querulous but did not need to climb and she was not vociferous.

"And the other matter I wanted to speak of,"

she continued hurriedly, "was the question of Mrs. Mooney's interest."

Francis tightened his grip on the arms of his chair but his expression did not change.

"I have known her for years," Mrs. Warren went on, "and in an unusually personal way. She is a good woman, reliable, hard working, and very pathetic. She will certainly pay you as soon as her son comes home, and she is really in great trouble. Do you remember the case at all?"

Francis thought quickly. "Oddly enough I do," he said, "because she was here only a few minutes ago. You might almost have seen her as you came in."

"I'm sorry I troubled you then," she cried. "Of course if you saw her yourself it is arranged. She has an idea that the Trust Company is pushing her because some shirt factory or collar factory wants her house. But, of course, you explained away all such bogies."

"On the contrary," he said, twirling his broken pencil between his fingers. "I'm afraid she left here very unhappy because, on the spur of the moment, I could not think of any arrangement. You see, the man who holds the mortgage insists on immediate payment. The house will have to go, I am afraid, but you know it is in a dreadfully un-

sanitary location. Just as you came in I was going to write her of a little house of my own in Dorchester which happens to be vacant and which she may occupy rent free until her son's return. The sale of her house, too, would give her something over and above her mortgage."

"It's wonderfully kind of you," Mrs. Warren said slowly. "I am sorry she cannot keep her own house, however. Would it be too late for me to pay her interest?"

"Oh, quite," he answered quickly. "The matter has gone too far. I am very sorry. She is so obviously a dependable and good woman."

"Thank you for what you have done, at any rate," she said, taking his arm as she rose from her chair. "I will urge her to accept your cottage. She is proud, for a woman of her class, but her pride will have to go down before her need and the generous spirit of your offer. And you will talk with Hugh? He is a dear boy in spite of his irritating faults."

"I shall not forget."

Once more Francis turned to the papers on his desk, and rang for his stenographer. "To Mrs. Mooney," he said. "You will get her address from the cashier."

"Yes, sir. And the cashier told me to tell



you that Mrs. Mooney had paid her interest."

He sat very still for a moment, and then rang again. "Ask Mr. Norton to step in here." He drummed on his desk as he waited, and then when Mr. Norton came in asked sharply, "Mrs. Mooney has paid?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where she got the money?"

"No. She went out with Brandon, and almost immediately returned, and paid."

"Is Brandon here?"

"No, sir."

"That is all, thank you. And you, Miss Smith, I shall want you a little later." Alone, he walked rapidly back and forth across the narrow office. "I was a fool," he said softly. "I must get rid of Hugh, somehow."

## CHAPTER V

"I PAID it," Hugh said angrily, "because I was sorry for the woman. She has nothing in the world but the roof over her head. I did not mean to have her lose it because the Beacon Collar Company wanted to extend its business."

"That's not the point," Francis said quietly, putting his glass of ale on the table beside him. "You paid when, as you say, you thought I wanted her turned out."

"In going to work for you I did not agree to submit my conscience to your dictation."

Francis laughed. They were sitting in their club in Cambridge. It was late in the evening and no undergraduates were about. "That is the last thing I should want—even when you put it in such grandiloquent fashion.— You have played football, as I remember."

Hugh merely shrugged his shoulders.

"And when the quarterback gave the signal for a forward pass you obeyed, even though you disapproved the play."

"Yes, but I should not have obeyed if he had told me to knock out the man opposite me."

Francis turned a dull red and his hand trembled as he took up his glass. "Naturally not," he said, "but you knew the quarterback would never have given you such a signal. Has it ever occurred to you that in business, as in football, it is the duty of the subordinate, not only to obey, but to trust his captain not to do a dirty trick?"

It was Hugh's turn to flush but Francis went on without appearing to notice it.

"You know that I don't often talk about myself. You know, too, that I cannot discuss the policies of the Botolph Trust Company with its employés. But this situation you must understand because I want you to be a loyal servant of the Company, and you cannot unless you trust me personally.

"Mrs. Mooney lives in a house which, as you know, is necessary to the further plans of the Beacon Collar Company who are among our largest depositors. This, in itself, could not possibly give us the right to do anything unfair, whatever pressure might be brought to bear, but it was what you thought we—or rather I—should do. Mrs. Mooney's house, small, unsanitary, is the only one left in a purely business district. She bought it forty years ago and like so many Irish women of her type, clings to it in spite of increased taxes. She is merely pigheaded."

“And wants to die in the house in which her children were born,” Hugh put in.

“Next year,” Francis went on, “the taxes will be so large that she will have to go. She would not accept the offer to buy so it would have been a kindness to her to force a sale.”

“And turn her out into the street with her grandchildren.”

“She would have got a good price for her house and — this I tell you in confidence — I should never have let her suffer. After she went it occurred to me that I could arrange to put her for the time being into a cottage of my own in Dorchester. That, however, was a personal matter. I saw the kind of woman she was, and was no more willing to let her suffer needlessly than you were.”

Hugh sat a long time in silence puffing his pipe. “And now?” he asked at last.

“Who knows? She has a reprieve of six months. After that, more interest, and taxes. The Collar Company, the only certain purchaser in sight — the others would have bid up merely as a speculation to sell again — may have made other arrangements. She will have to sell, poor woman, and she may get nothing above her mortgage, if she gets that.”

Hugh still smoked silently. "Will you have another bottle of ale?" he asked.

"Yes — one more, and then home to bed. I've been in the office all the evening and just dropped in here to change the point of view."

"And didn't. I'm glad you talked, though, Francis. It makes me see things differently." He hesitated. "I seem to have made a mess all round — and incidentally an unusual ass of myself. But I don't mind that. It's Mrs. Mooney, poor woman. It looks as though I'd have to buy her house. Do you suppose the future Mrs. Brandon would like to live surrounded by a collar factory?"

"She might, you know, for love of you," Francis said laughing, and then stopped suddenly at the look on Hugh's face. "What is it, old man?"

"Nothing," he answered savagely. He had thought suddenly of Louise Atwood in such an environment and then had remembered. He was introspective enough to know that there would have been no real pang if Francis had not been with him. When he went to see Louise he had not been in love with her. But yet he had told her he loved her and had been angry with himself that he had not suffered more than he had. At last he did suffer. Francis was of too dominant a personality to be put aside and, whatever his own feelings, he could not

think of her as Mrs. Evans. "It was nothing," he said, reaching for a match. "Only I always hate myself when I joke about the girl who may be my wife some day. It is like laughing about some girl one meets at a dance. You just wouldn't do it, you know — call her by name — any more than you would repeat to a girl something you had heard about her." He looked quickly at Francis who was gazing into the fire. "That is, if you were a gentleman," he added.

Francis turned toward him. There was a half-veiled question in his eyes, brought there by Hugh's somewhat truculent tone. Quite naturally, he could not explain the apparent wish to offend and was far too intelligent to ask. He saw, however, that his opportunity to speak of the gambling had gone by and therefore rose to go.

"I saw your aunt, Mrs. Mandell, this afternoon, Hugh. She is a charming person and quite delightfully fond of you. Are you coming along with me?"

"Not now," Hugh answered. "I told Reggie Turner I'd meet him here at eleven-thirty."

"Good night, then. Don't sit up too late. See you in the morning."

Hugh leaned toward the fire, his elbows on his knees, his chin resting in his hands. "In business

a subordinate must not only obey — he must trust his chief." The phrase kept hammering at his intelligence. He saw its truth, from the point of view of the business, and, after all, each employé was nothing more than a spoke in the wheel that must follow the impulse given by the hub or be discarded for a better. He had resisted that impulse because he had not trusted his chief and his action had brought, perhaps, needless suffering on an innocent woman — at least, so it seemed now. He had not seen far enough, only, in fact, within the tiny circle illuminated by his sudden flame of pity. Francis, with his apparent cruelty had been the really kind one.

Hugh fought with himself silently. He was not one of the sort who could be outwardly loyal without inwardly trusting. For him there must be a real faith. Without it he saw clearly that he must resign his position. So he went back, in thought, over the years, analysing his feelings. He had met Francis at the dinner when he was taken into the Club — Francis, already being talked about as one of the strongest graduates. He had admired him, along with the rest of them. And then the chorus of approval began to irritate him. It seemed to him that Francis was playing for popular applause and yet the only reason for this was that applause al-

ways came. "And why not?" Hugh asked himself. "The fellow is intelligent. What he does, he does well—damn well. There is no doubt about his being a magnificent worker. Why shouldn't the public appreciate it?" Hugh found that he could give no adequate answer to the negative. It was a struggle to put down the instinct of years but he had the courage to set against it the facts of years. Louise, he thought, had been just, after all, more really fair-minded. He had been unable to answer to her satisfaction. Now he could not answer to his own. "After all," he reasoned, "unless I am a cad I must judge Francis as I do other men. I must be fair."

Another thing he admitted to himself in this private confessional, had annoyed him—the success of Francis's social career. The man was—just nobody in particular; and he was welcomed everywhere. What right had he to associate with certain people whom Hugh could have named, certain old families which had ruled Boston, socially, for generations? And yet—even there the remark about some one else of one of his professors, who was himself a member of one of the same old families, occurred to him—"Why should he condemn himself for life to the quite estimable Smiths and the unimpeachable Joneses when others are ready to receive



him with open arms? The power of our democracy consists in progress, socially as well as materially. Otherwise we should not be a democracy, but rather an oligarchy." What had been applied to another was equally true of Francis Evans and Hugh was compelled to write himself down once more as unreasonable, unfair.

Was it all reducible then, to snobbishness, which he was sure he despised, and to his fear for Louise Atwood? The first hypothesis he dismissed as contrary to his nature; with the second he struggled, all the while admitting to himself that, away from her, he did not love her. At the same time he could not divest himself of the belief that Francis wanted to marry her to assure for himself the social position that seemed already secure enough, provided he did not make a stupid marriage. And it was part of Hugh's conception of Francis's character that he would do nothing stupid. But even this belief he was compelled to admit had no more foundation than all his mistrust. Perhaps Francis really loved her and if he did she would learn to love him in time.

It was all mere feeling then, this mistrust. Hugh swore to himself that he would fight it off, that he would take his happy, normal place among the admirers. Francis had been unnecessarily good to

him. He had helped him and would help him in the future — and yet — that little word “yet.” It was closely related to the more pretentious “if,” and it came always between him and his resolution. Hugh stretched his arms wearily and yawned. The problem still was settled only in so far as he gave intellectual consent to his conclusions. He was about to go when he heard the key scrape in the lock. Reggie Turner came in, shaking loose snow from his overcoat.

“You’re very beautiful to-night,” Hugh said, as Reggie handed his coat to the steward and then held out his hands to the blaze. “I thought you scorned society.”

“Why should it suggest society to you to see me decently dressed once in a while?”

“Because you never think of doing it otherwise.”

“Thank you. What’s the grouch to-night?”

“There isn’t any. I’ve been thinking.”

“No wonder then. It’s always bad for the digestion to muddle occupations, just as it is to mix drinks. It’s your business to stick to business — a little poetry thrown in perhaps. That doesn’t take any thinking, just intuition, like the stock-exchange.”

“And yet you dine out.”

“Oh,” Reggie exclaimed. “That’s simply the

normal interlude, the chance to descend into inanity, the soothing syrup that induces sleep and a healthy reaction."

"I don't envy the girl you sat next at dinner."

"Girl! There were two, one on either side."

"Check!" Hugh laughed. "The one you talked to, I meant."

"That's better. On one side sat Cynthia Evans, a girl I shall perhaps marry some time. She's restful because she realises that her mother has done all the family talking and a little over. On the other side was Louise Atwood and I talked *with* her, not *at* her. I shall never marry her."

"She would not be likely to marry a man who said she looked like the woman who does the heavy tragedy in modern French comedy," Hugh said. "It was a mean remark."

"It was," Reggie answered, "but not clever enough for me to have said because it just misses fire."

"You didn't say it?"

"Certainly not. I don't talk that way about girls I like, except perhaps to you. What's the matter now?"

"Nothing. Go on, what did you talk about?"

"You principally — and your chief a little."

"That must have been interesting."

"It was. That is, the part about Francis was. He's always a rich field for speculation."

"Not much chance for that, I should think," Hugh put in. "The world seems pretty well agreed about him."

"H'm. Is that any reason why *I* should agree? And I never noticed particularly that you were an enthusiastic member of the chorus."

"I intend to be in the future."

Reggie pulled out his pipe and filled it before he spoke. "I suppose it would be just as well," he said thoughtfully, "since Francis happens to be your chief — just as well, I mean, to appear to join the chorus. I should not want you to sing so loud that you would have to shut your eyes and lose the sound of the prattle of those outside. And I shouldn't want you to forget either that the conductor was leading his own composition. What's happened? Have you been having a heart-to-heart talk with Francis?"

"He was here before you came."

"I see. And of course he told you that for once he would break his rule and talk about himself."

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Because I know his rule and that that particular rule is never made except because it breaks so sonorously and impressively. What happened?"

"It was a specific case," Hugh said, "but it

summed up all the doubts I have had." Then he told about it, about Mrs. Mooney and the Collar Company and his own impulsiveness.

Reggie listened silently until he had finished. Then he remarked acidly, "It is a beautiful story."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean poppycock. Of course you were an ass to lend the woman the money because you will never see it again. But you were a particular ass because you had no business to butt in and irritate Francis. You were just a sentimental young idiot — almost as stupid then, as you were just now, not to see through such a beautiful tale. Did you happen to know that Mrs. Warren went to see him about the Mooney woman this morning? She told me after dinner to-night."

"No, but what has that to do with it?"

"I thought it might account for the little house in Dorchester, that's all."

Hugh flushed angrily. "It's just that kind of mean speculation, Reg," he said, "that I've been indulging in for years and that I'm going to stop. It's all guessing as opposed to facts. You might just as well say that his telling Mrs. Warren is proof of what he told me."

"Hold hard, young man," Reggie said sharply.

"It's just my kind of putting two and two together

— the second two being neglected by the rest of the world — that very often discovers truth. Of course, in this case, it looks like malicious bolstering up of mean suspicions but I'm low enough to believe no man perfect and also that even a suspicion is worth investigating when a lot depends on it."

"But what does, in this case, except the saving of your self-esteem?"

Reggie looked at him for a long, serious moment. "You do. You — and Louise Atwood."

Hugh reddened with anger. "I am quite able to take care of myself and —"

"So is she!" Reggie broke in. "I used to think so but I don't any more. You are a young fool and she's dazzled. I don't quite understand why, but she is. You've got to let me talk, Hugh, to get it off my system even if you won't listen. Francis is a damn clever man but he's in love, whether with her or with her position doesn't matter. He's not one to be balked in any ambition. Louise *thinks* she will marry him — She didn't tell me so, but I'm no fool — but she's troubled with intuition, the same thing that we call suspicion, being men. And you, more or less unconsciously, hold up the hands of that intuition, by babbling of suspicions that you can't prove and most of all by being yourself."

"But I'm going to join the chorus."

“Shut up. You can shout as loud as you want. She’s a woman and she’s not going to be deaf to the little silent voice that is really you. She *wants* to believe in him. She can’t *help* believing in you. Sooner or later Francis will find it out, if he hasn’t already.”

“What if he does?”

“Then look out. The surest way for him to make her trust him will be to destroy her faith in you.”

Hugh laughed contemptuously. “Is that the kind of melodrama your history teaches you?” he asked. “Francis is no Jesuit. And what’s more, I can look out for myself, as I said before,” he added. “I’m going home to bed. Good-night.”

Reggie pulled a book from the shelves and sat down in front of the fire. “Nevertheless,” he said softly to himself, “the boy will run into breakers ahead. And Louise — Oh, I hope to Heaven she’ll see straight.”

## CHAPTER VI

LOUISE ATWOOD was one of those rare people who, every one agreed, belonged to the best society in Boston. It is a strange and elusive thing — best society — anywhere, but in Boston more than elsewhere in America is the stranger bewildered. There are the old families whose great-great-grandfathers slaved at Heaven knows what lucrative employment, but who left much money and names which were honoured at first for integrity and righteousness, and which now, for some quite other, quite romantic reason, are most unreasonably associated with those ideas of social elegance always called up by mention of the 18th century. As Reggie Turner often said, "It would be a joy almost too great for endurance to see Mrs. Thaxter meet the great-grandfather she talks so much about." For years these old families intermarried, largely because they were too provincial to know any one else; but as national, not to say international consciousness increased, the marriage sphere was somewhat grudgingly extended. New names began to glitter in the social firmament; the old names began to represent new ideas. The fifth generation became more met-

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ropolitan. Marriage no longer suggested home and children, but opportunity for greater social freedom and activity. Divorce had not yet become fashionable, but it was no longer unpardonably bad form. Bostonians struggled for recognition in New York instead of condescending to it. "The City is progressing," said the Fifth Generation.

There were some, members of the old families, who had dropped out through lack of interest or through disgust at the vulgarity of their contemporaries and now, through incessant reading of Emerson, were joining the ranks of the Intellectuals. To them the doors of society were never officially closed. They were merely forgotten. There were, of course, others, struggling frantically in the outer courts; girls, aping the slouching, untidy nonchalance of the more spectacular of the elect: men, dreaming of recognition because, in college, they had known the leader of the cotillions. And they often succeeded,—if they remained bachelors long enough to realise the importance of marriage.

Finally, there was the inner circle, to which Louise Atwood and Hugh Brandon belonged, to which Francis Evans aspired and could conclusively achieve if he married well. Here were the few remaining leaders of the older generations. Here were the younger girls who had never forgotten their

mothers' injunctions to "sit up straight," who played tennis or listened to an opera without slouching. They were as ready as any for a good time but there was a moral soundness about them as refreshing as were their straight shoulders. Their good blood was brought to perfection through good training. And the young men were like them — not particularly witty perhaps, nor even profound, but fine, clean, well-bred creatures, whom it was a pleasure to see.

"So long as the heart of it is sound," Mrs. Mandell said, looking at Louise and thinking of Hugh, "we don't need to worry about the degeneracy of modern society."

"But the heart is shrivelling," Mrs. Warren added pessimistically. "We need a little newer blood, like Francis Evans."

Hugh was not troubled with any doubts as to society as he stood in the crowd by the door at Sally Thaxter's ball. "Everybody's here you ever knew," he said enthusiastically to Reggie Turner, after he had made his bow.

"And a great many more," Reggie grumbled. "Horrible crush made by horrible people."

"Then for Heaven's sake go home and growl at your books," Hugh called as he broke into a dance and carried off one of the prettiest girls in the

room. He loved dancing and danced excellently — “divinely,” the girls called it.

Mrs. Mandell watched him from her seat admiringly, knowing that after the music stopped he would make his way across the room to speak to her as he always did. Hugh could no more have forgotten to be polite than he could have forgotten how to dance. And he came, making his way through the flower-like groups of girls, the vivid black of his coat accentuating the lovely tints of first one dress, then another.

“It always makes me happier, Aunt Edith, when I catch sight of you,” he said, “makes me feel safer, somehow, just as I used to at dancing school when I was a little shaver.”

She smiled up at him. “You were the boy I always watched then, just as I do now. Then you were awkward and sometimes fell down. But you never cried. Now you are too big to be hurt.”

“Oh, no, Aunt Edith. It’s much more dangerous now than it was. The heart is more sensitive than the shins, you know.”

“And yet then you danced half the time with one girl — and such a miniature lady she was — while to-night you are impartial. I have not seen you dance once with Louise.”

“But she’s just as charming now as she was then,

isn't she, Aunt Edith?" he said quickly, to hide his embarrassment.

"Just as charming," she said. "Why don't you dance with her?"

"I will," he responded. "I don't want to butt in though, you know — on my chief."

"Francis Evans is not here," the little old lady said sharply. "And in any case, Hugh, you must never, never let yourself be pushed aside by him."

"Then I shall dance with her now, Aunt Edith. You would put courage into the weakest heart." She almost stood up to watch him — her interest was certainly on tip-toe — as he made across the room to where Louise was standing. Then, as the music began and she saw Hugh put his arm around her she leaned back with a sigh of contentment. She watched the couples as they whirled past her, smiling now and then, wondering sometimes, occasionally frowning, with all her charity. Then she caught Mrs. Warren's glance and moved along to the empty chair beside her.

"Where do you suppose Francis Evans can possibly be?"

"Perhaps he was not invited," Mrs. Mandell answered demurely, not taking her eyes from the dancers.

Mrs. Warren sniffed with disgust. "Really,

Edith," she said, "you can be as vicious as any one when you try. I've almost a mind not to tell you the news about him."

"He has decided to go to the Senate, I suppose."

"He certainly could go if he wanted to. But it is really much more important news than that. He told me about it this afternoon — in confidence, of course."

Mrs. Mandell shivered slightly and looked around the room for Hugh and Louise. But she only said, "I congratulate him. I hope he has found a nice woman."

"You will agree about that just as I do. Louise Atwood is not the kind of person who can be judged by her queer looks."

"You don't mean to say" — Mrs. Mandell could hardly control her voice — "that Louise is going to marry him?"

"She is, and wonderful it is for her, I think. Not many girls have the chance to marry a man with such a brilliant future. He doesn't fiddle away his time. He will be a pillar to support the weakest."

Mrs. Mandell looked straight ahead. She could not see Hugh and she wanted him. She did not want to see Louise. Against her she felt a sudden hard anger that was not yet allied to pity. Then she became aware that Mrs. Warren was laughing at her and the mist that clouded her eyes dissolved.

"You are glad?" she said. "You, Bessie? Should you be glad if your own daughter were engaged to him? No — don't answer. You would not. You may admire him — everything — but way down in your heart you do not trust him as you trust a man of our own kind. You know you don't."

"I think him splendid, my dear." Mrs. Warren spoke fearlessly but she knew herself that her confidence was pierced by that thin, inherited arrow of doubt; that if Louise had been her own daughter the pain of that distrust would have driven out every other thought. And this knowledge of her unconscious but uncontrollable faithlessness to her own self-constructed ideal made her cruel. "You would be happy for him," she went on, "if you were not jealous for Hugh. But a girl like Louise demands success, my dear, not mere general worthiness and undoubted good looks."

"Nothing can be finer than some kinds of success, Bessie," Mrs. Mandell said gently. "Yet love comes, I think, in spite of it, not as its result."

"You are a sentimentalist, Edith," Mrs. Warren responded.

Louise and Hugh, in the meantime, after dancing once or twice around the room, had gone into the conservatory. "I want to talk to you," she said, "if we can find a corner to ourselves."

He led her through the palms and potted plants, past other couples who seemed to find much to say, to a bench that was still unoccupied.

"Strange," she said softly, "how they can turn a garish hotel room into a lovely garden like this. Behind those curtains of vines there is probably crimson wall-paper, and the ceiling, you know, somewhere beyond these grey veils that look like mist — well, the ceiling is probably the dreadful reaction on the builder of some beautiful room in Versailles. The material red and gold and imitation marble of his horrible imagination has become the frame on which to hang the trappings of fairyland."

"A place of mystery and moonlight," he added, falling into her mood. "A place where dreams unfold their silver wings."

"And die," she continued sadly.

"Not until the night is dead."

She sighed. "No. It is not a dream, hardly even the semblance of a dream. It was only for a moment, Hugh, only that little moment between sleeping and waking when facts seem to swim in a rosy mist and yet when you know, all the time, that they are facts — just as I know, and you know, that all this is a sham, that only the red walls and the marble really count."

"Oh — no, Louise," he protested. "That isn't

true — that last. It's the dreams that count — the shams, if you will, so long as you believe them while they last. This is all real — this glen, moonlighted, these palms, shutting us away from the desert, these cedars, saving us from the winter blasts outside. Oh, no, no, it's all true, except the walls, and the facts and the people. It's our own little bower of retreat and for the moment it is real."

He saw her lips tremble. She had not looked at him once. He went on hurriedly. "That's what keeps me up in business, Louise, knowing that the real things are the beautiful things, that are mine — the secret things that the materialists don't see. Did you know that sometimes palms grow up and down State Street — great glorious rows of them, and that under them walk princes of the blood and princesses, and that sometimes there are Saracens, and haughty cardinals, and that all the material, dirty, busy people one meets are really animals, badgers, and rabbits, and polar bears, and jackals — lots of those — and now and then a panther, whom you love and fear, and twittering birds of every sort, and rats and lions. That's what makes a business life, any life, worth living, Louise, to one who sees through."

"Through what?"

"Through mere gross material flesh, Louise,



deep, deep into the souls of people. You can never smother the twittering of a bird under rolls of flesh. The man, so-called, who carries a jackal in his soul, will still be one of earth's scavengers. To see it all makes romance out of life — to see beneath the surface and at the same time to accept the surface, when it's worth while, without thought of what lies beneath."

"You accept the surface, then?"

"Surely. It saves one from being a pessimist. But I should never accept it too completely. I should never marry it, for example."

"Ah!" She drew away from him and at the same time turned towards him. "Is that what I shall be doing, Hugh, in marrying Francis Evans?"

In the semi-obscurity she felt him grow pale. She could not see because he suddenly bowed his head and his face was in shadow. She leaned towards him impulsively. "I, too, saw below the surface, Hugh — that other night, when you did not. I knew you did not love me, really, or I should not have brought you here to tell you about him. But I knew it would hurt — a little — because it is breaking with a long past. The break had to come some time, though. I should have married, or you would, and that would have been the end — in a way — and yet not really the end because we can always be friends, just as we have been."

"But I shall not be first, any more, Louise. Are you really, truly, going to do it. I thought that the other night you spoke impulsively — to make me stop my silly talk, perhaps."

She laughed, at last, merrily and patted his hand. "Now you are the boy I know," she said, "just sulky about something and needing to be petted. Do you remember how at dancing-school Sally Thaxter wouldn't dance with you one day, and how cross you were, and how I had to give you every dance, for hours, before I could make you cheerful?"

"And then how Aunt Edith laughed at me and told me I ought to be very happy because you were worth thirty little Sally Thaxters, yellow pigtail and all. She was always right. It was only Sally's extreme youth that attracted me. It doesn't any more. Aunt Edith will be very sad."

"Then it's for you to make her happy again, Hugh, by showing her that you don't care."

"Don't care," he echoed, and laughed miserably. "But I do, Louise. I care terribly — enough to hope that you'll be very happy."

Her eyes filled at that. Hugh reached out to touch her and looked at her bowed head for a long minute. "Never forget the romance of life, whatever happens, Louise. Never trouble yourself about the imitation marble underneath while you can

cling to the illusion, for illusions are real while you think them so. And remember that if ever the vines are torn from the walls, that others will grow. You are sure to be happy ”— his voice broke but he went on — “ but if sometimes you don’t see straight for a moment let me help. You are still first with me, you know.”

“ I think this is our dance, Louise. I have been hunting everywhere for you.” Francis Evans stood between the palm leaves, looking down at them. On his lips was a smile, meant to show his pleasure, but which seemed to Hugh to denote disdain and anger, delicately poised. There was something in it that frightened him, but he jumped to his feet and held out his hand.

“ Louise has told me, Francis. I congratulate you; there is no girl in Boston like her.”

“ Your opinion was obvious,” Francis answered in sudden anger, and then, with an instant change to his normal, restrained manner, “ Thank you, Hugh. Nobody knows that better than I — now, but I envy you all the years that you knew her while I was — shall we call it in the social making — gathering my credentials, as it were.”

“ We don’t demand credentials in Boston — from people like you, Francis. And now Louise has set the final seal on everybody’s approval. It would

be insulting to wish you happiness when you cannot escape it." He looked at Louise and felt suddenly that he could say nothing more. "Good night, and good luck — both of you."

Francis seated himself beside her and took her hand, which lay coldly impassive, in his. Again there came the distant sound of music, broken, and made somehow unreal, it seemed to Louise, by the palms. She was thinking, unconsciously and dully, of Hugh.

"They've really done this unusually well," Francis said. "It's so private I could kiss you, I think."

"Please don't," she cried. "Not here."

"Why not here?" he asked, piqued. "Where could you find a more romantic spot?"

"On State Street," she answered instantly. "The palms are finer there."

"Palms? — on State Street?" He laughed.

"Yes, palms. And under them walk knights and princes of the blood and all sorts of queer animals, tricked out in human semblance. Have you seen them, Francis?"

"The bulls and bears, you mean, I suppose," he said, thinking her little joke very trivial and very unlike her.

"No, I didn't mean that," she answered; and then,

a little wistfully, "Do you never see beneath the obvious to the real significance of things, Francis?"

"Never," he answered rudely, "unless there is something worth seeing, and there seldom is. This so-called looking beneath the surface is usually romantic nonsense."

She smiled at him. "That was a perfect answer. Didn't you say that this was our dance?"

"Yes," he said, baffled and irritated. "But first Mrs. Warren wants to see you."

"Does she know?"

"I told her this afternoon. You don't mind?"

"Surely not. I merely wanted to understand if all Boston is in the secret, as of course it is — now."

As she took his arm she felt the finality of it all and suddenly, impulsively, she turned toward the bench where she and Hugh had sat, and made a deep curtsey.

"Why did you do that?" Francis asked, exasperated.

"I was just saying good-bye to romantic nonsense," she answered. "Now come — to Mrs. Warren."

At that final moment her thought of Hugh was keener, more dependent, than it had ever been and yet she knew that he had gone out of her life forever.

## CHAPTER VII

LOUISE had wanted to leave the ball early and by three in the morning Francis was in bed. But he could not sleep. He thought again and again of the events of the evening and more particularly of the attitudes and expressions of the people who had congratulated him. Almost every one had been cordial and almost every one had been unduly surprised. It was as though they had said, "We admire you greatly for all that you have accomplished. We have admitted you as one of us. We like you, but have you not taken just a bit too much for granted in presuming yourself worthy to marry one of us?" It seemed to him that they had all been whispering together of his origin, had been scanning secretly his past record. And always his thoughts culminated in Hugh's magnificently condescending remark, "We do not ask credentials from such as you."

Francis realised with intense irritation that all this would not have mattered, except perhaps momentarily, if he had been able to carry out calmly his original plan. He had made for himself such social position as was possible for a bachelor. A

good marriage he had considered essential as giving definite status to that position, and of all the available girls Louise Atwood had seemed to him the wisest choice. He had set about his courtship with the same quiet determination that would have characterised his prosecution of an important business venture. He had been assiduously attentive without familiarity. He had carried one weakly defended outpost after another, seeing with calm satisfaction that he was inevitably drawing nearer the goal. Finally he had proposed, politely, with just the proper blending of sentiment and masterfulness, and she had accepted him as he knew she would. Then he had kissed her — kissed her with no more expectation of a strong emotion than he would have felt in kissing his own mouse-like sister, but when she dropped her slow lids, veiling an expression that he could not understand, he felt himself caught in a sudden almost terrifying whirlpool of passion. She had pushed him away, violently, disdainfully, and he, mastering his passion as quickly as it had come, had turned so that she might not see his eyes. That had been his last, as it was his first, forgetting of himself, and it had also marked the beginning of his fear of Louise and of himself.

Since then he had been wandering through those fog-bound moors where shadows and the amorphous

shapes that start up through the mist are the embodiments of doubt and jealousy. The worst bogie of all was the realisation that he did not know her, a knowledge that had come only with love. In this he was almost humble with himself. He wanted to understand her because he wanted, later, to mould her, and he knew that he could only work in a material that was familiar. Hugh understood her, or seemed to, and she surely knew Hugh — far better, Francis thought, than he wanted her ever to know him. Perhaps for a time he must adopt Hugh's way of looking at things. He despised it, but he was willing to try it — for a time — because he felt that in his wife's house, certainly, he could not endure, even at first, the position of an "honoured guest."

He got up and stood before the open window, letting the icy wind blow the fumes from his brain. He was racked with the same overmastering passion that had caught him when he kissed her, and intensified, not cooled, with the knowledge that he did not understand her.

Again Hugh's phrase sang to him, "We do not ask credentials from people like you." Who are "we"? Why are "we" different from any one else? Was the "we" meant to include Louise? It could not, because it obviously excluded him and



Louise was his. Yet he knew it did. And the credentials that they did not ask — what were they? Why any mention of credentials? Was not America a democracy where every man had a right to make a place for himself? And had he not made such a place — he Francis Evans — a place, as good as Hugh's, a thousand, a million times better than Hugh's, because he had caught success in his net and Hugh had not.

He leaned from the window to breathe in the biting air and caught sight of a solitary figure coming down the street from the direction of the Exmouth Club. Francis drew in his breath sharply as he watched him, this man who slipped in the snow and walked unevenly. His hat was in his hand. His overcoat blew open, showing his dress-suit underneath. As he passed under a street light, Francis saw his yellow hair and the clear-cut line of his profile, and his uncertain eyes. "Hugh," he muttered, drawing back into the shadow of the room. The blood beat fiercely in his veins. "Hugh." He wanted to close the window but could not and stood, looking down at the figure that came waveringly nearer. "*We* do not ask," he said to himself. Hugh was almost under his window and Francis looked into his unseeing eyes. The boy was singing — a silly lovesick song. Francis gazed down

so fiercely that Hugh stopped. Suddenly he spoke, quite loudly and clearly. "No doubt about it. The best man always wins."

Then Francis drew the curtains and went back to the fire. "So," he said softly, "so that is the man who would not ask for my credentials. That is the man whom Louise understands and who understands her, he thinks." Never had he had such contempt for Hugh, but he found that with the contempt came a new and quite unsuspected hatred. Hugh he might despise, but the intangible something which he represented Francis longed for with an aspiration made poignant by the knowledge that only its attainment could set his own doubts at rest, could make splendid, instead of tragic, his love for Louise. And that goal, whatever it was, Hugh, with all his imperfections, stood for. The idea was intolerable. Another solution there must be. Would not the utter destruction of the old ideal, as represented in this weak boy, be proof of his own honour, of his real superiority?

He threw another log on the fire, and drew up an arm-chair. He must, through analysis of his own position, and through unblinking recognition of his own faults and virtues, plan out for himself a course which his unexpected love of Louise had made so difficult. What he supposed was to be

merely an intelligent marriage, an important move in the game, had turned out to be of capital meaning in itself. Its original place in his scheme, in so far as it affected his outside relations, financial and social, remained the same; but as it affected him, personally, everything was changed. His idea of a polite partnership had been swept away by that first kiss. Louise had ceased to be primarily a social fact and had become a horribly vital human being, as necessary to him as a bit of bread to a starving man, and as fiercely to be defended. Francis blamed himself unsparingly that he had not realised the possibility of just this. The past, it seemed, had taught him little of himself, although now, as he looked back with unsparing self-analysis, he could see that perhaps his most salient trait of character had been that passionate seizing for himself and holding for himself exclusively whatever objects of his desire happened to be within his reach. As a child he had never cried for the moon, but his toys were his — not to be touched by any other child. He had only been saved from the detestation of his playmates by his scrupulous observance of the corresponding rights of other boys. As a man he had never sighed for the unattainable, but when he once put his hand on any good thing, he had absorbed it, made the most of it for his own sake to the ab-

solute exclusion of every one else. In certain ways this attitude was undoubtedly a source of strength. In others, as he saw clearly, it laid him open to the charge of gross selfishness.

In the world of affairs, Francis knew, his conception of his own rights was of the utmost value because of his own large-minded interpretation of its meaning. The presidency of the Trust Company, for example, one of his ambitions most quickly realised, was his, and being his, the office must be dignified, must be raised to an importance it had never held before, because it was his. He was indefatigable in his work, and keen, energetic work that redounded to his credit, inevitably produced equally good results wherever its influence reached. Socially, moreover, his conception of possession was acceptable because it entailed an acceptance of obligations. When Mrs. Warren first invited him to dinner, his self-congratulation was unbounded, but he had maintained his place in her house, and in other houses, by scrupulous care in the fulfilment of all his obvious and even obscure social duties. No effort or self-sacrifice was too great to hold a position once occupied.

Francis considered these things as he sat in the firelight, in the silence that precedes morning. He thought of them in no undue spirit of self-esteem,

but simply as facts resulting from this passion for possession. It was when he turned to the effects on him, personally, that he was a little less satisfied. And yet he could never really dissociate himself from others, could not mistrust his own character, merely as character. He had, for instance, a strange love of old books, and his small collection was, in its way, admirable. He seldom read, but he loved to look at the books, to know that some of them were unique and that they belonged to him. But the collection was secret because this same fierce pride of possession made him unwilling that others should touch or see them — secret, too, because if his collection were known, people whose good opinion he craved might think him selfish. Whether or not he really was selfish never troubled him. He was reported to be a man of exceptionally clean life and in the main rejoiced in the reputation. It was not the truth, but Francis knew that it was much nearer the truth than would have been the case had he not here, as elsewhere, wanted the exclusive possession which he could not afford. On the whole, he thought, he had missed a great deal of pleasure through this particular manifestation of his ruling passion. He seldom discussed questions of morals and when he did, he assumed always an attitude a shade more strict than that of his companion.

Only when talking with a confessed libertine did he express his real belief. "One should never lose sight of the matter of health." That remark summed up his whole philosophy on the subject, and, as he thought of it now, Francis believed it sound. Talk of positive standards seemed to him mere sentimental twaddle, to be outwardly respected by him only because such standards were outwardly respected by respectable people.

And marriage! He had thought of it in two aspects — in his own case as a necessary, and on the whole pleasant, definition of his social status, leaving him, in the meanwhile, practically as free as now to seek and find his pleasures as he wished; in the case of others it had seemed to him usually to be merely a form of immorality receiving the official sanction of society. He was altogether too modern to consider seriously the old-fashioned view. Not even when he realised his love for Louise had his marriage assumed the place held for it by good, but out-of-date people like Mrs. Mandell and even Mrs. Warren. It would be simply the realisation of desire in a manner that would bring with it, instead of destroy, social standing. He had not progressed — retrogressed, he would have called it — to an ideal of marriage as the foundation of a home, of a family life that makes sound the heart of democratic

society, because he could not conceive unselfish love. His love for Louise was, in quality, like his unlicensed love of earlier days — in quality the same, but greatly intensified. And it issued as usual in the fierce desire for exclusive possession which in this case meant intellectual surrender, the knowledge of all her thoughts, her wishes, her dreams. It meant the total absorbing of her personality in his, the rooting out of all ideas in which he did not share. She had said good-bye to romantic nonsense, but her farewell had been ironical. It must be real. She liked Hugh's poetical rhapsodies. She must despise them as he did. But to accomplish this result he knew that he must more fully understand her, unless, of course, some extraneous circumstance should bring her views unexpectedly into accord with his. He could not believe the power of tradition to be very vital and by showing its fallacy in the case of Hugh she would for herself complete the circle.

As he coupled her name with Hugh's, he kicked viciously at the fender and then got up to walk about the room. It was easy to consider generalities, hard to take up particulars because the thought of Louise set his heart beating abnormally, and the idea of Hugh brought a red mist in front of his eyes. Yet it was just of these two, he saw clearly, that he

must think, and worst of all it must be of both together. Without a rigid plan of action, without a map on which his course was plainly marked and where every pitfall was flagged, there could be only disaster ahead. He held his head high, therefore, determined to subdue the passion in his blood and the anger in his heart, and to bend both to the service of his will.

“Hugh and Louise. Louise and Hugh.” He forced himself to put the names together until he could do it calmly. Louise did not love the boy; he doubted whether Hugh loved her, but they had, nevertheless, a sympathy of outlook which might easily become ground for a stronger feeling. He doubted really whether Louise loved any one, but that made the situation even more dangerous, because she might fall into the error, unless he were careful, of believing — through pity perhaps — that she loved some one else. He smiled when he remembered how she had repulsed him when he kissed her. That might have been natural, however, since she probably thought of marriage in the old-fashioned way. Love was not to be reckoned with, then, only the danger of a misplaced idea of love. He must not permit any fancied call of blood to blood to interfere. And even if Louise loved him, Francis knew, as he loved her, it would never satisfy



him while there was some bond between her and another in which he did not share. She must be his, body, and mind and soul. But at present between her and Hugh stretched that bond of sympathy, that appreciation of "romantic nonsense," that fancied power to see beneath the surface of things, that unconscious sense of birth. In phrasing its meaning Francis caught once more a glimpse of the knife that might sever it. Louise trusted Hugh really, as she had never trusted him. That trust must be destroyed, and destroyed by the triumph of the practical things of life, of the obvious. Hugh, the prophet of dreams, must be brought face to face with reality, in circumstances that would damn him in the eyes of reasonable, self-respecting people. Francis stretched out his arms wearily, but smiled. "Just how?" he questioned himself. "I don't know, but somehow. And Louise will see. Mrs. Warren will see. Every one but Mrs. Mandell will see — and she's a fool." He had no plan, meant to have none. It was not for him to create circumstances, only to guide them. He believed in fate and he knew that fate did not shape events for the benefit of the dreamer, but for the man who was ready practically to seize her gifts.

He went to the window and opened it wide. Outside the first faint grey of a winter morning

brought out the tracery of a leafless tree before the apartment house. As he stood looking, there came a knock at his study-door and, shrugging his shoulders with surprise, he went to open it.

Hugh, dishevelled, almost exhausted, stumbled into the room. Francis watched him cynically as he fell in a chair and leaned forward, his head in his hands.

"Well," he said at last. He wished Louise were there. This man, dirty, unkempt looking, had so little of the romantic about him, so little that suggested the breeding she loved. "I am a beast," Hugh muttered at last. His voice sounded as though he were going to cry, and Francis knew that, if it happened, he should kick him, in sheer physical disgust.

"Apparently you are," he assented.

At that Hugh straightened instantly and an expression which was really fine came into his face, an expression which made even Francis, for a moment, forget the sordidness of it all. "I left after Louise told me, Francis. I was discouraged and miserable, not because I had lost Louise, but because I could not trust her to you, because I could not trust you. And yet I thought I had conquered all that — and now I have really. I went to the Club and drank and drank and then I walked the

streets for hours. I am not drunk any more. I wanted to tell you because you are always so straight yourself. I wanted you to know that I had not trusted you and that all that was past. You will have no more loyal servant now, Francis, nor a more loyal friend if you will let me be a friend." He struggled to his feet and held out his hand.

Francis took it, but his eyes were like steel. "That's all right, Hugh," he said. "Of course we're friends. Come in here and let me give you a bed for the rest of the night. I'm not going to turn in now, a bath and then a ride in the Park is what I need. I'll excuse you if you're late at the office this morning," he added as he closed the door.

"Thanks," Hugh called. "I knew you'd take it right — what I said. It's true what I've been thinking all the night — the best man always wins, hands down, Francis — and you've won."

## CHAPTER VIII

It was one of those sparkling days late in the winter when sleighing was ideal because the clear air was transfused with a suggestion of spring that took away its sting. The too hasty crocuses were hidden beneath a velvet covering of snow or marked, on its surface, fairy patterns in colours of amethyst and gold. Commonwealth Avenue was like a river, flowing out on one side, and in on the other — a river of sleighs, some fast, some slow, causing eddies and whirlpools in the current. There were sleighs of all colours and fashions, some that looked as though they had been roused from a Rip Van Winkle sleep to share in the glorious day, in the gaiety of this Sunday afternoon in Puritan Boston.

Francis Evans, as he guided his racer into the rapid outer edge of the current, said eagerly to his companion, "We'll have a motor-sleigh some time, and that will drive the poor old horse from his last redoubt."

"Oh, no," Louise answered quickly. "I hope not. Nothing could ever take the place of perfect motion like this. I don't believe there is greater joy in an aeroplane."

"Probably not," he agreed, "because it's so beastly dangerous. Nobody but a fool would go up in one."

"Hugh did the other day."

"I don't know that that affects my statement," he said, laughing.

"A man who is not afraid is not, in consequence, a fool. I like people who are willing to take risks."

"When there is anything to gain — yes."

"No — just where there is nothing to gain. That is the only kind of risk that counts. It makes you sure that when the time comes to take risks that must be taken there will be no hesitation."

"You would like me better if I went up in an aeroplane."

"Because Hugh did? Certainly not. I want every man to be himself."

"There's Hugh now," he said, pointing with his whip.

Louise caught only a glimpse of him as they sped past. He was standing on the sidewalk talking, and he did not see them.

"I'm worried about him, Francis," she said anxiously. "He doesn't look as neat as he used to. He doesn't seem to stand so straight before the world. It almost seems as though he were degenerating just a little."

Francis shrugged his shoulders. His thought was of relief at the dimming of the heroic outline but his words were sympathetic. "I know what you mean," he said—"exactly. I have talked to him, done everything to brace him up, but it seems to do no good. His clothes are getting actually shabby and there's no reason for it. His salary, with the little money he has, is certainly enough to keep him neat. It all worries me horribly."

"What does he do at night?"

"The Club, usually, I think. Being still on the waiting list I can't follow him there."

Louise smiled. She had long since discovered through his frequent mention of the fact that he was not a member, that Francis held the Exmouth Club as a kind of Mecca of male social progress. But she was too much interested in the subject of Hugh to give it more than a passing thought. "One cannot help wondering," she continued seriously, "whether this shabby exterior may not be the prelude to some kind of moral disaster. I don't believe it but the idea forces itself on me."

"That sounds very portentous," Francis answered,— "almost too bad, I should think, to be true." It was exactly what he had hoped she might think. As to himself, he was at sea. Hugh's eye was too clear, his bearing too straight-forward,

to permit any masculine suspicion of over-indulgence. Francis knew, moreover, that Hugh had too many good friends in the Club to be gambling beyond his means. But there remained the steady, unaccountable, decline in his general appearance, too slight to be noted by casual acquaintances but patent to one who was steadily with him or who was deeply interested in him. That Louise, who saw him seldom, had noticed it was irritating, that she interpreted it as she did was reason for satisfaction. He was rather inclined, himself, to put it down to some quixotic impulse, some curious malformation of the poetic temperament. That was probably the cause; the issue he did not attempt to fathom.

“Whatever the cause, though,” he went on, “it’s too bad. In so many ways Hugh is a first-rate fellow — he might amount to so much — that you hate to see him losing his grip.”

Louise shivered. Like Mrs. Warren, she could listen sympathetically to blame, but qualified praise she could not suffer, even from the man she had promised to marry. It was condescension, and she felt instinctively, while she hated herself for feeling it, that Francis was not in a position to condescend.

“That’s true,” she forced herself to say, however, “so true that I should rather talk about some-

thing else. Did you see Sally Thaxter just now, when we passed her? The most wonderful ermine coat — perfectly stunning but not appropriate for a girl just out.”

“There speaks the woman of mature age,” Francis said, laughing.

“Oh, well, I am getting old,” she threw back at him. “I should have been an old maid if you had not come along. Compared to Hugh, for example, I am an octogenarian.”

“And to me?”

“A child,” she laughed.

They had left the city far behind and were gliding smoothly, still in the stream of sleighs, over the hills of Commonwealth Avenue as it approaches Auburndale. Francis was an excellent driver and Louise, leaning back into the warmth of the fur rugs, gave herself up to full enjoyment of the day, and the perfect roads, and the invigorating air. They turned, at last, from the Avenue and struck across country, following more slowly the devious side streets, exclaiming now and then at the beauty of some snow-laden tree that blazed in the sunlight; silent, in the main, and in consequence more intimate.

There were few pedestrians but once they passed a woman, picking her way along the half-cleaned



sidewalk. She was a flamboyant person, her hat heavy with white plumes, her cerise coat lined and trimmed with imitation ermine. Her lifted skirts showed silk stockings the colour of her coat, and elaborately buckled shoes.

“Look, Francis,” Louise said as they approached her. “Look at the vision.” She saw his hand tighten on the rein, saw his eyes narrow suddenly. Louise wondered — but after all, it was no concern of hers. Men always knew queer people about whom it was more discreet not to enquire.

The woman stopped short in her walk and stared at them, boldly, defiantly. She smiled and was ready to bow, Louise thought, but Francis touched the horse with his whip and they flew by in a whirl of snow that blotted out the gorgeous figure on the sidewalk.

Louise looked at him quizzically. “Why didn’t you bow to her, Francis? She expected it.”

“Because,” he answered curtly, “there are certain people one has to know in a business way whom one does not recognise at other times.”

“I should think it would make business interesting,” she said demurely.

Francis did not answer but whipped the horse again so that they flew around the corners and all his attention was taken by the road. He felt him-

self in a vicious mood. There had been too much talk of Hugh and then this woman had appeared out of the skies to raise possible complications. Clearly the time to rid himself of dangerous acquaintances was approaching but for the moment he was conscious only of intense irritation.

As they turned a corner sharply they almost ran down a child who was playing in the street. At the risk of upsetting the sleigh and by his skilful driving Francis avoided an accident, but as they passed he cut savagely at the child with his whip. "Teach the little beggar a lesson," he said. "Children have no right to encumber the streets. It's dangerous for them and for the people passing."

Her face was set and she made no response. Francis looked at her and her expression angered him still further. "I suppose Hugh would have punished him by giving him a sonnet," he added. He was sorry the moment that the words passed his lips but it was too late to recall them.

"Hugh," Louise said gently. "No, I don't believe Hugh would have done anything. I was just sorry for the child — and for you."

"For me?"

"Yes — that any one could irritate you as that woman must have done."

“Oh, the woman,” he protested, “I had totally forgotten about her.”

An hour later, when he left her at her door, Francis drove away, for once thoroughly dissatisfied with himself. For three months he had walked with circumspection, never making a misstep nor letting fall an unconsidered word. And then to-day the hint of spring in the wintry air had set the blood beating in his eyes and in his brain—the hint of spring, and Hugh, Hugh, Hugh! He felt that endurance was being stretched to the snapping point.

Louise climbed the steps of her father's house and rang the bell. “Bring tea,” she said to the maid, “at five o'clock and”—it was a sudden thought—“I am not at home to any one, except Mr. Brandon if he should call.” She went into her own room to do her hair and to change into an afternoon gown and then, descending to the library again, sat down in a low chair to wait. She had no reason, except the need of him, to think Hugh would come.

As she waited, every line of her figure relaxed, as physical relief, perhaps, to the tenseness of her thoughts. She looked the patrician that she was. Her hands, resting lightly but firmly on the arms of her chair, were slender, delicately moulded, strong. Only the long oval of her face, shining

palely in the dim light, gave the inevitable suggestion of something foreign, superpassionate, but not sensual. It hinted rather at possible physical passion, subtly, firmly, and exquisitely transformed into a steady flame of intellectual activity. Louise was a woman of large view, of tenacious purpose, never forgetting herself and her own interests, but never permitting these interests to come into apparent conflict with those of other people. She had chosen to marry Francis after cool consideration of the matter from every point of view. He was to become, inevitably, she believed, one of the most influential citizens of Boston. He was already well on the road to riches. She believed him to be honest. She knew him to be respected by other men, to be efficient, successful. When he had first kissed her his sudden display of passion, although it had startled her, had, on the whole, pleased her. Perhaps one of her strongest reasons for promising to marry him had been distrust of herself, the knowledge that if she loved it would be madly, to the utter exclusion of everything else — that she would love jealously, to her own misery and to that of her husband. And to save herself from this, to keep in her hands the many threads that, woven together, make up the lasting web of happiness, she had chosen calmly, to marry a man whom she did

not love — thus for ever, and with eyes wide open, abjuring the greatest happiness, that would have been for her too rent with pain to make it, she thought, worth the price. Thus it was, that after her first recoil, when Francis had unwillingly exhibited his own feeling — a recoil natural enough in a delicately nurtured woman from the display of a brutally physical force — Louise had grown to be glad. She knew him well enough to appreciate somewhat his desire to hold for himself alone whatever belonged to him and saw that this could only further safeguard her against herself.

But strangely, almost alarmingly, as months passed, bringing always a closer understanding of Francis, and with it, on the whole, a more generous respect, her feeling for Hugh, who was always absent now, had grown more tender. She was sure that was the word — tender. It was not so that love would have come to her, she thought. Love must have come like a conqueror, in all his trappings of manhood and personal dominance; or like a thief in the night, suddenly imposing his authority, evil though it might be. And, love the conqueror, the thief, had passed her by. Nevertheless she dimly realised that she was playing with fire — felt rather than knew. She might have for Hugh a mother's tenderness; she might want to

spread protecting wings; but the fact remained that Hugh was no child. He was a man, compelling and virile. She believed that he did not love her — but what if she were mistaken? He was a boy whom she had always known, who had always needed her help, but he had become a man, and the language of his heart answered the language of hers.

Louise half rose from her chair to say that she would see no one, that she had a headache, but at this moment the maid came in. "Mr. Brandon and Mr. Turner," she said, "I was to see whether you were at home."

"Yes," Louise answered. "Ask them to come up here, please." She sighed with relief, and disappointment, not sure which predominated. The tea-table gave her an excuse for not rising and she merely held out her hand to each in turn, smiling the welcoming smile that meant so much to them and was partly true, partly a mask, for her. The first glance at Hugh's clothes, accentuated her fear of his decadence; the second, at his face, almost dispelled it.

"We hoped and hardly expected to find you," Reggie Turner said. "The afternoon so belies our climate's reputation that we were afraid you might stay out until dark."

"Especially," Hugh added, "since Francis is such a bully driver."

"We went far," Louise answered, "but Francis had some kind of a meeting so we had to come back."

"Then I sincerely approve of meetings on the Sabbath Day," Reggie said fervently.

Then there was drinking of tea from china cups that dated back to the East India trade; there was eating of "molasses crisps" that had always been better in the Atwoods' house than anywhere else; there was the usual repartee, somewhat cynical and always amusing, between Louise and Reggie, while Hugh sat silent.

"And then finally, Louise," Reggie said, "there will come the day of renunciation of all this frivolity. There will be the sacrifice of ten thousand roses to hide the architecture of the church and to conform to the demands of the newspapers. We shall hurry home from the ceremony to read about it, to learn that another 'prominent Vincent girl' has taken the lover's leap. Hugh and I shall get drunk and shed sentimental tears at the thought that after the return from Niagara you will be ensconced in the little nest in Dorchester."

"I should like to go to Niagara," Louise laughed, "just to shock your sense of propriety. But why Dorchester?"

"Why Dorchester? My dear lady — is it possible you have not heard of the little house in Dorchester, the only one Francis owns, the intended refuge for the tragic Mrs. Mooney?"

"Never of the house," she answered, "nor of the tragic Mrs. Mooney. Ought I to know?"

"Ask Francis," Reggie said.

Hugh stirred uneasily. "It's time for us to go, Reg," he put in. "You have talked enough nonsense for one afternoon."

"No, Hugh — not enough for one afternoon. I have never found an afternoon long enough for that. The world needs to laugh. It's a tonic that drives away dull care, and I am self-constituted physician in ordinary to those who need the medicine. You with your sudden parsimony and Louise with her — well, with her doubts, are likely patients."

"I have no doubts," Louise said firmly, though the sudden attack made her tremble.

"And neither of us is laughing," Hugh added.

"Then," Reggie said, "if you will not smile, and if Louise, alone in all the world, is certain that this good weather will continue, I have no mission." He got up to go and Hugh followed him.

"How can I doubt people like you, or like Hugh?" Louise asked, insistently and unnecessarily.

"I never said you did," Reggie answered.



"Come on, Hugh — unless you want to stay and be gloomy alone with Louise."

"I am coming." He spoke undecidedly but Louise confirmed his purpose.

"Yes, go, Hugh," she said. "Get the last full breaths of this wonderful day. I must dress for dinner. I am going out."

Yet, when they left her she sat down again, and leaning on the table, rested her aching head on her arms. "Doubts!" she kept repeating to herself. "Doubts! What right had he to say that, and why that I have no doubts to Hugh? Why do I have silly fears? The world is all the same — all weakness, and fraud, and pain. Yet, Francis, who is strong and good, I doubt — and Hugh, who is weak, I trust. If only I could see him as he is — not as Mrs. Mandell sees him — then I should get my balance. If I could know, not suspect, his weakness, I could rest on the other's strength. I have chosen Francis as my pillar and he will not fail." But even as she assured herself the doubts that were nameless and without foundation reasserted themselves until she shivered with a fear that knew no bounds.

## CHAPTER IX

ON the day following his unsatisfactory sleigh-ride with Louise, Francis walked to his office through the rain and slush. During the night spring had come with a bound. The gutters were overflowing with brown water. Torrents rushed hissing through the Common. All the magnificent silence of winter was swallowed in a mighty rumble. It was spring in its most forbidding aspect, a giant awakened from his sleep, unkempt, ferocious, not even faintly suggestive of the poet's Spring, the beautiful child dozing in the flowered lap of summer. As always, there was something sinister in this sudden change, and to Francis, who was secretly very sensitive to the weather, the day had in it a kind of terror.

His office was a retreat and he plunged into his work with an avidity rare even for him. He was in an ugly mood, controlled but bitter. His dictation was curt and his orders to his clerks peremptory. When the cashier came in for instructions Francis said immediately, "Mrs. Mooney's interest is due in a week. Has she been notified?"

"It was not necessary," the cashier smiled.

"She came in yesterday and paid it. Her son is at home, I believe, indeed she told me so much of her family history that I began to think of calling in the police. She paid in advance, she said, because she had been late last time."

Francis had been figuring rapidly. "When does the principal fall due?"

"At her next interest period. The time will be extended, I suppose."

"It will not." On September 20th, Francis knew, she would feel the inconvenience of the approaching tax-paying period and two thousand dollars, in addition to that, would seem a large sum. He had no grudge against her except that she had disarranged his plans and was supported by Hugh, but that was enough at the moment to exasperate him. "Perhaps I had better see her. She will come anyway when you write her that she cannot have an extension."

"As you say, sir."

"And nothing is to be suggested to her as to other arrangements," Francis added. The cashier bowed. He had been wondering whether loyalty to the Trust Company was compatible with such re-arrangement of his own small investments as would enable him to take up the mortgage himself. Evidently it would not.

"Here is twenty thousand dollars in cash," he said as he rose to go. "It must be sent over to take up that stock in the Mutual Building Company. You will want to sign the order." He laid on the desk a roll of bills in a band and then left the room.

Francis counted the money, looked over the prospectus once more, signed the order for stock and pushed it, with the notes, to one side. "It looks safe," he said to himself, "and with such backing as it has we shall be wise in going in for a little of the stock, if only to have our name included."

"Mr. Evans, sir," the call-boy said at the door. "A lady to see you on business, Miss Flanagan, she says her name is."

Francis did not turn but his hand crushed the papers he was holding. "Show her in," he said, curtly.

When the latch turned again he got up from his chair and shut the door after the boy when his visitor had entered.

"You don't seem very pleased to see me, dear," she said pouting.

Francis looked at her evenly and pointed to a chair beside the desk. "Well," he said, when he had seated himself again.

"Well," she echoed, throwing back her cerise coat that was lined with imitation ermine.

"You're a fool to wear that thing in this weather," he said savagely.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I like it and it ain't real. I saw the Thaxter girl in a real one yesterday — just after I saw you. You might have given me a lift."

"That was for me to decide. Why did you come here? Haven't I told you not to?"

"I don't remember — don't know as I would have cared anyhow. You haven't been to see me for a month."

"What of it? I haven't troubled you about rent for the house, have I?"

"Rent!" she cried, and laughed. "No, you haven't troubled me about rent. And you haven't sent me any money, either."

"Why should I?"

"Do you expect me to live on the memory of the last you gave me?"

Francis did not try to conceal his scorn. "No," he said, "I don't. You're perfectly well able to support yourself."

She grew pale at that. "What if I told you I'd been straight — faithful to you, I mean."

"I should say you lied," he answered.

"But I have been faithful," she insisted bitterly.

"Then I should merely assert that you are a fool."

At that she thumped the arms of her chair passionately until the veins stood out on her large hands.

"Look out, Flossie," Francis said, smiling. "You'll break one of those highly polished fingernails of yours."

She leaned toward him and her eyes flashed. Words rushed turbulently to her lips. "You are a beast," she cried, "a heartless beast. You don't know that girls like me are human like everybody else — a great deal more than that doll you had in the sleigh yesterday." He held up his hand warningly. "Oh, yes, I know," she continued. "You're going to marry her. That's what I knew would come some time. I didn't think it would be hard, knowing it would come some time. It is — but I ain't going to make any fuss over it. I was bad — yes, I know that too. But what chance was there for a girl from the country, poor, good-looking, with no religion to keep her straight, nothing, but just love of pretty things and wanting a good time. I was a nurse but the men I nursed always forgot it, and I wanted money. There's nothing new, nor interesting to you, I guess, in all this, but it's true — and sad, too. I could cry over myself if I stopped to think. But the good times aren't all a girl wants, I tell you, Francis. She gets awfully tired sometimes, of the lights and the drink-

ing and — the beasts — and she gets to wondering if there mayn't be a man somewhere — a real man. That's where I was, Frankie, when you came along." Her voice grew soft and her eyes luminous. "I loved you — and I'd never done that before — loved. You were strong, and honest, and kind. I didn't want you to marry me — I never thought of that because I loved you and I didn't want to drag you down. You liked me and you paid me well" — she turned away from him as she said it — "and then you put me in the little house in Dorchester, and I had enough so I didn't have to — to work. And then I read in the papers about how you were going to marry Miss Atwood — and — and — Oh, I can't talk about that time. But you came again, so I thought and thought and made myself see it didn't matter — much, and that we needn't interfere, your wife and I. There will always be a place for me, won't there, Francis?"

He had listened because the passionate outcry held him but when she stopped he only said harshly, "Have you finished?"

"Finished," — the word almost strangled her. "You haven't answered me yet. There'll always be a place for me along with her, won't there, dear?"

Francis got up and stood for a long minute looking at her pitilessly. She shrank back in her chair, wrapping her coat tightly around her. "Don't kill me," she whispered.

He laughed at that. "You poor fool!" he burst out. "Do you think I shall have any place for you? In the wide world I should never see you. In the smallest room you would shrivel out of my sight." He caught himself up suddenly, and then added, as if apologising to himself, "That is melodrama but the only kind of play-acting that you can understand. You have disobeyed me in coming here. You make this room, everything connected with me, dirty. I don't want ever to see you again. But here"—he turned away from her and worked over the combination of a small safe set into the wall, still talking as he worked. "You've amused me in the past and just now you amused me very much, and for the last time, so you deserve a reward." He opened the door of the safe and took out some money, counted it, and turned back to her.

She was standing by her chair now, very erect and so pale that the rouge on her cheeks showed like ragged spots of purple paint against the white. There was a certain fearlessness about her that was almost dignified and that impressed him, angry as he was. She looked at him fixedly.



"Here," he said, holding out the bills. "This will give you a week of pleasure at your own expense. As to the house in Dorchester — don't bother about that. If you get out in a month or two it will be all right."

"I don't want your money," she said thickly. "I have enough."

"As you please. I thought you told me you had none. I will send it later when you have had time to think about it." Then he added, more kindly. "You'd better put your hat on straight before you go out, Flossie. After all, we've been good friends. You must not leave looking as though we had been fighting. And perhaps — who knows? — perhaps we may meet again sometime. Good-bye, my dear."

With a sudden vigorous motion of her arms she reached up and pulled her hat into place. Then she walked quickly to the door. Standing with one hand on the knob she turned to him again. "I might tell Miss Atwood all about it, you know."

"Not at all," he answered calmly, smiling at her. "You would not spoil the memory of our friendship. You would not make it impossible for us to be friends again."

Then she went out and because she closed the door gently Francis raised his eyebrows with a faint surprise. He put the money back in the safe and

then sat at his desk again. "It's nearly time to send this," he said to himself, glancing at the clock as he took up the roll of bills. "I ought to have done it right away, because the sight of money might make a woman like Flossie think I was really rich and hold me up."

He felt himself in a cheerful frame of mind again, much as he felt after a summer thunder-shower that cleared the atmosphere. "And yet Flossie was quite a wonder in her way," he thought, "but dangerous — like all of them." He was almost ready, for the moment, to sympathise with the rigid moralists who foolishly condemn all vice as vicious. Merely a prudish way of being on the safe side, it seemed to him, but with his final stamp of respectability to be gained through his marriage — he smiled at the idea — with this final inclusion of him in the ranks of the pure in heart, safety became, of a sudden, a very important part of life. He considered himself a quite suitable addition to the moralist party. Had he not always been of irreproachable respectability himself — outwardly at least — and was there any reason to believe that outward respectability meant anything more fundamental in other men? Did not they all, perhaps, have their interviews with members of Flossie's race? Not many, he believed, behaved as gener-

ously as he had done — except under pressure, of course. On the whole he felt decidedly satisfied with himself and with the world in general, and that in spite of the rain that beat ceaselessly against his windows.

Then quite unexpectedly and very unwillingly he thought of Hugh. Did he, also, have two standards, one by which the world was to judge him and one for his private use? Francis knew that he must answer in the negative. The fact certainly did not increase his respect for Hugh — quite the contrary. The boy was no saint. He gambled; he sometimes drank too much; and because he never tried to conceal the fact the world thought he did both more — Francis knew it was very much more — than was the truth. But was this one of the reasons, this complete frankness, for the intuitive understanding that existed between Louise and Hugh? Was it this, more than the accident of birth? Or was his truthfulness possibly a consequence of birth? He knew that Hugh, whatever his sins, superficially, was still pure of heart. And was this true of himself? He knew it was not, all the time that he scoffed at the possibility in others. Even scoffing was a form of admission. Perhaps Louise felt this difference between them. Perhaps this was why she could reveal herself to Hugh as she never did, with-

out an effort which he felt her make, to him. The thought was new and it gave him pause while it brought back with renewed force the knowledge that before he could dominate her thoughts as he wished, Hugh must in some way definitely discredit himself. He must guide events. His confidence and self-satisfaction of a moment before had given place once more to the same ugly humour that had possessed him when he stepped from his house into the driving rain of the streets. Hugh must discredit himself, and it must be through something more definite than shabby clothes, since with them there had come no clouding of the eye nor trembling of the hands. Indeed Louise was capable, he knew, of interpreting this general outward appearance of carelessness to some hidden chivalrous motive unless it could be accounted for by a corresponding moral degradation. And any romantic explanation, redounding to Hugh's credit, would leave matters in a worse state than ever. Francis put his hands over the roll of bills and a pile of unsigned letters, and leaned back in his chair, thinking deeply.

A half hour later he touched his call-bell. "Send Mr. Brandon to me," he said to the boy.

Hugh came in and Francis, as he looked at the clean-cut, manly, straight-forward face, had a sudden, uncontrollable sense — for the first time in his

life — of his own moral infirmity. Yet he had always lived up to his standards and those standards he believed to be as high as were compatible with efficiency and success, as high, therefore, as they could be without being absurd. To feel, even for a moment, that Hugh's ideal was better, was thus something intangible and maddening because it was an admission of weakness. Francis hated the intangible. He despised weakness. Less despicable in his eyes was a strong bad man than a weak good one. Although he certainly did not consider himself in the former class, he would rather have been there than in the latter. But most of all he wanted to be, himself, a strong, good man if that could be achieved without the adoption of any quixotic ideals.

"You wanted me, Mr. Evans," Hugh said quietly.

"Yes, I want you to take this money, twenty thousand dollars, to the office of the Mutual Building Company. We have put in an order for stock. It is possible that the certificates are made out. If not bring back simply a receipt. You must have the money in the hands of the treasurer by half-past twelve."

Hugh took the notes and went out. "I'm going on an errand for Mr. Evans," he said to the cashier. "I shan't be back until after luncheon."

He put the roll in the inside pocket of his coat, buttoned his raincoat around him and pushed his way through the little knot of people who were seeking shelter from the rain in the doorway of the building. The sidewalks, whipped by the storm, were almost deserted. Hugh pulled his soft hat over his ears, and, head down, butted into the wind.

Half-way to his destination he crashed into a man who was running in the opposite direction.

"For Heaven's sake look where you are going, young man," the stranger cried, and then, as Hugh wiped the rain from his eyes to see—"Hughie Brandon, by all that's holy. I was just going around to see you, but instead, come in and have a drink." They had collided at the door of a saloon.

"Can't," Hugh answered, "but I'll meet you at luncheon somewhere. When did you drift to town, Bob?"

"This morning and off for the Great City on the one o'clock. You'll have to come in."

"All right," Hugh agreed, pushing open the door, "but just for one cocktail. I've got a package to deliver by twelve-thirty. It's bully to see you."

Hugh shook the water from his coat and together they leaned against the bar, talking rapidly for five minutes. "Be sure to let me know when you come

to town again," Hugh said at last. "I've got to beat it now."

"All right," Bob Hadley said. "How's the muse?"

"Dead," Hugh shouted over his shoulder as he raced down the street.

"You're just in time, Hugh," Mr. Thaxter said a few minutes later as he took the money.

"Not much to spare, was there?" Hugh laughed, glancing at the clock. "I stopped to speak to Bob Hadley, but I knew I could make it."

"Oh, is Bob in town? Evans wants you to ring him up immediately, Hugh." As he took down the receiver, the old gentleman turned to compare the amount marked on the roll with the number of shares checked after the name of the Bay Trust Company.

"Beastly change from yesterday, isn't it?"

"Beastly," Hugh agreed. "Is that you, Francis?"

"Yes," came the answer. "Hugh, I want you to take the one o'clock to New York. You can buy fresh collars and things there. I have some papers that must be delivered to Mr. Marchmont to-night. You know his address. I'm awfully sorry, but I only heard a moment ago."

"Why, of course, I can go, I suppose," Hugh re-

sponded. " Louise telephoned this morning to ask me to dinner. Will you make it right with her? "

" Certainly. She will understand. Tell Mr. Thaxter that our office boy will come for the receipt after he has given you the papers on the train. And, by the way — put up at the Harvard Club, will you? I may want to get hold of you this evening."

" All right. I'll meet the boy at the gate. And tell Louise I'm awfully sorry. Good-bye."

He turned to Mr. Thaxter. " Francis will send a boy for the receipt, sir. He wants me to go to New York on business on the one o'clock and I can just about make it."

" Very well," Mr. Thaxter answered. " Sorry you have such a day for your trip."

" Bob Hadley is going down," Hugh said, " so I don't mind the weather. I haven't seen him since he left college."



## CHAPTER X

AFTER he had sent the office-boy with the papers to be delivered to Hugh at the South Station, Francis leaned back in his chair with an unaccountable feeling of relief and of freedom. The knowledge that Hugh was out of town seemed, somehow, to clear the air. It was not a feeling which he could have defined positively even if he had tried. As the weeks passed he had realised more and more that, quite unconsciously, Hugh, or the idea for which he happened to be the symbol, stood between him and Louise; that she, in spite of herself, was weighing them in the balance and that he had been daily losing, not gaining, in her estimation. She still did not love Hugh — of that he was certain. But neither was she learning to love him. She was finding her loveless promise more and more difficult to carry out because she could not achieve the perfect confidence on which she had relied to take the place of love. He had grown afraid to speak of their marriage. No date was set and he did not dare to ask it, lest insistence should mean a definite drawing back on her part. He had allowed matters to take their own course because action seemed impossible

but now he was beginning to wonder whether his trust in fate had been misplaced. Hugh's almost imperceptible degeneration in outward appearance was no longer an asset. Louise had recognised long since that while the face was clear and the eyes fearless there could be no moral degeneration, and, as a result, Hugh's apparent thoughtlessness of himself became only a little mystery which made her think of him more than she would otherwise have done. Hugh, moreover, if he showed no striking business ability, did his work faithfully, and steered clear of anything which might discredit him.

So only the fact of his shabbiness remained, but the very mystery of that made possible a hidden disgrace. "You ought to watch him," Mrs. Warren had said the night before at dinner when they touched on the topic. "Surely he can afford a new suit. His evening clothes are shiny. He needs them as covering, not as a mirror. No one with a face and figure less striking than Hugh's could possibly wear them with any dignity. He's not gambling — at least, not at the club, for my sons say he scarcely ever goes there. What does he do with his evenings? He's worth saving — that boy — for the sake of his Aunt who adores him blindly and who is one of the best of women in spite of her demoralising kindness of heart." And Francis, not to

help Mrs. Mandell, but to help himself, had determined, if possible, to find out about the evenings. He was wondering how it could be done when the telephone bell rang.

"Is this Evans?" he heard. "I am Mr. Thaxter, about the money for your stock — there is some mistake, I am afraid. You sent an order for two hundred shares and only seventeen thousand dollars to pay for them."

Francis hesitated. "I don't think I understand, sir. Did your clerk perhaps make an error in counting the money? There are twenty notes, each of a thousand dollars."

"I counted it myself," Mr. Thaxter answered testily, "when I was making out the receipt for your boy, who is here."

"I beg your pardon," Francis hastened to say. "The mistake must have occurred here. I shall send immediately — no, I will come myself with the missing three thousand. Will you please tell the boy not to wait?"

He hung up the receiver and called for the cashier. "You are sure, Mr. Norton, that you gave me this morning the full amount for that stock in the Mutual Building Company?"

"Quite sure. There was a roll of twenty bills, I counted them myself."

"Exactly. So did I, and they were here under my hand until I turned them over to Brandon."

"Is anything wrong, sir?"

"I hope not. Mr. Thaxter just telephoned that he received only seventeen thousand."

"Perhaps Brandon will explain when he returns after luncheon." The cashier looked worried and unhappy.

"He has gone to New York," Francis said. "I think Mr. Thaxter must have made a mistake."

"I hope so," Mr. Norton assented fervently, "but of course one *couldn't* suspect Brandon."

"I should not want to suspect any of our clerks," Francis answered severely. The suggestion had startled him. "Will you bring me a cheque for three thousand dollars on my own account? I am going to see Mr. Thaxter."

As he drove through the dreary, slippery streets Francis rapidly reviewed the situation. He believed, as he said, that Mr. Thaxter must have made a mistake, but it irritated him that he had not thought of the possibility mentioned by the cashier. Had he, too, fallen into the absurd faith that Hugh Brandon could do nothing dishonest? Any other messenger he would have suspected instantly, but "of course one could not suspect Brandon." Why? After all, Hugh was human like the rest of mankind

and no human beings are impeccable. At least his eyes were open now. If Hugh had yielded to sudden temptation — and it was possible — events must take their natural course. Francis felt that he would even be sorry for the boy because it is always sad to see the wreck of a life. He would himself, under no circumstances, throw suspicion on Hugh; would protect him if possible, but the fact remained that if the young man were proved a defaulter it would make his own path infinitely easier. He could then believe even more in a just and benevolent fate.

With Mr. Thaxter Francis discussed thoroughly the loss of the money. It was the older man who narrowed possibilities until doubt hung heavy on Hugh. "And yet I can hardly believe it of him," he said sadly. "His family have always been honourable people, if sometimes shiftless. They can point to a cleaner record, I think, than most of our old families. Of course Hugh's mother is a fool." Discussion of Hugh usually ended with some contemptuous, or from saintly people like Mrs. Mandell, with some pitying reference to poor Mrs. Brandon. At last Mr. Thaxter, who felt himself rising splendidly superior to his own pride of race, frankly advised reporting the matter to the police, "although," he said, "the boy has many friends and in

a matter where you are so closely concerned, personally I should advise calling an immediate special meeting of your directors. There must be a sad scandal and it will be better that many shoulders should bear the responsibility."

The upshot of the conversation was, therefore, that at two o'clock, nine of the twelve directors of the Botolph Trust Company were assembled in the President's room. There were present old Mr. Andrew Mason, director in twenty companies, gruff in manner but kindly at heart, almost grotesque in appearance with his huge nose and his tufts of white, intractable hair; Mr. Lawrence Severance, who had an almost feminine sweetness of manner and was as obstinate as a mule — some said as stupid; Mr. Anthony Austen, beaming always, an Orientalist of some distinction and in religion a ritualist with leanings towards Buddhism, but with all his peculiarities a keen man of affairs; Herbert Strange, a professional pessimist — it was said that he had smiled only once since his wife, with whom he was always quarrelling, ran away with a young, yellow-haired musician — that once, when news came that the young man in question had shot himself; and Tom Warren, Mrs. Warren's eldest son who was the kind to satisfy his parents' hearts. These five, with Francis, represented the conservative element. They met at

dinner more often than at directors' meetings. In addition there were Mr. Saunders of the Beacon Col- lar Company, Mr. Jenks of Lynn, and the Hon- ourable Michael Sullivan, who was said to be a close friend of the Mayor.

Francis told them as soon as they were seated why they had been called together, stating first that the money was gone, then reviewing calmly and fully, but without unnecessary words, the successive events of the morning. "Finally," he concluded, "Mr. Thaxter urged me to report the matter to the police, or better, to call first a meeting of the directors since all the facts point to failure of trust either on my part or on Brandon's. The money was not out of my possession until it passed into his hands and was presumably in his possession until he turned it over to Mr. Thaxter. Any action, if any is taken, should therefore proceed from you."

"You have, of course, heard nothing from Bran- don," Tom Warren said.

"There has been no opportunity," Francis an- swered. "He was at the South Station and there took charge of the papers which he was to deliver in New York. I have no reason to think that he did not take the one o'clock train."

"He probably did," said Mr. Jenks of Lynn, "and I guess the three thousand is on the way to New York also."

Mr. Severance spoke next in his suavist manner, intended undoubtedly to counteract the rough words of the suburban member. "It might be of value in the consideration of this matter," he purred, "to state at once, Mr. Evans, since you have suggested personal responsibility, that we certainly acquit you of any blame. I think I may say that this is the unanimous opinion of the Board." He bowed, vaguely in the direction of the President and smiled at the others. "We may therefore limit the discussion to consideration of the question as to whether the evidence is strong enough to justify the — may I call it detention — of poor Mr. Brandon."

"And first of all," growled Mr. Andrew Mason, "it might be well to enquire whether up to this time Brandon has shown any indication of being a damn fool."

"Every human being is a fool at one time or another," remarked Mr. Strange sadly.

"I don't think I quite catch your meaning, sir." Francis looked at Mr. Mason rather nervously.

"Clear as daylight," he shouted. "I mean, is he cracked? Is Brandon such an ass that he thinks a messenger can abscond with part of the money he's carrying and no questions asked?"

Tom Warren smiled at him gratefully.

"Or would it not be more to the point," the cool



voice of Mr. Severance broke in, "to ask whether, in the opinion of the President, Brandon was under any particular need or obligation such as — ah — occasionally occurs, and which would make intelligible a sudden yielding to temptation of a — shall we say financial nature?"

Francis hesitated.

"Speak up, sir," shouted Mr. Mason.

"It is difficult to say," Francis answered. "I *know* nothing certainly, and yet — although it may be foolish to mention a fact which may have no bearing — for some time Mr. Brandon has appeared, in a way, to be going down hill. His clothes have been rather shabby. He has looked poor."

"This is very important," Mr. Severance said solemnly.

Tom Warren shrugged his shoulders. It did not seem to him in the least important.

"It appears to me, gentlemen," spoke up the Honourable Michael Sullivan, "that we're wasting our time, and mine, at least, belongs to the City. The case is just this: the Company has lost three thousand perfectly good dollars, currency of the Republic. It was stolen by somebody, or lost by somebody. By whom is for a jury to decide. It looks to me as if it had been sneaked by this man Brandon who needed some cash quick and wasn't clever

enough to know how to get it honestly. Now the thing to do is to report to the police as quick as possible. I'm not influenced to think anything else because Brandon's more or less of a swell. He's one of our clerks and no better than the rest. If he's innocent, all right. The jury'll find it out. If he's guilty, it's no business of ours to shield him. It's up to us to help the State to bag criminals, whoever they are. That's what I've got to say."

"If you knew Brandon," Tom Warren put in eagerly, "you could not suspect him. Hugh would no more steal than I would. You only need to look at him to trust him."

"The world ain't run according to the looks of faces, young man," Mr. Sullivan announced. "I never saw this fellow Brandon as far as I know, but that don't make any kind of difference in my judgment — and wouldn't. I wouldn't trust my own grandmother on the evidence of her face, or you on yours, any more than I'd expect you to trust me on my good looks. Our duty's plain — just to report the affair without letting any sentiment interfere, and I ask you to put the question, Mr. President."

Again Francis hesitated. "I quite see Mr. Sullivan's point of view," he said slowly, "but I can understand equally clearly the keen disgrace this would mean to Brandon, if he is innocent — a dis-

grace in which his family, and his friends, too, would inevitably share. If I were fully convinced of his guilt I could not, of course, in my position, oppose his arrest, but I am not convinced, as yet, although I admit, as Mr. Sullivan suggests, that I may be swayed by sentiment. Before we go further may I ask whether this Board would permit me personally to make good the loss, and then keep the matter quiet until we can be sure of our ground."

"The Board would permit no such thing," growled Mr. Mason. "You might have done it at first and kept quiet until you were sure of your facts, but it has gone too far for that now. We cannot constitute ourselves a body of private detectives."

"And if the Brandon tribe, family and friends, are so touchy," added Mr. Sullivan, "would they like to have the young man shielded from justice? I haven't got much use for folks that are afraid to face facts. The thing to do is to accept facts and then make other people see them the way you do."

There was further discussion, some of it acrimonious, much of it futile, but when Francis finally put the question, only Mr. Mason and Tom Warren were opposed to immediate action. Mr. Sullivan volunteered to put the matter into the hands of the police.

"Don't you think it can at least be kept out of the papers?" Warren asked.

"I won't tell them," Mr. Sullivan answered, "but I guess the Boston papers are about as enterprising as they are anywhere else. If it's news that will interest the public, the public will get it fast enough. Perhaps your friend Brandon won't mind seeing his picture in the front page. It'll help sell his poetry."

After the meeting was over Francis went immediately to see Mrs. Brandon — an unpleasant but clearly recognised duty, and one, therefore, which he would never have thought of shirking. He had never met Mrs. Brandon because it had never happened that an introduction was inevitable and he had never considered it worth his while to make an effort. After her husband's death, when she found herself poor, Mrs. Brandon had retired into a querulous and suspicious isolation. If the best people were kind to her, she considered that they were being kind through pity, and if any but the best approached her, she believed that they were trying to ingratiate themselves, because, being poor, she could not choose, and so they might gain a reflected glory by reason of her social position. As a matter of fact, she had position only in her imagination. She was well born, to be sure, but she had always been a disagreeable woman and had been tolerated only because of her husband's undeniable charm. Her son had been educated by Mrs. Mandell, sent to the proper fitting school and then through college, but

this fact had never prevented her from bemoaning "the terrible expense necessary to bring up a boy properly." Hugh's popularity acutely irritated her because she had taught herself to think of him as a burden.

All this Francis would have discovered for himself if he had not known it before. When he sent up his card she refused to see him. When he insisted she was thoroughly rude to him and he thought her rudeness only less disagreeable than her ready, despairing, but only selfishly understanding agreement in Hugh's guilt. The only disgrace she seemed to feel was that which touched her. She, he knew, would have accepted any sacrifice on his part if it could have saved her, nor would she have thanked him, because she would have taken it as her due. Her attitude, because it made him sorry for Hugh, made less tangible his growing conviction that the boy had really taken the money. And yet, he argued, as he drove to the Atwood house, was not Mrs. Brandon's belief in her own importance, her amazing confidence that it was the duty of the rest of the world to minister to her needs, a heritage which might have been transmitted to her son, blinding his perception of the rights of others when they interfered with his own needs? It was possible, and he answered himself, it was exactly this percep-

tion which it seemed that Hugh would most readily have admitted as the very basis of the ethics of society.

With this insoluble argument tormenting him, therefore, he went to Louise without his usual confidence. The opportunity of self-justification through the failure, under stress, of other standards than his, had apparently come to him at last, and he was not ready to seize it because he was not morally certain of the failure. He realised only too clearly that a ready acceptance of what was not yet proved could only finally condemn him. He could not say "I know," but only "I think," or, better still, "I am afraid."

Louise was waiting for him at the tea-table. She welcomed him so frankly, with so little of the reserve which had recently been characteristic that Francis hesitated to destroy the charm of her passing mood by reference to the day's events. But perhaps again, in this very mood, he thought, fate was working for him.

Keen, always, in estimating expression, Louise was instantly conscious of his lack of response to her own light-heartedness. "Something is troubling you, Francis. Have the widows and orphans been obstreperous, and has the little house in Dorchester proved a bad investment?"

He almost betrayed his sudden terror. Had she heard then of Flossie? and was this joyousness of hers only relief at having a valid excuse to break the frail bond of words that bound them together? But it was impossible. She could have heard only from Flossie and Flossie would not have dared to talk, would have been silent anyway, he knew, because she was, after all, a loyal creature. He had not thought of her since she left him and he felt now that it was she who had started the day all wrong. He stiffened with anger, but his words were quiet. "What about the house in Dorchester?" he asked.

"Hugh told me about it months ago," she responded lightly—"the house you were going to give Mrs. Mooney, or whatever her name is, and where we were to live after we are married—at least, that is what Reggie Turner suggested."

Francis laughed, a little hoarsely. "Reggie is an ass," he said, "and Hugh—"

"And Hugh?" she echoed. "What is Hugh?"

"I don't know, Louise," he said slowly and sadly. "I don't know what Hugh is. This has been a dreadful day." Then he told her the whole story much as he had told it before, but this time with a restrained nervous intensity that made every word burn. She was motionless and silent until the end. He noticed that her hands rested lightly in her lap,

that her eyes did not for a moment leave his. She was as calm as though she had been listening to a well-told fairy tale.

“Throughout,” she said, when he had finished, “you have shielded Hugh. Why?”

“Because I find it impossible to believe that Hugh could have done such a thing.”

“No,” she said quickly. “You shield him because you think he needs shielding; because you, like every one else, are in the habit of shielding him. Your ideas of fitness, too, are suddenly broken to pieces and you are trying to join them again by clinging to an old theory that you feel in your heart is shattered.”

“And you,” he cried — “you believe that Hugh is a thief?”

She shivered at that. She knew that in this little tragedy she, too, was finding a kind of bitter justification for the stand she had taken. “I see no other way,” she answered gently. “You have said nothing of his shabby clothes — but I remember. You have no other explanation for the loss but this, from which you swerve whenever you approach it. You have only stated what is on the surface of things. I have taken the only explanation that your words left open and ” — she added hesitatingly — “all the facts, all the possibilities that lie beneath the surface, only



too terribly confirm the theory which neither of us wants to see confirmed."

Francis listened, wondering, almost convinced, but without understanding. Had there been, possibly, some weakness in Hugh, some failure in the past, of which he was ignorant but of which she knew, that made her so instantly accept, almost as though proof were unnecessary, the possibility that the best of her childhood friends had committed a crime?

"You thought, perhaps," she went on, "that I, that we — all of Hugh's friends would rally to his defence. If you thought that, Francis, you were exaggerating again the class feeling which you think you see everywhere and which really is almost all in your imagination. There are some, of course, who will refuse to believe, but because he is a friend, not because he is, or ought to be, what he was born. We must all have friends who will stand by us in the face of proof. Life would be unendurable without such trust."

"And I believed that in you Hugh had such a friend," he said, greatly daring.

Louise caught her breath. He had had no right to say it, but she could forgive because she understood. And she answered as he had spoken, "I needed even more fully to trust you."

To Francis her words were illuminating and at the same time irritating. They were a straightforward admission of lack of trust in him, but, after all, that he had known, and they certainly implied as well, determination to accept in the future his more modern and more reasonable standards. They were confirmation of his belief that only through the failure of inherited ideals could she accept others, for she had practically said that the death of the old meant for her the birth of the new. He leaned over and kissed her hand — at the moment he dared not do more — and then rose to go.

“And you, Francis,” she asked, “what do you believe of Hugh?”

“I believe that he took the money,” he answered slowly but firmly. “I cannot yet explain it to myself, but you have convinced me — for you know him better than I. To save you suffering, I would have made good the loss and said nothing — but I did not know this morning, as now I do. And it is too late. Hugh must stand the consequences of his folly — and you — I know how strong you are. Good-bye, Louise.”

As he went out he felt a sudden sense of exultation. She, of all people, had been the one to convince him finally of Hugh's guilt, and in doing so she had placed her future in his hands. He felt

that she was his as she had never been before and beyond that it was not worth thinking.

But Louise, alone before the tea-table, sat rigid. Slowly, now that the need of self-repression was past, the tears welled up in her eyes and rolled unheeded down her pale cheeks. At first there had been excitement to support her. Now she was facing the ghosts of her past life. At first, in the crash of all that she had believed most certain she had been able to fix her attention on the vistas that opened to her through the falling walls. Now, through the dust of the disaster, it was hard to look into the future. She could see only failure — a failure that somehow included her — and she was sad as though she had met death face to face. She was sure that Hugh was guilty, believed it almost passionately because she found it so hard to believe. It was somehow, she felt, a retribution, a punishment for her helpless dependence on tradition and for her inability to see clearly the superiority of the man she had promised to marry. But if it was her punishment she cried out against the injustice of a chastisement that would make others suffer with her. All her faith in the use and beauty of "romantic nonsense" was dead, but its extinction left her world a dreary place. Her heart was bitter against Hugh, but at the same time it ached for him — and, like Francis, she could not understand.

## CHAPTER XI

THE rain had stopped when Hugh made his way through the bustling multitudes of homeward-bound suburbanites in the Grand Central Station to the street. Bob Hadley had left him to take a taxi across the city. The tops of the buildings were washed over with misty sunlight and seemed soaring upward like pale flames toward the milky sky that was all flecked with rose-pink clouds. Hugh stood on the sidewalk, jostled by the crowds, wondering childishly where all the people could be going. Somewhere, he supposed, but it seemed to him that soon all the somewheres in the world would be crowded. And still, he knew, when the light had fallen from the sky and the great city blazed defiantly at the stars — still the streets would be thronged and the tumultuous life go on, the life then of the underworld which loves darkness, and garish lights that cut the darkness, which shrinks away from the beautiful, searching sunshine. The bigness, the eternal restlessness of it all, almost frightened him, provincial and Bostonian as he was. The first sight of New York always affected him deeply, stirred him as nothing else ever did. It was to him a

maelstrom, sucking in all the evil and passion, and along with it much of the beauty and courage of the nation. There was no room here for goodness, for chivalry — all the fine old heroic virtues must be stained, soiled to the heart of them, he thought, with greed and the lusts of life. And yet virtue and goodness and simple purity there was, he knew, made wildly beautiful by contrast, immeasurably strong because they had emerged clean from the onslaught of the forces of darkness. He could only conceive it allegorically, as matter for great, soul-stirring poetry, as a stupendous pageant of human emotions.

Yet this, he thought, as he turned up Fifth Avenue and walked with, instead of against, the crowd, this inward vision of the spiritual significance of it all was not distinct enough for verbal expression — nor could be, perhaps, until he had tasted, himself, some of the bitterness and the joy of the life it represented. And in the meantime the instinct to look below the surface prevented him from clearly understanding even the surface. What was the life, really, that surged past him on Fifth Avenue in motor-cars, and cabs, and omnibuses? What were the forces that drew those other multitudes back and forth daily through the subway somewhere beneath his feet? Their various tiny passions — what did

they all mean in the sum of things? He knew the meaning of the leer on the face of a painted woman who brushed against him as she passed. He understood the greed that shone in the eyes of a Jew standing before a jeweller's window. He could smile at the haughtiness that was a convenient mask to hide the shrewish nature of an elderly woman in purple velvet and white furs, who looked over the heads of the pedestrians while her automobile waited for the policeman's signal to cross Forty-fourth Street. He could give a dime to the beggar child who looked up at him with hungry eyes. But after all, these were elemental passions,—lust, greed, pride, hunger. He might find them just as truly in Boston, read of them just as truly in books thousands of years old. Circe was not dead, nor Judas. Arrogance still smiled disdainfully at the hungry faces of children the world over. And yet Hugh felt that he did not understand these passions finally, much less these passions as they exhibited themselves in New York City,—for in being localised they are eternally changed.

And what of the quite ordinary man and woman in the street, the well-fed, the mildly prosperous? There was, he felt sure, a characteristic, common, in greater or less degree, to them all, and that characteristic the meaning and the result of New York's

difference. It was not a simple thing. It could not be defined, as so many defined it, as mere desire for money. It was that, to be sure, and yet much more than that because it was not purely selfish. It was civic pride or the travesty of civic pride that sees in a mean personal advantage the glory of the whole. It was the belief in New York as the financial centre of the world, the very mother of gold. It was the doctrine of complete individual freedom, issuing in complete bondage of the masses. It was profound ignorance of beauty resulting in universal restlessness; the flow and flux of a common consciousness, always seeking but never finding, because it had no knowledge of what it sought. It was each one of those things and all of them together, and it was common to all the people because all, proud lady, hungry child, Jew, prostitute, and the tired man in the subway train — all were convinced that only in New York could the goals of their various ambitions be reached. This was the secret force that bound them,—the spell of the great city.

Hugh wondered how it would seem to the unimaginative man, to Francis, for example; whether he would feel the mysterious terror of it. And he knew that Francis would not, that to him New York would be merely a stupendous mart of trade, an

arena of commercial gladiators where the best man, the most ingenious and the always ready, might achieve such success as would be inconceivable in Boston. Perhaps it was a saner point of view. Perhaps in this era of world progress the merchant was of higher value than the poet. Even as he put the question he answered it in the negative — and without vanity, because he did not consider himself a poet.

Unconsciously, almost, he had turned to the right at Fifty-fourth Street and now stood looking up at the number of Mr. Marchmont's house. The time had come for him also to play the business man, if even in a very humble way. Hugh walked up the steps and rang. To the butler he gave his card, scribbling under his name, "From Mr. Evans, of the Botolph Trust Company."

With the closing of the door the lights and tumult of the city were shut out, and yet, sitting in the magnificent reception room Hugh felt with a kind of despair that he was more than ever admitted to the spirit of New York. It seemed to him that he was enclosed in a sanctuary whence flowed the beneficent and baleful influences that dominated the city. The coarseness of the decoration was hidden under gold leaf, shining, and exaggerating what it was meant to obscure. The room was a bad imitation of Louis



Quinze, bad because accentuating to the point of grotesqueness every originally beautiful feature — “Like a Chippendale chair,” Hugh thought, “built by a dealer in Cambridge port — the last word in the degeneration of a style.” The windows were masked by curtains of soft, wonderful, old crimson brocade and between the windows hung a superb, old, black wood crucifix. Hugh shivered as he saw it. And yet was it not also a part of the colossal sham of New York, the most vivid of its travesties of holy things because itself bearing the semblance of the most holy?

He jumped to his feet as the portières at the end of the room parted to admit Mr. Marchmont. He was an oldish man, heavy-jawed, loose of cheek, with eyes deep-set, a faded beard, and hands that moved continuously. Hugh’s instant impression was of power not well restrained, of restlessness that must sooner or later bring physical wreck.

“You are from the Botolph Trust Company?” he questioned sharply.

“Yes. I brought these papers down to be delivered to you, Mr. Marchmont,” Hugh said, holding out the package.

“What are they?”

“I was not told.”

Mr. Marchmont took the bundle to the light,

tore it open and rapidly glanced at the papers, holding them very close to his eyes.

"Merely the papers in the Maddox case," he grunted. "Did Mr. Evans send you to New York just for this?"

"Yes. He said you wanted them immediately."

"So I do, but not so immediately that they could not come by mail. It's all part of Mr. Evans' game, young man — the damn good game he plays of making a good impression. Always willing to put himself out — to go down on his knees — always on to his job — everything up to date — knows when to smile and when to scowl. Oh, he's clever — for Boston. See where it's got him! But in New York it would never do. This sort of thing doesn't do here, for instance, this sending a man with papers the U. S. mail could handle just as well. It's wasting time and energy to make a good impression that it wasn't necessary to make. Don't set Evans up as a model, young man. Do the job efficiently, as he does it, but don't add the frills. People in New York haven't time for frills — and they won't in Boston much longer. What did you say your name was?"

"Brandon, Hugh Brandon, Mr. Marchmont." Hugh was amused, but at the same time immensely interested. Behind the bluster he felt the real power

of the man, something far more real, for example, than the more self-conscious power of Francis. And what was more, Mr. Marchmont's words chimed in only too well with his own, sternly repressed, and in consequence, he hoped, gradually expiring beliefs.

"Brandon," Mr. Marchmont said slowly. "Sit down, Brandon." He pushed an electric button and then sank into a deep chair himself, and pressing his finger tips together stared at Hugh. "Brandon — that's an excellent name. Your ancestors have lived in Boston for generations, haven't they? — Bring cocktails, Jennings. — What kind of people were they?"

"Respectable, I hope," Hugh answered, smiling. "Usually a rather dreamy lot, I am afraid, fonder of poetry than business — not as successful as yours, Mr. Marchmont."

The older man's eyes twinkled in the shadow of his overhanging brow. "My what? My ancestors, do you mean? What have you ever heard of my ancestors?"

Hugh hesitated. "I always think of the name as a power in the world."

Mr. Marchmont laughed aloud. "Yes! Yes — but you're a child. I have no ancestors. The name is me. I am the name and the power — ex-

cept now that I am beginning to be known as Ted Marchmont's dad."

"Is Ted Marchmont of the Yale team your son?" Hugh cried enthusiastically. "He's one of the bulliest fellows I have ever met."

"Then you're a friend of mine," Mr. Marchmont said. "Any boy who likes Ted — but then everybody likes Ted, thank God. And the name, Marchmont, that was invented for Ted. When he was at school I had it changed from Smith — a good name, Smith, but suggests nothing except Smith. Marchmont does. It suggests ancestors, like Brandon, so I did what I could for the Kid. I couldn't — or at least I wouldn't — invent ancestors, but I could invent a name that made them seem possible. Smiths, you see, don't ever have them. They have just forebears named Smith. It wasn't pride, young man. It's nothing to be proud of because you happen to have more business sense than the next fellow. It was just love of the boy that made me do it."

"But it seems to me all the more wonderful," Hugh cried, "the strength, and the courage, to work up to what you have reached, Mr. Marchmont."

"It took no courage to work for what I wanted," he answered, smiling, "since work was what I loved

and strength was what I had. The courage is in striving for what I don't like and ought to. I read the 'Faërie Queene' last month," he added rather ruefully.

"Last month!" Hugh gasped. "That would take courage, even for a poet,— to read it straight through."

Mr. Marchmont laughed. "I'm glad you told me that. I don't want to be a poet, but I want to know literature when I see it. That's for Ted's sake, too, I guess. I want him to respect his dad. Here are the cocktails."

"To Ted," Hugh said, holding up his glass.

"And to the man who likes him."

"That was one of the best. And now I must be off." Hugh said it regretfully.

"Not at all," Mr. Marchmont insisted. "You and Ted are of a build. You can climb into his dinner clothes to-night and stay here to keep a lonely old man company. And you want a bath. There's a swimming-pool off Ted's rooms. My man will show you."

"But I told Mr. Evans I'd be at the Harvard Club," Hugh said uncertainly, eager to stay.

Mr. Marchmont's eyes twinkled again. "There's always the telephone, you know. We'll ring up the clerk and tell him you're here. Evans won't mind

you staying here and making more good impressions for the Botolph Trust Company."

"Of course I'd give anything to stay, Mr. Marchmont. If it's not interfering with you, I will."

"Good! I usually have my own way." Then, to the butler who had come to remove the cocktail glasses, "Tell Jones to take Mr. Brandon to Mr. Ted's rooms, to get out some clothes for him and to show him the pool. Dinner's at eight," he added. "You've got three-quarters of an hour."

Ted Marchmont's rooms were what a boy's should be — almost bare of ornament, large and comfortable. Hugh wandered about, pulling off his clothes piece by piece as he walked, then went to the pool and plunged in. There was always an exhilaration about a swim, that did much to drive away a bad humour, and this swim, alone in a white marble room where potted palms and azaleas relieved the blankness of the walls, this tank above the city, its windows breast-high, so that, leaning on his bare, wet arms he could look down on the lights of the streets to the far glow of Broadway, seemed to Hugh the very perfection of swimming. He lay down on the marble rim of the tank, loving the feel of the marble, one hand reaching the water and splashing listlessly. It was complete luxury and peace, and Hugh was one of those who could appreciate the finest

flavour of both without being softened by either. At the moment, his feeling of young, clean, vigorous life was dominant. His mind rested on it. The world was all good, all pure, entirely to be trusted.

There was a discreet knock at the door. "Come," Hugh called irritably. He wanted to lie still on the marble floor, letting life, and the world, for a time, move on without him.

Jones came in with towels on his arm and Hugh scrambled to his feet. "I was forgetting time," he said. "How late is it?"

"A quarter to eight, sir," the man answered. "Your clothes are ready laid out for you, sir." He slid through the door and was gone.

"Oh, Lord," Hugh said aloud, "all sham after all." His unwonted mood of an hour earlier, of a kind of listless fear, of groping to understand, had him in its grip again. The straightforward power of Mr. Marchmont, the sane simplicity of Ted's rooms, the cold freshness of the water, had only lightened, not dispelled, his gloom. Even these things now seemed somehow to be only manifestations of some rarer form of the New York spirit. And the gaudy room below, with its solemn, misplaced crucifix — was it not another, perhaps more important aspect of the man and of his New York house? He wished, as he hurried into Ted's

clothes, that he had gone to the Harvard Club after all. The atmosphere there would have been sweetened, a little at least, with memories of the University, although Hugh knew only too well how quickly the best of such memories could be lost in the surge of the city's life. But it was not even that, not even college idealism that he wanted. It was space, freedom, clean, windy spaces and deep, limpid waters,— the full realisation of the feeling born in him as he lay, naked on the wet marble rim of the pool. He was afraid of men, of the great city whose ideals he could not understand. And until Jones tapped discreetly at the door he had been happy. Jones had been too discreet, exaggerated like the decorations of the reception-room, like the huge, tortured muscles in the legs and arms of the Christ on the Cross. That thought -- of the muscles — gave him sudden relief. It at least explained the crucifix which had seemed a strangely quiet note in the discord of exaggeration. He had been wrong. It was akin to every other aspect of New York — like them all, overwrought.

As he brushed his hair Hugh almost laughed at the calm of the face that looked at him from the mirror. Then he turned mechanically and went downstairs.

Mr. Marchmont was waiting for him and they



sat down to dinner immediately. Hugh, under the fire of his host's incessant talk, gradually forgot the phantoms of his imagination in his interest in the realities about him. Mr. Marchmont's talk was trenchantly real, not brilliant, but with a kind of searching vitality that gave it unexpected and compelling meaning. He ate sparingly and drank less, but the long dinner proved his unerring knowledge of food. Hugh was by inheritance critical, youthfully eager to convict of display, but neither in the dishes nor in the service could he find anything to criticise except the presence of one superfluous servant. Nor was he sure that he approved of gold dessert plates.

After dinner they went to the library, a huge room, a little too sombre in tone, but filled with books that made Hugh look with longing.

"What's the matter with you?" Mr. Marchmont asked so unexpectedly that Hugh started.

"Nothing," he answered, confused and ashamed.

"Nothing! Nonsense!" Mr. Marchmont exclaimed. "At least I can read a face as young and as open as yours."

Hugh smiled a little sadly. "I'm just a bit of an ass, I think. New York gets on my nerves sometimes. It has to-night. I wish I could take it on the surface as Francis Evans would — as any sensi-

ble man would. I don't belong here. It doesn't concern me. Why not get what fun there is to be had from it and let it go at that?"

"Because New York concerns every American who's good for anything, I suppose. New York is the genius of America. What we do now, the whole country will do later. It's inevitable."

"Never," Hugh cried impulsively.

Mr. Marchmont smiled. "Well, what do you make of it?" he asked.

"Nothing," Hugh responded. "It's too complex. No simple formula will cover it."

They smoked in silence a few minutes. "You're about the first stranger I ever heard say that," Mr. Marchmont said at last. "I guess you think yourself, Brandon, and I wouldn't be surprised if the reason you can't fire off any cock-sure judgment is because you have so much of New York working its way into your own sleepy town. The strange, complex, wonderful genius of New York," he went on—"it's like a serpent coiling itself around the rest of the country, strangling its life and giving its own life in place. It's like smoky air—you hate the smell, but you must breathe."

Hugh leaned forward watching him. He forgot Mr. Marchmont's sagging cheeks, the look that suggested the possibility of collapse, and was conscious

only of the fire in the eyes set back in "the deep, dark cavern of his head." It seemed to him, at the moment, that those eyes held the riddle of New York.

"What do you want to do?"

Hugh started, as he had before, the question was so unexpected, but his answer was instant. "I want to go West — now — to-night — to get away from men into the clean, wide upland plains. There, perhaps, I can get a new perspective, and see things as they are."

"You ought to go, my boy," Mr. Marchmont said. "Go and clear your brain — and then come back and write a poem about us all."

The butler opened the portières. "There are two officers at the door, sir, to see Mr. Brandon."

"Officers!" Mr. Marchmont cried, jumping to his feet. "What in the world do they want? Send them in."

Hugh, too, was standing. "I can't imagine what it means, Mr. Marchmont. I am very sorry."

"What is the meaning of this?" the old man thundered, as the two policemen came in.

They were very apologetic. "It had to be done, sir," one of them said. "We've got to arrest this man."

Hugh caught the back of his chair. He was very

pale. It must be unreal and yet, somehow, it all seemed a fitting end, a part of the tragedy of New York.

“ Arrest him? ” Mr. Marchmont shouted. “ For what? ”

“ For theft from the Botolph Trust Company. ”

Mr. Marchmont turned to Hugh. “ It’s a lie, of course, ” he said.

“ Of course, ” Hugh answered mechanically. “ It’s a lie — a beastly, brutal lie. Good night, sir. Thank you for a wonderful evening. I shall return Ted’s clothes to-morrow. ” And before Mr. Marchmont could interfere he had beckoned to the officers and left the room.

## CHAPTER XII

REGGIE TURNER walked rapidly back and forth on the train platform at the South Station. He was waiting for Hugh, who was to arrive on the train which left New York at midnight. Mrs. Mandell had telephoned for him in the evening and since then he had worked rapidly. He knew Hugh was innocent, but knew also that it would be difficult to prove.

As the train roared into the station he felt an unwonted and unwelcome lump in his throat which so absurdly increased that he could only grasp Hugh's hand silently.

"Here, young feller, get out of here," the policeman shouted at him.

Reggie gained instant control of himself. "I have a right to be here," he growled back. "There's a paper from the judge giving me permission. Besides, I've got the bail ready in my pocket when the charge has been properly made."

The officer scowled at the paper. "Come along then."

Hugh took Reggie's arm. "What is it all about, Reggie? I didn't do it, whatever it is." He had

on, still, Ted Marchmont's suit and in the raw morning light looked dishevelled and worn.

"Of course you didn't do it, you damn fool," Reggie answered fiercely. "Do you suppose I'd be here if you had? I don't know the whole story, but it's vaguely this: You were given twenty thousand dollars to deliver to Mr. Thaxter. He counted it after you left for New York and found only seventeen thousand — ergo — according to the superficial reasoning of Mr. Francis Evans, you took the balance with you."

Hugh did not answer until they were in their carriage, the policeman opposite, watching every motion. Then he said slowly, "Will any one — does any one believe a stupid accusation like that — of me?"

Reggie nodded and looked out of the window.

Hugh thought rapidly over the events of the day before, of his dash through the rain, his meeting with Bob Hadley — the episode of the drink with him was bad. The package of bills had passed from Francis Evans' hands into his, to his pocket, and then into the hands of Mr. Thaxter. There had been no chance of theft while he had the money. But the fact remained that it had gone. He went over it, and over it again, but there seemed no ray of light. He had not slept — was worn out. Per-

haps he might think of something when he had bathed and was fresher.

At the station-house Hugh realised the ignominy of it all most keenly. He could not imagine himself as the same man he had been a day or two before. The depression that had settled on him in New York was intensified. Treated as a criminal he felt like a criminal. He began to wonder whether he had not really taken the money. He felt in the pocket of his suit and remembered that it was not his, but Ted Marchmont's. Perhaps the policeman in New York had already found it in his clothes, at Mr. Marchmont's house. He answered questions and signed his name mechanically and then Reggie took him by the arm and led him into the street.

"Ought I to fee the policeman who brought me from New York?" he asked uncertainly.

"Fee nothing," Reggie answered savagely, jumping between Hugh and a camera. "Here, quick — into this taxi."

Hugh gave up his own volition, allowed himself to be carried to a hotel and taken to a room. "Now strip," Reggie commanded. "I'll draw a bath. Then, after that, you've got to sleep."

The bath refreshed him, but still everything seemed unreal, unbelievable. "I can't sleep," he said, as he came from the bathroom.

"You can, by God, and you will," Reggie said angrily. "Take these powders and tumble into bed. I can't waste my time talking to a man who can't even think."

Once more Hugh obeyed and lay on the bed, staring at the ceiling. "You're awfully good to me, Reg."

"Good, nothing. Don't talk, but go to sleep. Nobody will disturb you here." He sat down at the window and opened a newspaper.

"Have they got me in it?" Hugh asked.

Reggie made no response, even when the question was repeated, and after a few minutes he tip-toed across the room to find, as he expected, that Hugh was asleep. "That'll fix him," he said to himself. "The poor devil thinks too much all the time and now — well, he's thought his brain dry." Almost aloud he added, "Good Lord! I forgot to feed him. Too late now, anyhow." He scribbled on a piece of paper, "I will be back by noon," pinned it on Ted Marchmont's coat and then, noiselessly, let himself out of the room.

After a hurried breakfast he took a taxi-cab to the Brandon house. He had an absurd feeling that everything he did must be done as quickly as possible. To the maid he said sharply, "I should like to see Mrs. Brandon, please; Mr. Turner, tell her."



He walked about the room impatiently until Hugh's mother appeared. She was a tall woman, abnormally thin, dressed, as always, entirely in black. Her mouth drooped because she had found, or made the world a very unsatisfactory place. Her face was wrinkled, not with the delicate tracery of a charming old age, but with the deep, unlovely furrows that marked a peevish disposition.

Yet no one could possibly have mistaken her for anything but a lady. Her distinction was evident in the line of her nose, in her exquisite hands, in the way she opened and shut her eyes. Reggie was startled, as he had often been, to see in her face so much of what gave Hugh's its quality.

"Have you seen my boy?" Mrs. Brandon cried.

"Yes, Mrs. Brandon. He's asleep in a hotel. I have come for some clothes for him."

"In a hotel! Have they let him go, then?"

"Not that yet, I'm sorry to say. He is out on bail. Francis Evans arranged that."

Mrs. Brandon pressed her handkerchief against her eyes.

"Oh, how could he do it! How could he do it!" she wailed.

"Do what? Who?" Reggie asked, irritated.

"Why, Hugh," she answered sharply. "How could he take that money? He owed it, of course,

but they could have waited. Why couldn't he have thought of me, of the family name? We have always been honourable people — my family — and the Brandons, too, I thought. But now I shall never hold up my head again. Last night even — Oh, it was horrible — I had to demean myself to Francis Evans, a common upstart, a man whose father I never knew. I had to do it because he is at least honest — and my son is not. I had to plead for mercy — because Hugh is my son."

"You don't mean to say," Reggie stammered. "You don't mean that you — think Hugh guilty?"

"Guilty!" she cried. "What else could I think? Mr. Evans certainly made plain what happened,—and really in a very courteous way. I should hardly have realised that he was not a gentleman except that he was perhaps a little too certain of his own position. His mother is impossibly common."

Reggie felt that he was certainly and surely reaching the limit of his own patience and with it of his courtesy. It had always annoyed him to think that Hugh was this woman's son, and how he had grown up sweet-tempered and unselfish was a mystery. "Of course, Mrs. Brandon," he said, rising, "if you think Hugh guilty you cannot have much sympathy with him. *I know* he isn't. Therefore I am

going to do all I can for him and just now I want a suit of his clothes."

"You don't think he is!" Mrs. Brandon cried. "Then who is? The money is gone."

"Yes, there's no doubt of that."

"Perhaps," she said uncertainly—"yes, very likely it was Mr. Evans himself. People of that class like to make trouble for those above them. And he's very clever, they tell me. Yes, I think it very probable that he arranged it all just to disgrace the family. Of course there's Louise, too."

Reggie started. "What of her, Mrs. Brandon?"

She hesitated a moment. "I am not quite sure just what I do mean," she admitted. "Mr. Evans is engaged to her, of course, but she and Hugh have always been very fond of each other. Mr. Evans may be jealous— one can really never explain people like that—and if he is, there is no saying, of course, what he would not do."

Reggie was unconsciously staring at her, but without seeing her— just as he would have stared at a door-knob or an imaginary section of the air. What she was saying seemed to him so fantastic and yet he remembered making somewhat the same suggestion to Hugh months before, at their club in Cambridge. And Hugh had asked whether the study of history always made one melodramatic.

Mrs. Brandon was not making a special study of the Medici family, but she also had jumped to a melodramatic conclusion. Apparently, they were both in danger of raising a common theft into the dignity of a romantic crime.

"I think I will ask him to come to see me," Mrs. Brandon went on hurriedly. "Or perhaps it would be better to see Louise. What should you suggest?"

"I should suggest," Reggie answered, "that you do nothing at all. I cannot command, Mrs. Brandon, but I know that for Hugh's sake neither you nor I must say anything at all. As soon as Hugh decides on a lawyer I shall ask him to come here to see you. May I go upstairs for a suit of clothes?"

"Certainly," she said. "You know Hugh's room."

"I wonder," she went on, when Reggie appeared with a bundle, "whether I ought to see Hugh. I do hope he won't want to come home. It would be so disagreeable to have even a suspected criminal in the house. I think I should rather not see him until we are sure one way or the other. My nerves are in such shocking condition already that I am afraid it would make me ill."

"I should do exactly as you think right, Mrs. Brandon." Reggie shut the front door decisively.

behind him and jumped into the waiting taxi-cab. "To the Botolph Trust Company," he called to the chauffeur.

On the way down-town he tried to disentangle the threads of certitude and of dawning suspicion in his own mind. The more he dwelt on it the more Mrs. Brandon's casual suggestion appealed to him and, at the same time, the more preposterous it seemed. Francis Evans was rich — he was honest, according to his own code of ethics, Reggie was convinced — and that code would never permit the appropriation of three thousand dollars without legal sanction. It would have sanctioned the seizure of Mrs. Mooney's house, which seemed to Reggie quite as criminal, but he had a little of the historian's impartiality and was able to adopt temporarily a point of view other than his own. On the other hand, there was the fascinating realm of romance in whose mysterious groves the moving forces were love and passion and intrigue and high play. It was true that this realm seemed very remote from Francis and yet his love for Louise must have brought him to the borders of the wood — might not jealousy of Hugh have carried him into the shadow of the trees? Jealousy was the mother of many crimes. But even if this were possible, he thought, even if in some mysterious way the disgrace of Hugh had assumed

in the mind of Francis the importance of a stepping-stone in the path of his own ambitious progress, he would have brought it about in a less blatant way. In certain aspects Francis was a man of great finesse. Reggie, so to speak, seized his suspicion by the throat, held it up to the full light of common day, against the quite ordinary background of busy, modern city streets and watched it grow pale, proved its bloodlessness when brought into contact with reality. Then, rather regretfully, he pushed it into the inner recesses of his mind, ticketed for future reference, should occasion arise.

At the Botolph Trust Company he learned that Francis had arrived and went immediately to his office. He found him pacing the floor but with an expression that was calm and determined.

"Hugh is here, they tell me," Francis said. "How does he take it?"

"Take it?" Reggie responded, sternly repressing the suspicion that began again to show signs of life. "He's too tired to take in the full meaning of anything. Of course he can't believe, yet, that any one should really consider him guilty. It is absurd, you know, when we think of him — as clean and honourable a boy as ever lived — to be accused of a common theft."

"Oh, I know all that," Francis said bitterly. "I

know all the cant that will be talked about the impossibility of such an act on the part of a gentleman. It's marvellous what a multitude of sins good birth will cover in the minds of certain people, but over against that sentiment are facts. Hugh drank, gambled. He had been looking shabby lately — Heaven knows why, unless he owed money. And then the fact that I put twenty thousand dollars into his hands and that he gave Mr. Thaxter only seventeen. Surely you don't accuse Mr. Thaxter of theft! What becomes of sentiment in the balance against such facts as that?"

Francis spoke roughly and, Reggie felt sure, with sincerity. "Are you sure you gave him the twenty thousand?" he asked.

"Absolutely," Francis answered. "I counted the money after the cashier brought it to me. And for me that is the tragedy of the situation. It reduces the matter largely to a question of personal integrity — to Hugh's word as against mine."

"Hardly that, I think," Reggie put in, "except, perhaps, in the minds of the jury. Hugh did not take the money. He is incapable of such a thing. That I know, but to me it does not prove that you took it. We have simply skipped a link in the chain. What do you believe yourself?"

"That Hugh stole it," Francis answered, without a moment's hesitation.

Reggie sat very tight in his chair. It was the first time he had heard a direct accusation and it hurt incredibly, especially since he felt sure it rang true. It was not that his own confidence was shaken — rather was it the sudden realisation that others could be equally certain on the opposite side. “You intend to leave everything in the hands of the police, of course?”

“I must,” Francis answered. “The decision no longer rests with me. If it did I should make up the deficiency from my own pocket and say no more about it. I think you can understand that a trial will hurt me almost as much as it will Hugh — not materially, perhaps, but socially, to put it baldly. There will be no question in the minds of business men as to which is telling the truth, Hugh or I, but there will be in the minds of that certain type of woman who clings to the belief that a gentleman can do no wrong.”

“You mean that in acquitting Hugh they will accuse you?” Reggie asked innocently. “Really — what do you care for such people? I could gladly dispense with all the friends who could think me capable of anything so stupid as to steal three thousand dollars in the blundering way you think Hugh did it.”

“So can I, by Heaven,” Francis broke out. “With Louise, and Mrs. Warren, and the few peo-



ple I really care for behind me I shall weather it all right."

"Yes," Reggie assented thoughtfully. "Yes. I think you'll weather it all right. Louise will stand by you. Mrs. Warren — well, I'm not so sure about her. She's of the old school after all and her — well, it remains to be seen. There are bound to be some, you know, who will go pretty deep, who will not only acquit Hugh but who will condemn you — no, hold on till I've finished — who will condemn you for not understanding, as they do, that Hugh could never have done it, whatever the evidence may be against him. Personally, I should rather be thought a thief than stupid."

Francis turned very white. "I think we've had about enough of this," he said. "I feel perfectly able to manage my own concerns, and to cope with any charge that I know is untrue."

"Quite so," Reggie said, rising. "I wish Hugh felt equally certain of being able to meet false accusations successfully."

"It's one thing to stand up against an error," Francis answered, "quite another to face out the truth."

"So I have always heard," Reggie said, smiling. "Good-bye."

He had dismissed his cab and walked the rest of the way, Hugh's clothes under his arm. It seemed to him that nearly every one on the street wanted to stop and talk and he became more and more angry as he realised that the opinion, usually politely expressed, was the same. "Terrible that such a nice fellow should have made such a mistake." "Gambling always does lead to disaster, you know." "So tragic for his poor mother." Nobody seemed to remember that it was most of all tragic for Hugh himself.

He even met Mr. Thaxter, who stopped, like all the rest. "I cannot understand it," the old man said. "When he came to me yesterday he looked as honest, as sincere, as a boy could look. Faces are meant to hide, not to reveal, I suppose, but really I should have had as little thought of mistrusting him as one of my own sons."

"Then why should you think of it now?" Reggie asked impolitely.

"Why —" Mr. Thaxter stammered. "Why — the evidence, I suppose — yes, of course — the evidence all points against him."

"What if the evidence pointed equally against your own son?" Reggie asked.

"That would be impossible," Mr. Thaxter said

loftily. "My son would never put himself in such a position."

By the time he reached the hotel Reggie felt that he had a personal grudge against all evidence. The very sound of the word was depressing. Yet everybody used it, glibly, and no one seemed to realise how foolish, how utterly meaningless it was, when used against a man like Hugh.

## CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Hugh woke up about one o'clock he saw Reggie sitting by the window, smoking. At first he lay quiet, and as the memory of the last few hours surged back, he felt himself oppressed with a boundless sadness. He was caught, as it were, in some whirlpool of that strange, modern, business world which he could not understand. It seemed to him that the loss of the money was only incidental, something fortuitous, which, because it had happened, proved his profound incompetence to hold his own in the vast river of progress. And because of his incompetence he grieved now, not because of what people might think of the positive accusation. That would come soon enough, he knew, active, poignant suffering, welcome, perhaps, because it would make him forget his failure. "There must be no such word in your vocabulary," Mrs. Mandell had told him. Poor Aunt Edith. She little thought of such bitter failure as this.

"Have you seen my aunt?" he said aloud.

Reggie jumped from his chair and came to the bed. "I didn't know you were awake. I'll order the breakfast I forgot before. You had better dress while it's coming. I haven't seen Mrs. Mandell;

I saw your mother this morning when I went for your clothes."

"Poor mother," Hugh said. "She believed, of course, that I took the money. She often makes life hard for herself." He got out of bed while Reggie telephoned for breakfast.

"I must see to getting this suit pressed and returned to Mr. Marchmont. Ted may get home and need it, unless his father thinks it is contaminated. He's quite a wonder — Mr. Marchmont."

"Frightfully common, isn't he?"

Hugh smiled. "I don't think that's quite the word. He's frightfully — different, I think — from us, you know. And at the same time frightfully representative." He smiled again thoughtfully. "He sums up in himself — in his eyes I might say — all that New York is and that we're getting to be. He's material success personified, but he knows, just as New York is beginning to, blindly, that material success has little flavour without a spiritual consciousness of it. He read the whole of the 'Faërie Queene' last month."

Hugh talked as he got into his clothes, struggling to keep away from consideration of himself. But he knew it could only be temporary and suddenly gave up. "Now tell me," he said; "everybody knows about this business, I suppose."

"Yes, everybody," Reggie answered. "The papers are full of it."

"Couldn't Francis have kept it quiet?"

"Yes. I suppose he could have. I don't know. But there was no incentive to keep it quiet since he believed you guilty."

"I don't quite see that," Hugh said slowly. "How could he believe it, I mean, knowing me as well as he does — and not even talking it over with me?"

"Oh, it's plain enough," Reggie broke in. "He's one of those superficial people to whom evidence means everything — evidence — dissociated from motive, and character, and everything real — just evidence — something floating about in a void, the land of promise of all fools."

Hugh laughed. "And yet, as a historian, Reggie?"

"To the devil with history that's based on evidence — this kind at least. Why, Hugh, there isn't any, there's just absence of it. You are the only evidence — you, yourself. Is the past nothing?"

"Yes," Hugh answered quickly. "It always is in these days. Mr. Marchmont said that last night — last month — whenever it was I saw him. 'Life is like a football game under the new rules,' he said. 'There's no chance any more for the old-fashioned

steady player. It depends now on the brilliant punter, on the unexpected forward pass. The man who counts is the man of sudden, brilliant plays — in business as well as in football. And the man who lets slip an opportunity, who does not catch the punt, is down and out.' That is what I have done — somehow failed to catch the ball."

"But you haven't, Hugh. You talk as though you'd really done something rotten."

"It makes no difference whether I have or not, so long as the umpire thinks I have. I'm useless now."

"Nonsense. A triumphant vindication would make the world crawl at your feet."

"Perhaps," Hugh said, smiling sadly. "But that's just what there will not be — a triumphant vindication. Of course I didn't take the money, but if a jury lets me off it will be on the ground of my supposedly good character. There will never be any proof. I may have lost it. Somebody else may have lost it. And there will always be people who think I stole it. But that's neither here nor there. What's to do now?"

Reggie shrugged his shoulders. "I thought you had more guts, Hugh."

"It isn't that," he said. "It's just that I don't fit in with the times. I'm old-fashioned. I don't

understand, and, what's more, I shall never understand modern conditions. Labour-unions and strikes and trusts appal me. The world is all making for the suppression of the individual, for mob-rule. I don't want to be one of a mob. I don't want to be one of the blatant, successful creatures who dominate the mob, without the mob's knowing it. I want to stand aloof, to think things out for myself and now nobody will care what I think. That's all and that, from my point of view, is failure."

"In other words," Reggie put in, "you want to realise on your securities. You want to look really at what things mean, and then to tell other people what you see. Why can't you do it now as well as before?"

"Yes," Hugh answered sarcastically. "I can see that it would be effective — a man who wears a striped uniform, because he is convicted of theft, to write on truth. It would be splendid! But what is to do now?"

"Get a lawyer, I should think," Reggie said gloomily.

They settled on Randolph Byers, a young man whom they both knew and who stood already high in the profession. They talked together, and with him, of all the phases of the case, gained his enthusiastic support and took his advice. "Don't



talk," he said, when he left them late in the afternoon. "You had better get out of town, Hugh. I can manage that. Amuse yourself writing till we send for you. It's bound to come out right."

"I wish I thought so," Hugh said to Reggie. "At least Byers is dead right about my getting out of town. I know a quiet spot in the Berkshires where you can get me easily, that place we went to when I was training for the team two or three years ago. You go home and pack my things, will you, and meet me at the station at six-thirty?"

"Where are you going now?"

"To see Aunt Edith and then Louise. I've got to do that, Reg. It's better not to see mother, but Aunt Edith I want to see and Louise — well, I can't have her think me guilty."

Reggie shrugged. "That may be difficult to prevent," he said. He would have held him back if he could.

An hour later, when Hugh left Mrs. Mandell's house, he felt, as always after being with her, more confidence in himself and in others. There was a completeness and a perfection in her understanding of him that resolved itself into a trust so flawless that it made him, at times, hold his breath. And its power, as Hugh well knew, came from the fact that she was conscious of his weakness as well as of

the good points of his character, that, with full knowledge of the truth, she believed in his ultimate success, counting success to be a gift to the world of a little more sweetness, a little more beauty, a little more truth. It was inspiration to him because it seemed the ideal supremely worth striving for, because, not being a coward, he knew it would be cowardly to fail her. He had not always lived up to his ideal in the past and that made his determination stronger to keep the future clean. And to-day, particularly, she had given him courage in the tragedy of the moment. Mrs. Mandell had not tried to lighten it, but she had shown him how to rise above it, and in her old-fashioned way she had made him see that the real test of him was not proof or disproof of the accusation, but his own bearing under it. "To you there is no credit in being innocent, Hugh," she had said. "Anything else would have been impossible. You represent the type that we of an older generation long to see among the youth of the land, and you stand as the representative of a class which some people say is passing into memory. It is for you to prove that class still vital and unshaken. How? By holding fast, on the one side, to truth, and on the other to dignity. They do not always stand together in these days and yet one without the other is only half itself. You can be a gen-

tleman when your friends — or those you thought your friends — doubt you, and you can be a gentleman in prison stripes.” Hugh thought he should never forget the words, nor the nobly repressed trembling of her voice, nor the light in her eyes, as she said them. He felt the thrill of one who is chosen to champion a high cause — and he was only a man accused of a common theft!

The glow of it was still on him as his cab drew near the Atwood house. Yet he was conscious also of a chill of fear. He wanted to have Louise trust him. He felt that with her behind him, and Mrs. Mandell, he could face anything that might come. And the defection of either one would mean real sorrow. Alas — he was not sure of Louise, felt less sure as the moments passed.

He saw her at the library window as his cab drew up at the house. Without waiting for the startled maid to announce him he ran up the stairs.

“You!” Louise cried, half rising from her chair. “You!” He saw no welcoming smile on her face this time, only sadness and a kind of terror.

“Is there any reason why I should not be here?” he asked gently.

“Every reason, I should suppose,” she answered. She clasped her hands tightly and leaned forward, staring at him. He saw that she was very pale,

her face like a death mask. He knew that she had been racked to the depths of her nature and that could be only if she were in terrible doubt. For a moment his courage wavered and in the quick, scornful flash of her eyes he realised that she had seen it and that she had interpreted it as the fear of guilt. Then, instantly, he remembered the honourable duty that was his opportunity. It had taken but a moment, yet Hugh, as he had lost ground with her, had learned much. He knew now what pain he must expect and would always be morally braced to meet it. In his immense personal loss he felt, instead of despair, a new and deeper courage.

“Do you remember, Louise,” he said gently, “the night of the Thaxters’ ball and our talk in the cave of palm trees — the last intimate talk we ever had? And do you remember what we said then about looking beneath the surface of things, and of people? And of how it was better to accept the obvious — the curtain of vines, I think it was, over the red walls — when the obvious gave harmless pleasure, but how we added that in the serious things of life, in the great decisions perhaps, it was necessary to look below to the hidden reality which most people call the romance and the dream?”

Hugh was standing, looking bravely down at her, and he smiled as he spoke. She bent her head,

slowly, more as an acknowledgment that she had heard, than in acquiescence with what he said. "Can't you do that now, Louise?" he asked quickly. "Can't you look beneath what *seems*, to what you know of me?"

Then she spoke. "It seems to me, Hugh, that always until now I have seen only the surface."

"What do you mean?"

She looked straight at him. "I mean that until yesterday you were, for me, a man created in my own imagination. As a little boy I accepted you, and ever since I have looked at you — not at you, but toward you, hidden, as you were, behind that lovely picture of fine, innocent, joyous, well-bred childhood — and I have made you a kind of hero. I heard, as girls always do, of your drinking and your gambling, and I forgot as soon as I heard. What might stain others, I thought, would leave you unspotted. And why? Because I never saw beneath the surface — saw the surface, only through a haze of light. It was that old, old fallacy that I believed without thought, that a man, through the accident of good birth, was made impregnable." Her eyes had fallen as she spoke. It was more like self-communion than like speech. But now she looked up at him again and her eyes, back of her slow lids, burned fiercely. She had now no thought of his suffering.

“And then?” he asked.

“And then — this. The opening of my eyes has made me bitter for the years that are lost. Listen. I am a selfish woman and a proud woman. Without love I promised to marry Francis Evans because I believed that with his strength, with the respect all men give him, I could most fully live my life as I wanted to live it. But in my own heart I kept comparing him to you — or to the ideal I had of you — and always to his disadvantage. You lived in the clouds and his feet were firmly — miserably, it seemed to me — on the earth. His language was prose and yours was poetry. He called your ideas romantic nonsense and to me they were a finer way of expressing truth. I thought that he was honest and that you were honourable. And now! Oh, I shall never forgive myself for all the injustice I have done him in my heart. But I am glad, Hugh, to know the truth at last. It is agony — just at first — to know that my life has been based on falsehood, that the beliefs I gathered as a child must all crumble away in face of facts. But it has been blessed to find facts at last, to feel the ground under my feet and to see and learn to love the good brown earth. Sometime I shall learn to understand the poetry of everyday life, will live it as Francis lives it. And for myself I am glad that you did a

mean, low thing, because it has shown me the reality, the beauty of a man who, without imagination wins success."

Her cheeks were glowing. Her breath came in gasps and Hugh, standing rigid before her, knew for the first time that he loved her and that he had inevitably lost her. He was stirred as he had never been before, and yet all the time it seemed to him as though he were living in a dream, that she must be addressing some other man. He could not grasp the fact that she thought him guilty of that one incredible act of folly, and that belief in it destroyed her belief in him. In the silence of the room he heard the clock on the mantel ticking and knew that he could not leave without answering her. He groped for words but none seemed adequate.

"I wish you could have found all this happiness," he said at last, awkwardly, "without having to believe me guilty of a mean, petty crime. No good birth, nor breeding can counter-balance defect of character. Nor can they assure strength and virtue. But I have never boasted of either, Louise. I am not boasting now, when I say that both, perhaps, helped to make it impossible for me to steal."

"Do not degrade yourself still further by lying," she cried.

"No," he said sadly. "I shall neither lie nor

say anything in my own defence that you might think was a lie. I just came to say Good-bye. Perhaps I should not have come if I had known how you felt. But still, I think I should have; I wanted to see you."

"How I felt?" she asked sharply. "How could any one feel differently? The evidence is plain. But, oh, Hugh, I am so sorry." It was a cry wrung from her, from all her memories of the past.

Hugh heard it — the misery of it — but he was too deeply hurt to heed. "Yet even the jurors are asked not to decide before the case is tried," he answered. "I hoped you would have other evidence — of your senses, of the past — that would make you decide differently. But if it was necessary this way to make you happy — well, I shall try to forget it and remember only the years that are gone. Good-bye, Louise."

She sat rigidly staring at the opening through which he had gone and then, when she heard the street door close, threw her arms out on the table before her, and dropping her head in her hands, sobbed and sobbed.

The minutes passed and the dusk crept in at the windows, but still Louise did not move. She was silent now. Her sobs had resolved themselves into an overwhelming depression that gripped her phys-



ically as well as mentally. She struggled to make her reason mistress of her heart and for a long time in vain. She assured herself that she was happy, and yet her long, slow breaths shook her from head to foot. She knew, or made believe she knew, that Hugh was unworthy of another thought and yet his face persisted in her memory — his face as he went through the door and turned to say "Good-bye." She was very cold and the room was quite dark. She leaned back in her chair exhausted. And still, mocking at the claims of reason, there came the call of blood to blood, Hugh's silent voice speaking in her heart, pleading for justice, as he had himself disdained to do. Was he still to haunt her, even now, that she had finished with him forever? She tried to drive away the vision by thinking of Francis with the new, self-effacing trust of the last hours. She saw him, not in place of Hugh, but beside him, dominating, not through good but evil. The great jaw was obstinate and cruel, not firm. It took its character from the full, sensual lips; and the thin nose led up to eyes that seemed to have sinister fire in them. Louise cried aloud and, springing to her feet, turned on all the lights. The darkness was full of terror. She tried to call her father, but remembered that he was away, as usual, and even had he been there she could not have spoken.

And then, as she stood in the middle of the room, Francis himself came through the door. She looked at him, yet hardly daring to look, and at the sight of his face, of his startled sympathy, firmly and masculinely kind, she gave a sob of relief and ran to him.

“What is it, dear?” he said gently, holding her close. “Has something frightened you? Are you sad about poor Hugh?”

“He has been here,” she answered, her face against his shoulder. “And, oh, Francis, I want you to marry me, please, very soon — before I go mad with my own thoughts.”

## CHAPTER XIV

It was midsummer. The late afternoon sunlight, slanting through the trees, fell on the water and was broken into a million little sparkles of light. Far out on the horizon the Gloucester boat left a long, wavering smudge of smoke behind it, and nearer, between the Beverly shore and the low coastline of Marblehead, the white sails of a dozen racing dories burned like tiny white flames against the dark blue water.

Mrs. Mandell, sitting on her piazza which overhung the sea, paid no attention to the boats, nor to the flitting light on the water, nor to the great bed of larkspurs in full bloom, deep purple and fairy blue, over which the bees buzzed, and where an occasional humming-bird hung to dip his slender beak into the throats of the flowers. She was engrossed in the *Transcript*, reading eagerly and sadly the accounts of Hugh's trial. For the months of suspense were past and her boy's fate was being decided. They had been lonely months for her, with Hugh away in the Berkshires; sad months as public opinion, in anticipation of the trial, had crystallised and she had seen one after another of those whom she

trusted definitely take a stand that to her was incomprehensible and cruelly wrong. Her sadness had been accented at first by Louise's sudden and therefore undignified marriage. Hugh had written her of his talk with Louise on the day he went away and her quick sympathy had read in his words the deeper disappointment that underlay his distress at the loss of a friend. So, when she heard of the marriage, her feeling toward Louise had been, perhaps, more bitter than it had ever been toward a fellow creature. The bitterness had gone now. It had not been able to hold out against the cold misery in Louise's face. And then, when the trial actually came, she had almost forgotten other things.

All Boston and all the North Shore talked incessantly of the case and those who talked most were those to whom the *Transcript*, dignified and proper, was the only bearer of the truth. Therefore the *Transcript* had departed from its custom and printed many details. But for Mrs. Mandell it did not say enough and no paper could have done so. It seemed to her to tell so little, except of the obvious, and what seemed to her superficial, aspects of the trial. There was really so much more that was unsaid and that would be illuminating as mere words were not — the expression with which these words were said, the bearing of the witnesses, and much more, of

Hugh himself. She gazed out on the water, at Hugh's boat moored just off shore, over the green top of the bathhouse roof that showed beyond the lawn. They had meant something to her when Hugh was there to delight in them. Now they were meaningless. The calm ocean looked hard, terrible, as it had looked to her sometimes in the past when a storm had been brewing and through her telescope she had seen Hugh's boat beating around the end of Marblehead Rock, so far away. No storm was brewing now and no boy she loved was out in his eighteen-footer, yet the sea was cruel, as it had been then — cruel and heartless, like everything else.

It was a relief, therefore, when the maid announced Mrs. Warren. She did not want to be alone.

"How are you, Edith?" Mrs. Warren cried as she panted across the piazza. "I think of you all the time, my dear. I'm sure it's much harder for you than for Evelyn Brandon. She's in Maine, thank God, and there she relieves herself by flitting about and talking, to the despair of every one else."

"She is Hugh's mother," Mrs. Warren said, "and for that reason it must affect her most of all. Do sit down, Bessie."

Mrs. Warren sank into a chair. "Just because

a woman happens to be a mother is no proof that she feels things in the right way. I think Evelyn Brandon has always blamed Hugh for the pain he gave her at birth. I see you've been reading the *Transcript*. There's nothing new in it. Did you see the morning papers?"

"No."

"Oh, well, my dear, you must. Sometimes one longs for the sensational just to make one forget one's own feelings. I have a paper with me. Will you let Jane go out to my car and bring in my purple reticule — the large purple silk bag, not the grey one — that has only my knitting in it?"

Mrs. Mandell sent the maid and Mrs. Warren went on rapidly. "I read all the papers these days — all about the case, I mean. The *Transcript* prints some details because its readers want them but the really dreadful papers print everything because they seldom have an opportunity of dragging such good names through the mud. The questions and answers are funny beyond words, some of them; and some make you tremble for the future of the country. There is such bias, such an attempt to make this case mean the downfall of the old families.— Oh, thank you, Jane, that's quite right." She plunged her arm into the huge bag and pulled out a paper. "Here, this is what I want you to see

particularly, my dear — this about Mr. Marchmont's testimony. They say his evidence was very damaging, but, after all, you can just see the man, undoubtedly as vulgar as all New Yorkers of the newer sort, but a real man. I think I should like to meet him."

She opened her paper and read: "Question: 'Did Mr. Brandon appear to you at all nervous or worried?' Answer: 'He did.'— This was in the cross-examination of course, Edith. Question: 'Did he give you any explanation?' Answer: 'Yes. He said New York oppressed him because he did not understand it.' Question: 'Did this seem to you an adequate reason?' Answer: 'It did. I was very glad to meet a young man who felt keenly the tragedy of modern conditions and who had no cock-sure remedy to propose before he had thought things out for himself.' Question: 'Do you remember on what else the conversation turned?' Answer: 'Not much except this general subject. I remember that we also discussed the "Faërie Queene" by Edmund Spenser.' Laughter. Question: 'Did Mr. Brandon say anything about going away?' Answer: 'He did. He said he should like to go West.' 'When?' 'Immediately. He wanted to be able to think, somewhere out of the noise.' Now all that doesn't sound like anything

very unusual," Mrs. Warren went on—"just the natural, straightforward answers of a busy man, but listen to what the paper says: 'Mr. Marchmont's testimony, in spite of its damaging admissions seems to have made an impression in favour of the accused because it was evident that the witness was prejudiced toward him. Mr. Marchmont, who is known the world over as a keen business man, has also the reputation of being an equally keen judge of character. He has himself risen from the ranks and would therefore not be unduly impressed by so-called good birth.'—'So-called,' my dear! Do you hear that? I don't believe that our worthy forefathers would ever have put the equality phrase in the Declaration of Independence if they had had any idea of the coming influx of ignorant European peasantry who would read that far and think everything else mere twaddle."

"They meant, I think," Mrs. Mandell said gently, "that every one must have his chance."

"And it is interpreted now to mean a chance only for those who don't deserve it," Mrs. Warren retorted. "They don't rejoice half so much over the real success of one of their own kind as they do over the downfall of one of us. It may please them to remember that this Mr. Marchmont hoed potatoes as a boy but they would light bon-fires and have



torch-light parades to see Hugh put in prison. Mr. Marchmont is successful because he has risen out of their class. He certainly sounds to me like a real man."

"Still, I am afraid his attitude will not counteract the impression that his admissions will make," Mrs. Mandell said sadly. "His honesty one must respect. He has written often to Hugh — wonderful letters, the boy thought them, but certainly not refined as we should judge refinement. And they seemed unnecessarily hard on Mr. Evans, I thought. His position, too, is difficult."

The quick blood mounted to Mrs. Warren's cheeks. "I don't think I ever told you, Edith, about his coming to see me after Hugh was arrested. It was of course before his marriage. Since that shamelessly common and precipitate incident I have not seen him."

"Louise told me that it was she who urged it, Bessie."

"Possibly. She told me the same thing, but a man with any dignity would never have consented." She hesitated a moment, looking out across the calm sea. "It is hard for me to say that, Edith, because it was I who gave him his first real position. I thought he was a coming Marchmont, a sprouting pillar of society. I was a silly old woman, trying to

be broad-minded and modern and to live down my inheritance. Mr. Marchmont is wiser than I, and braver. He said, I hear, that he believes gentle birth, with the gentle breeding that follows, counts in character for more than anything else. He had the courage to say it — he, who comes from a farm and changed his name for his boy's sake — and I, who have had all the advantages, did not dare to admit it."

"Perhaps for that very reason, Bessie," Mrs. Mandell interposed. "You did not want to boast."

"Boast," she said, laughing. "I have spent my life in boasting — about my boys, my husband, most of all about my own ability to read character. But this time I made a mistake because I don't understand common people. I mistook the veneer for real old mahogany. *Did* I tell you about my interview with the man?"

"No. Should you like to?"

"Not at all, but I will. On the day it all came out in the papers I sent for Mr. Evans. I took for granted that he knew, as you and I did, that Hugh was neither a rascal nor a fool. I thought that of course he felt badly and that perhaps I could help him. When he came — it was in the evening — I tried to be sympathetic and found him unresponsive. I was blind, my dear, quite blind, not to see im-

mediately, 'but I went right on talking as I always do, all the time floundering in more deeply. I told him that we must all stand together to protect Hugh, whatever his mistakes had been in the past; that it was, of course, a case where an attack on his integrity was an attack on us all. He grew quite pale, Edith. He was frightened. Then he told me he could not agree, that in every rank of life there were defaulters, or some platitude of that kind. I began to understand. He said the evidence all indicated Hugh's guilt and then my eyes were really opened. Only lawyers and altogether vulgar people are so shallow minded as to let mere evidence outweigh the testimony of character. Character I had thought, was — just character, but I began to understand that it was something more profound than mere training could make it. I was so shocked, so annoyed with myself for being taken in by him — it was the first time he had failed me and it was also the first real test — that I am afraid I was very bitter. No, 'afraid' is not the word because I am glad. I pointed out to him how all those whom he wanted to call his friends would consider his attitude, and I am sure I frightened him. Many a time have I wondered since whether that wretched marriage was not brought on by what I said; was not an attempt to hold fast to the social position I had been silly enough to make for him."

"It may be," Mrs. Mandell said slowly. "I don't believe that either you or I, Bessie, can truly understand the working of a mind like Mr. Evans'. I have always thought, you know, and blamed myself for thinking, that his guiding star was personal ambition. But most of all I have wondered, though I have tried hard not to, whether he, deep down in his heart, believes that Hugh took the money. He knew the boy so well, or at least had every opportunity to know him, that I find it very, very hard to understand."

"Believe it!" Mrs. Warren cried. "He's too stupid not to. He swallows the superficial evidence as a goat swallows nails. He would handle the deeper, really profound evidence of Hugh's character as awkwardly as a cow would handle a musket. He is shallow enough to believe Hugh a thief. He is said to be something of a Puritan and he probably classes this as a crime along with drink and cards. His sense of proportion is as deformed as that of parents who allow in the education of their children no distinction between drinking and drunkenness, or between smoking and immorality. It is like that of the college president who said he would keep no member of his faculty who smoked because he could not bring himself to sit in the room with an immoral man. The person who does *not* believe Hugh guilty is Francis Evans' wife. She protests too

much, and Louise was never given to protestations."

"She is a strange girl," Mrs. Mandell admitted. "Yet I have always associated her with Hugh. You knew it when you told me of her engagement. She has been so exquisitely refined, so different from the other, round-shouldered, noisy girls who were introduced to society when she was; and she is so appreciative, so intelligent, that it was hard to have my dream shattered. I think Hugh never loved her — until at the end, perhaps. He was too accustomed to her to think of love. But it would have made this sorrow much easier for him to bear if she had trusted him."

"Did he see her?"

"Yes. I don't know all that happened. Hugh felt, I think, that the marriage was intended as a final declaration of her belief in his guilt, and as proof also of her complete confidence in Mr. Evans."

"Poor boy!" Mrs. Warren exclaimed. "He must think the whole world is in a conspiracy to defraud him of happiness. But he's wrong about Louise. She did not think of him — only of herself. She is restless, introspective. She was not in love with Evans but she was in love with success and he represented success. She is a woman of the old school though, and she had no idea, at first, that

to marry him meant to give up all her old ideals. She found it did and she was scared, and then the old ideals seemed to go to smash — *seemed* to — and she could not honestly believe they had, and she wanted peace, and thought she could find it by giving up her individuality. Evans seemed to her a pillar — just as he seemed to me, after I had tried to persuade other people that he was — and so she married him. But she hasn't found peace. She can't adapt herself to the second-rate ideals of somebody else, even if he is her husband. I'm sure she thinks of Hugh more than she ever did. And her face, my dear! Her face is a tragedy."

"I had not thought it all out," Mrs. Mandell said, "but at least the result, I am afraid, is as sad as you say. At first I was too disappointed and too angry with her to see the pathos — *You* didn't see even the possibility of pathos then, Bessie," she added, smiling. "But now we both do. Louise is a dear girl. I don't want her to suffer, even if she has made my boy suffer."

"I think I could bear her suffering quite philosophically. Every deserter has to pay the price of desertion sooner or later. Of course I feel a little guilty. Not enough, though, to lose completely the savour of the spectacle of a righteous punishment." Mrs. Warren took out her watch and then lifted her-

self hurriedly, for her, from her chair. "I must go," she cried. "Tom always stops on his way home to tell me the latest news of the trial, and I must not disappoint him — not to speak of my own impatience. What a blessing these motor-cars are. I held out for a long time but now I think horses an abomination because they get in the way — even yours, Edith, although your coachman is so careful of you that you are almost as easy to avoid running down as a voting-booth. And you don't take up so much room."

As they approached the door Mrs. Mandell reached out quickly, with nervous abruptness as always, and caught Mrs. Warren's hand. "Will you," she asked tremulously; "will you let me know to-morrow, if the trial ends then,— what the result is? If the decision is right — if Hugh is free — he will come himself, but if not — if there should be some mistake, I should rather hear from one who is friendly — not from the cold print in the newspapers — nor over the telephone; please, Bessie, not over the telephone — that never seems to me really private." She put her handkerchief to her eyes to hide the tears that would come.

Mrs. Warren put her soft arms around her. "You poor dear," she said. "Of course I'll come to let you know — if Hugh does not come himself.

I think he will. And I'm sorry if I've talked too much. I don't think I quite realised, Edith, I so love to talk that sometimes I forget."

"You see," Mrs. Mandell wiped her eyes and smiled, "I may be very foolish but I never had a child of my own, Bessie, and Hugh almost — quite, I think — holds the place my child would have held. It is terrible to think that he must undergo this ordeal — so innocent, and so good, as he is."

"I know, I know. Why won't you come home with me now, for dinner? It is lonesome here. You'll be seeing things in the dark. And then Tom can give you the latest news, too."

"Thank you, Bessie. You are always kind, but I am better here. I must trim my larkspurs before dinner. They bloom so much longer if the withered flowers are removed. And then, you know," she added, "I'm horribly afraid of motor-cars — even of yours."

When Mrs. Warren was gone Mrs. Mandell put on a little white, ruffled apron, found her pruning-shears and went to the garden. She began clipping feverishly at the larkspurs, talking to them as she cut. "It's all for your good, my dears. You are just like people, though you don't know it. When we have old, faded, useless ideas we get rid of them as best we may — and we're better for it. Only



some of us can't dispose of them — there's no one to help us — and then we just grow old and shrivel up — as I'm doing — all wrapped up in the faded petals of our youth. Oh — I'm sorry. That was a bud — not a withered stalk. There were flowers to come there and I took away their chance of life. I'm worried to-night. I don't see quite plainly. But that, too, happens sometimes in life — that the buds are cut and the withered stalks hang on — ugly, on the tree, not beautiful. That's what bad people are trying now to do to Hugh — to cut the unopened flower — Hugh who loves you as I do." She bent low among the flowers, letting them brush against her soft old cheek, caressing them because they represented youth and freshness and purity. So hidden was she among the great blue shafts that she did not see Louise, who had come across the lawn.

"I wish I might help, Mrs. Mandell."

At the sound of a voice she straightened suddenly and blushed like a girl. "Louise dear!" she cried. "I didn't see you and I hope you didn't hear me talking to the flowers. I always do it. They seem so human when I am alone. It was sweet of you to come. Shall we go to the piazza?"

"Oh, no, please. Can't we stay out here and you just go on trimming? I only came for a moment."

"I am trimming very badly," Mrs. Mandell an-

swered. "I am cutting off the buds — just as my mother did on the day my father went away to the War. Shall we walk down the path toward the beach?"

Together, silently, they strolled across the lawn. The last rays of the sun caught themselves in the silver lace of Louise's dress, twinkling there as she walked. At the edge of the descent, they stopped, and stood looking out over the ocean. The last of the racing dories had long since disappeared toward Beverly Cove and the only life on the water was a sloop drifting toward Marblehead, and a huge, square-rigged lumber schooner with blackened sails, slowly and solemnly making its way in from the open sea. At the foot of the path Hugh's little boat rocked lazily at its moorings.

"I think I'd rather not go down, if you don't mind, Mrs. Mandell," Louise said. "I'm very tired to-day."

"I am sorry, dear. You are lovely in that dress but you look worn out. Let me have a chair brought out here." Mrs. Mandell put her hand timidly on her arm. She wanted to say more but could not.

Louise shook her head sadly. "Whose sweet little boat is that?"

Mrs. Mandell hesitated. "It is Hugh's. I could not bear not to have it put into commission."

She felt Louise tremble. "Of course not," she said. "Of course not." Then she turned her face away, and Mrs. Mandell, confused, and sympathetic, and a little frightened, patted her shoulder as though she had been a hurt child.

"I really must go now," Louise said at last, because she must say something. "I shall be late to dinner as it is but I could not pass without seeing you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my dear. Come often. It is a comfort to have you." She wanted to keep her and to comfort her, for she felt that Louise needed comfort, but she could think of no words to use. She watched her go slowly, a little waveringly toward the drive, the lines of her shoulders and of her arms drooping as though she were an old woman. Then she saw her turn and come back, almost running. She took both Mrs. Mandell's hands in hers and looked into her eyes. Her pale face was flushed and her breath came quickly.

"Do you think he is innocent?" she whispered. "Do you really, deeply and earnestly believe that he is innocent?"

Mrs. Mandell drew herself up proudly. Her face, too, was flushed. "I *know* he is," she answered.

Louise shuddered. "Oh, I wish *I* knew," she cried. "I wish I knew." Then she went, leaving Mrs. Mandell alone in the gathering dusk.

## CHAPTER XV

THE afternoon sun filtered through the dirty windows of the courtroom. Within, it was intolerably hot but not one on the crowded spectators' benches thought of leaving. On the foremost bench of all sat a phalanx of Hugh's friends, among whom Reggie Turner looked most worried and miserable. The case was over. The prosecuting attorney had made a characteristic speech, intended to inflame class hatred, dwelling lovingly on Hugh's little misdemeanours of the past, lauding Mr. Thaxter and Francis Evans, aristocrats themselves, pillars of society, who yet had been honest enough, courageous enough to bring to justice one of their own familiar friends. In his eyes punishment of the accused would be the triumph of democracy over oligarchy, of the slave over a cruel master. The speech had inevitably been sensational, meant to persuade, not to convince. Reggie had writhed, mentally, under it all; had almost laughed at the ascription of aristocracy to Francis.

Then Hugh's lawyer had answered, simply, sincerely, ignoring the sensational, holding fast to facts and to the inferences that could be drawn from them.

He, too, had touched on Hugh's past life, but on his history as a whole, not only on the mistakes, which were the incidents, not the groundwork of that history. The result was a eulogy which had made Hugh himself as uneasy as it had made his friends jubilant. All but Reggie, after that, waited in happy anticipation of the verdict.

But the long suspense was beginning to tell and from eager whispering the audience had subsided into a mournful, perspiring silence.

"I don't see why in the devil they stay out so long," one of the fellows whispered to Reggie. "If I were on that jury I could decide in about two minutes."

"Why two minutes?" Reggie asked. "You know Hugh. It ought to take you about one-half of one second. But what if you didn't know him? I think you might have to consider a good while."

"With Hugh sitting right there to look at all the time! A fellow with a face like his — as honest as the face of the moon!"

"Exactly. That's just the reason. If it weren't for that face you'd say 'guilty' like a flash. Why not?"

The boy subsided. "They haven't shown any motive."

"They have come mighty near it. Hugh was ap-

parently hard up. I wish to heaven he'd thought to beg some of your old clothes, Brum, and then he might have passed as a millionaire. Shut up, now. Here's the jury."

There is no silence so sinister, so overwhelming as the hush that settles on a courtroom when a jury enters to give its verdict. The tramp of the jurymen, irregular, harsh and resonant, suggests the heartbeats of the spectators, and of the lawyers, and of the prisoner himself. Reggie leaned forward, his chin in his hands watching Hugh. The attention of most was centred on the foreman.

Hugh, sitting erect in the prisoner's box, realised that it was the climax of his months of waiting, and braced himself for whatever might come. He felt as though Mrs. Mandell was beside him, so vivid was the memory of her words, "You must prove the class in which you were born, still vital and unshaken, by holding fast to dignity and to truth."

It had seemed to him a little fantastic at the time, just a little bit grotesque, but now it was real enough to give him courage. He stood up, when told to. He was not smiling — that was impossible — but there was no suggestion of fear in his expression. Firmly he fixed his mind on the luminous fact of his own innocence, determined to let no mere words beat down nor shake the confidence in himself based

on that knowledge. Nor was there a trace of self-approbation in his attitude. He could not congratulate himself on having left undone what there had been no temptation to do.

As the foreman of the jury stepped out the silence in the courtroom seemed to quiver with its own intensity.

“ Guilty! ”

Hugh stared at first uncomprehendingly at the speaker. Then he turned toward Reggie Turner and smiled, a slow, brave, unflinching smile.

A woman in the back of the room burst out crying and her sobs jangled on the nerves of the spectators. Every one shifted in his chair — just a slight motion that stirred the hot, dead air and set the dust flying. Hugh’s friends in the front rows looked at each other — those of them who were not ashamed of their wet eyes and trembling lips. The judge rapped for order although there was no noise — merely the cessation of silence.

Reggie sat motionless in his chair, still watching Hugh, who had turned toward the judge. He tried to tell himself that he had expected just this outcome, even while he knew he had not. He could not yet comprehend why the jury, in spite of the evidence, had not seen, as he did, the blazing fact that Hugh must be innocent — because he was Hugh.



He only half took in what the judge was saying. "Three years." That did not mean anything in particular. "Three years." Why, it might just as well have been for life, as far as that was concerned. A man who has been for three years a prisoner is a prisoner always. Those who believed him innocent at first, forget, and remember only that he is, or was in prison, convicted of a crime. And the prisoner himself — he who was a man! Are not three years enough to transform a soul just as they transform a body? No, he thought, not always. And if this were true surely Hugh's intense mental activity, the very characteristic that made him suffer more keenly than most, would carry him through the years. Thrown back upon himself he would think, but always on the background of that inherited character which no mere misfortune could taint. That could change only through the exercise of an evil will. It was armour-proof against accident.

All these things Reggie thought of in a flash and then he realised that the courtroom was clearing. Hugh went, too, with one more steadfast smile. Reggie pulled himself to his feet. His knees trembled curiously and he was dizzy. "The heat, of course," he thought, pushing back his damp hair.

Hugh's lawyer, Byers, made his way across the room. "Hugh wants to know if you will go to Beverly," he said, "to tell Mrs. Mandell?"

"Of course," Reggie said. "Tell Hugh I'll get to see him soon if they let me. There's no point in telling him to hold tight. He never flinched and he won't, because he knows he's innocent."

"That's his salvation," the lawyer answered, "and also what makes the situation so devilish. I did my best. And you can never tell—the truth sometimes turns up quite unexpectedly. It may any day."

"We had better not count on that. Hugh isn't lucky." Reggie turned and made for the door. Two or three of Hugh's friends spoke to him, but he paid no attention, and they let him go.

At the foot of the courthouse steps Francis was just about to get into his automobile. "Can I give you a lift, Reggie?" he asked.

Reggie looked at him curiously a moment. "No," he said at last. "No, thank you. Perhaps you might give Hugh another lift. He needs it more than I do."

Francis grew pale, started to answer, stopped and shrugged his shoulders. Then, to Mr. Thaxter, who came slowly down the steps, he said, "May I carry you to your office, sir?"

"You are very kind," the old gentleman answered. "But I think I shall walk with Reggie Turner, here."

Reggie could not restrain a smile as Francis

jumped into his car alone and the fact that Francis saw the smile was an added satisfaction.

Mr. Thaxter took his arm as they walked slowly down the street. "Sad," he said, "very sad — the whole affair has moved me as nothing has for years. And this outcome! The jury must have been blind, my dear boy, quite wilfully blind."

Reggie smiled again. "I thought, sir, that when I saw you the day after the theft you were yourself convinced of Hugh's guilt."

Mr. Thaxter sighed. "That is why I wanted to walk with you, Reginald — that, and of course my natural aversion to riding with Evans to-day. I am becoming an old man and I do not think as clearly as I once did, do not grasp the significance of everything at once. My attitude was not as fine — not as true to my instincts as was yours. It was not as clear-sighted even as that of Mr. Marchmont — a good man, though vulgar. If Mrs. Thaxter will permit I shall ask him to dinner when next he is here, as acknowledgment. A long business life has made me too conscious of outward appearances, Reginald. Therefore at first I permitted the mere evidence to govern my intuition. I was confused and bewildered. But as I thought, I knew that you, and my boys, and Mrs. Warren's boys, and their mother, and Mrs. Mandell — all those who have behind

them generations of integrity and gentle breeding — were right in placing intuition in a case like this, above everything. They knew that Hugh was one of them and that what they could not do, he could not do. And so, after a little, the mists cleared for me also and I understood. Old age is sometimes slow to see, but when its final perception coincides with the quick judgment of youth the two are sure to be right. For many weeks I have wanted to apologise to you for that first misunderstanding.”

“Surely, sir, no apology was necessary,” Reggie cried, “but I’m awfully grateful to you for telling me. It’s a bracer to know what good friends Hugh has. I’m going to Beverly to tell Mrs. Mandell. Hugh wanted me to.”

“That is right,” Mr. Thaxter said, holding out his hand. “I’m glad she can hear from a sympathetic friend. And, Reginald, if you see Hugh tell him from me, please, how I feel and that when he comes out there will always be a place ready for him.”

Reggie hurried to the station. He had just time to catch his train. On the streets newsboys were already calling out the verdict. The case had been made too much a matter of class prejudice to be of merely local interest. On all sides people had raised

it to a question of almost national importance. They cared little for Hugh's guilt or innocence. They cared much for his conviction or acquittal as signifying, in some occult way, the triumph or the defeat of democracy. Had it occurred at election time the affair would inevitably have been transformed into a burning political question.

This superimposed political-social-economic aspect of the case, Reggie found, was what filled the columns of the papers that he read on the way to Beverly — an account obviously written earlier in anticipation of the verdict. According to it, the decision proved the integrity of the courts of the old Bay State. The ancient privileged classes had been compelled to bow before the triumphant tide of democracy. In a felicitous paragraph the mayor took occasion vigorously to wave the American flag of which he had never heard during the first twenty years of his life, and to point out that had the decision been otherwise, as he took care to note might well have been, it would have proved the wisdom of his party's faith in the recall of judges. The jury-system was demonstrated to be finally good — just as it had been demonstrated a few weeks previously, Reggie remembered, in the exoneration of a notorious political briber. All this and much more like it, he found, but not one word about Hugh, the in-

dividual — nothing of the facts that no motive had been proved, that the evidence was entirely circumstantial, that the prisoner's own past life had always been honourable. Apparently Hugh was not worthy to be called an American. His blood was too pure, perhaps, the normal American being a creature of mixed extraction or having acquired in a few years' residence all the qualities that go to make up the name. Hugh was simply a snob, because he belonged to a certain section of society, and the whole world knows that snobs are members of no body-politic — except possibly, the Irish-Americans would have admitted, of England.

Reggie was exasperated almost beyond endurance, but his disgust reached a climax when he read a paragraph lauding Francis Evans as the aristocrat who had thrown off his metaphorical coronet and purple robes and had courageously stood forth as the people's champion against his more arrogant compeers. He crushed the paper and tossed it under the seat. He did not mind that Francis should be called the people's champion. He seriously objected to his being classed with the Brandons, and the Thaxters, and the Warrens. But he had the solace of realising with a chuckling satisfaction that the first ascription of virtue would irritate Francis even more than the second statement would

please him. For the rest of the trip he looked gloomily through the open car window, cursing inwardly at the dust and heat.

When, finally, Reggie turned in at Mrs. Mandell's gate his heart was very heavy. It was the hardest task he had yet undertaken for Hugh — this carrying of bad news. Hitherto there had always been the hope that his efforts, aimless as they were, might be of some avail. Now the strain of hope was over, and the sorrow that succeeded was not even for him to bear alone. He must pass it along. He felt, as he walked more and more slowly, between the borders of flowering shrubs, that he was a brute, stealing into a private house to attack the owner, a lady.

He found Mrs. Mandell on the veranda. She was leaning back in her chair, her eyes closed. At first his impulse was to tiptoe away, leaving her in peace — but he was no coward. He shuffled his feet on the gravel and then mounted the steps. Mrs. Mandell opened her eyes and started up from her chair. "Reggie," she cried, "you startled me for an instant — my mind was very far away." She stood by her chair, holding tightly to its back, and Reggie saw that she knew why he had come. "You were very kind to come yourself," she said at last, tremblingly. "You have been wonderfully kind — all along."

"Hugh asked me to come," he said.

"Hugh, too — to remember me at such a time. He was brave, of course. I knew he would be."

"He was wonderful, Mrs. Mandell. You would have been very proud of him."

She smiled. "I always have been proud of him. Even when he was most weak he never lacked the courage to confess his weakness, nor to grow strong. That is finest of all, I think, Reggie — the courage to grow strong."

"Yes," he answered huskily.

Mrs. Mandell stepped quickly across the piazza and stood looking out on the water and at the little sloop, rocking at its moorings. "I wish you would use Hugh's boat sometimes," she said suddenly, her face turned away from him. "He always used to say that a boat was like a horse — it could not bear to be idle."

For a long time they were silent. Reggie crossed behind Mrs. Mandell and sank into a chair, his face in his hands. "How long," she asked at last — "how long will he be away?"

"For three years."

Again there was a silence except for the waves beating on the shore and the rustle of wind in the trees. "The larkspurs will be at their best when he comes back. If you don't mind, Reggie, I think I shall go to my room for a little while. You



will stay until to-morrow, of course. There is so much I want to ask you."

Before he could rise she had disappeared into the house. Reggie wandered into the garden. She was quite right in saying that the larkspurs would be at their best. They were now — a section of the sky, it seemed, fallen to earth, and with all the iridescent colours of the sky, as pure and as ever changing. But the flowers could not hold him. His thoughts flew back to the courtroom, travelled onward from the courtroom to the prison, and to Hugh. It made him restless, but it at least gave an outlet for the activity of his mind. With Mrs. Mandell, he had thought of Hugh as dead — at least as having passed on to some existence beyond his reach. And that was false. He could still help, perhaps, somehow.

He heard a sound and turned to the house. On the veranda Mrs. Warren, her finger to her lips, beckoned to him. Reggie ran to the steps.

"Have you told her?"

"Yes, Mrs. Warren."

"Thank God. I came because I said I would, and she will suffer terribly, Reggie,— far more than Mrs. Brandon, although she is only Hugh's aunt. But she loved that boy as though he were her own son."

“Why do you say ‘loved,’ Mrs. Warren?” Reggie protested, coming up the steps. “Hugh is alive and well.”

“Yes, I know he is,” she answered — “that is, I hope he is. But one is so unused to having one’s friends in prison, you know, that it is hard not to use the past tense. Tom says he was really splendid at the end — perfectly unconcerned and calm.”

“Calm, certainly, I should say. Probably not unconcerned. A fellow does not hear himself sentenced to three years in jail without feeling some slight perturbation. Of course he did not show it. A man of Hugh’s calibre can always repress his feelings when he is the one at stake.”

“Because he is a gentleman. The old word still has a meaning to some of us.”

“Why — yes — if you want to put it that way, Mrs. Warren, but I have known lots of men at college, fellows of the humblest stock, who would do the same. There’s a lot in training, you know — adaptability and all that sort of thing — that after a while becomes the essential part of character.”

“Do you think so, ever, fundamentally?” she asked. “Is not good birth essential? I pretended not to think so, once, but I have changed during the last three months.”

“I think so certainly, Mrs. Warren. In fact,

I'm sure. Of course a man of humble origin may show it always in unimportant ways, but not in the big things, if he's the right sort."

"You mean to say that birth counts for nothing in your opinion?"

"Far from it," Reggie laughed. "It gives a tremendous handicap, but there are lots of fellows without it who get along mighty well if they are not unwilling to learn — and to learn because they know there is something real that's worth learning. College turns them out every year, dozens of them, ready to take a real place in the world — I mean socially, too."

"How about Francis Evans?"

Reggie looked at her quickly. "He was a particular friend of yours, Mrs. Warren, but I am afraid I don't care if I make you very angry. Francis Evans is the one man I know who went through college without gaining anything, except on the surface."

"But surely he tried to gain?" she said.

Reggie shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, tried," he admitted, "but not in the way I mean. He tried only for himself, from purely selfish motives. He began with the idea that he had nothing, really, to learn, but was clever enough to annex a great many the superficial traits of the people he wanted to

resemble while he held fast to the essentially underbred soul that was in him. Terribly efficient in business, Mrs. Warren, he is socially only a *poseur* — I admit, the best I have ever seen.”

“You overestimate him, Reggie,” she said slowly. “He is essentially dishonest.”

Reggie smiled. “I suppose that is always true of a *poseur*.”

“I don’t mean that,” she said quickly. “I lay awake last night thinking about it. I think he took that money himself to discredit Hugh in the eyes of Louise. I have changed my mind since yesterday.”

For a moment Reggie did not answer. Then he said thoughtfully, “That’s a very alluring theory, Mrs. Warren. I’ve had to fight it off because I don’t believe it is true. Francis is too much of a coward to do it. I admit that’s about my only reason for being sure he didn’t, but it’s a quite sufficient reason in my mind.”

“Well, you know him better than I do,” she said. “You may be right. But in any case, how terribly sad for Louise.”

“Terribly,” he assented. “Terribly.”

“You are going to stay with Mrs. Mandell?” she said, rising. “I must go.”

“Oh, yes,” he answered. “I am not going to desert her now.”

## CHAPTER XVI

FRANCIS EVANS, meanwhile, after leaving Mr. Thaxter and Reggie, went alone to his own office. The Trust Company had closed for the day and he found only Mr. Norton, the cashier, who was about to leave.

"Has the verdict been given, Mr. Evans?" he asked.

"Yes," Francis answered shortly. "Three years."

"Oh! I'm very sorry, sir." Mr. Norton spoke impulsively.

"Sorry?" Francis stopped, his hand against the door of his private office. "Aren't you glad to have the thief convicted? It at least clears your skirts."

"I am not afraid of that, sir," Mr. Norton said firmly. "It is not a question of my safety, but of justice. I can't believe that Brandon would have done it, whatever his need. And, too, Mr. Evans, it was stupid, so certain of detection. Brandon was no more stupid than he was dishonest."

"The jury seemed to find otherwise," Francis said, scornfully. "I hope, Mr. Norton, that you will at least keep your ideas to yourself. It would certainly be unfortunate to advertise to the world

that the Botolph Trust Company allowed a man to be prosecuted whom it believed to be innocent."

"I am not the Botolph Trust Company, sir," the cashier answered. "Certainly I will leave public expression of opinion to you."

"Exactly." Francis closed the door behind him. He went quickly through the letters on his desk. Purely on business, most of them, two were very disquieting. One, from Mr. Mason, formally announced his retirement as a director of the Company. It was dignified, and in wording non-committal, merely stating that advancing years necessitated release from business cares, but Francis well knew that it was aimed at him directly, and that it meant loss of commercial as well as of social prestige. Savagely he picked up again the other letter that troubled him. It was from Mr. Marchmont, written by hand at his own house after his return from the trial. "If I was a praying man I would pray to have Brandon cleared, but the smoke that overhangs New York — and Boston is no better — is too thick to let a big prayer through and mine could not be a small one. Brandon is honest — as honest as sunshine — in a way you and I cannot be, but the fact that you do not understand it makes me deeply distrust your judgment. Also I have long thought you too self-seeking to be a reliable business

associate. I would not say this if I was not angry down into my very boots. But anger and honest speech go hand in hand. This letter of information need not add in your eyes to the importance of the fact that I shall in the future have as little dealing with your Company as possible."

Francis tore the letter into a hundred pieces and hurled them into his waste-basket. He was profoundly ill at ease, was beginning to be frightened, and this time with a much more real fear than had been the sudden loss of nerve which rushed him into a stupidly spectacular marriage. He took out his watch and saw that it was after five. He must go to reach home in time for dinner.

He ordered his chauffeur to take the more direct road, by way of Chelsea and the Lynn Marshes. He had in any case a good run of an hour and a half ahead of him and feeling lonesome, as he did, he dreaded the ride. He thought for a moment of taking a train, but only for a moment. The automobile was his, to be used by him, and by his friends with him. He felt sure that, left alone, the chauffeur would invite some companion to go down with him for the ride and such unauthorised use of his property Francis could not endure. It had been hard enough to see Louise take down and handle his books as though they were her own.

As he passed the North Station he thought of asking some one of his friends, who would be taking the train at that hour, to go with him, but checked himself at the idea of another possible rebuff. And, further, he knew that the inevitable topic of conversation must be Hugh and the trial. He was willing to mention Hugh that night only to Louise, and that only because he knew he must, and because Louise, above all others, believed, or, at least had believed, Hugh guilty. He was passing the Charlestown Navy Yards and the walls were unpleasantly suggestive of a prison. After all, did Louise really believe what she so constantly asserted? Francis tried to read his paper, but the roads were too bad. Did Louise believe it? He was furious with himself that he could not answer the question instantly. His inability argued that he did not yet know her — not yet — after four months of married life. He had expected her to think as he thought and she showed undreamed of persistence in thinking as she pleased, even in little ways. She had insisted that his books should go with them to the North Shore and had then further irritated him by reading them — his books, that were never meant to be opened except by him.

It was true that in her attitude toward Hugh Louise apparently stood by him. It was the least



she could do, he thought, since she it was who had made him definitely believe in the boy's guilt. She had accepted his statements from the first — almost too readily. He understood fully now that she had wanted only to build up her trust in him and therefore had seized the first suggestion which justified him in her eyes by destroying — the only way — her belief in her old ideals. To make her position as his wife-to-be tenable in her own soul she had caught at the opportunity that would make final and real her break with what he had called romantic nonsense, with what she had believed to be a higher interpretation of life. But as her change had been selfish he wondered whether it had been complete. Francis remembered that during the night so long ago, when Hugh, drunk with wine and misery, had come to his room to make confession, this solution of the matter had dawned in his mind — the evidence to Louise of the weakness of her ideal through its degradation. But then he had not realised how eager she would be for just such evidence, how instantly she would accept it. Nor even in her acceptance had he realised how superficial it might be, a lid fastened over the vent of a volcano. So far the lid had held, he thought, but was it not merely a restraint of the forces underneath, having no subtle power to transform them?

He lay back in the seat of his car and closed his eyes wearily. The rising of Chelsea from its ashes interested him not at all, nor could any vision by the wayside affect the bitter intensity of his thoughts. He was not glad to be going home because he was not going to his own. For the moment he felt less able to meet his wife's polite concurrence with his views, than the express contradiction of others. In the second case he knew, at least, where he stood. In the first there was overmastering doubt. He was afraid that Louise read him more deeply than he could read her, that perhaps she had penetrated to the bulwarked heart of him which still secretly denied Hugh's guilt. He was afraid of this, and afraid also that she herself wore a mask through which he could not see, that beneath the mask her wish to believe had been slain by the forces of that profounder nature which persisted in denial because it had so much in common with Hugh, so little with him. Worst of all for him, hers was a nature which he could never dominate, because it is impossible to dominate, or even influence, that with which one never comes into contact. Francis was beginning to realise that traits which he had considered superficial were in reality fundamental, to see that a superstition may be so powerful as to be a basic principle of society. This superstition as to blood,

for example, as to gentility, with its consequent truthfulness and honour, was demonstrably false — as false as the ideals of mediæval chivalry — yet how eagerly the old families rallied to its standard, how valiantly did they defend one of themselves who was accused of forgetting his obligations. There was no reason to think that Louise, in her heart of hearts, believed otherwise than her friends. Certainly, if she did, it was because of some strange breaking away from the type inherent in her, not from any influence that he might have had.

As his car flew onward, leaving behind the city of Lynn with its shoe-factories and its cinematograph theatres and its dirt, speeding through Salem, where the bustle of business crowded against the vacant shell of the old-time aristocracy, Francis began to understand that the solidarity of this old superstition was — in Boston at least — a far more durable force than he had ever dreamed, far more vital, perhaps, more native to the soil, more enduring than the vociferous democracy which was the order of the day. Men and women, whom, after years of patient endeavour and patient waiting, he called his friends, had rushed to the defence of Hugh, and shunned him, not because they had believed him guilty, but because he said he believed Hugh guilty. If it had not been for his marriage he might have

trimmed his sails, altered his course, at the first warning of storm. But he had married Louise, one of those — he had not known she was almost the only one — who sided with him; had married her on a platform, as the world took it, of condemnation of Hugh, and because of this public proclamation his hands had been tied. He was inclined to blame her, therefore, for the trouble which met him on every side — for Mr. Mason's resignation, for Mr. Marchmont's contempt, for Mrs. Warren's coldness — and to blame her the more deeply now that he had almost persuaded himself that she had never sincerely believed Hugh guilty. He could see in her action only the selfish motive of holding him, without thought of the consequences which would affect only him, not her, because her birthright made her safe. In the retrospect he forgot that the marriage had been for him quite as much as for her that act of the drowning person who seizes at a straw.

It was, therefore, with no sense of happy anticipation that he covered the last few miles of smooth, tree-shaded road along the shore; with no thought of the stately entrances to the newer houses, nor appreciation of the far lovelier old estates where Louise's and Mrs. Warren's friends spent their summers. His dread became acute when he turned into

his own avenue and at his very steps he had the impulse to turn back.

On the long, cool, vine-wreathed piazza he found Louise and his sister Cynthia. Louise came to him, exquisite, he saw, in her white dress, and then Cynthia scurried across the floor to kiss him shyly. It gave him a moment of delight — this hurried, adoring greeting, very different from his wife's irreproachable and cold cordiality. His sister worshipped him and for her, he was sure, anything would be true which he stated to be true.

"You are late, Francis," Louise said quietly, not questioning, not disturbed, but stating a simple fact. Her calmness irritated him because he knew that underneath were questions crying for answer.

"I was delayed at the office over some late mail."

Then Cynthia could not restrain herself. "Is the case over? Is Hugh free?"

"He got three years," Francis answered. "Isn't it about time to dress for dinner?"

"Three years!" Cynthia cried. "Oh, how terrible! I'm sure he didn't do it."

"You — sure he didn't do it? You?" Francis spoke loudly in his exasperation. "How long have you thought that way? — so absolutely contrary to what you know I believe."

"From the first," Cynthia answered, beginning to

cry. "Mother and I always knew you were mistaken. Hugh couldn't — just couldn't have done it." His mother too! "You'd know it from looking at him, even if you never heard him speak — and after that — well, you're just all the more certain." She turned away and suddenly fled from the room.

Louise stood absolutely still. She had not moved since Cynthia asked the question. Now she smiled. "It's curious," she said, "how excited Cynthia becomes over this. She is usually so self-possessed. I have sometimes wondered whether she thought herself in love with Hugh."

"Has she spoken of it before?"

"Oh, yes, often, when she has been alone with me."

"And you never told me?" Francis asked angrily.

Louise raised her eyebrows in a kind of disdainful surprise. "No, why should I? It would simply have added to your cares."

"I ought to have known," he said and then, impelled against his will to ask — "What do you think of the outcome?"

"I?" she said quietly. "It is no surprise. I suppose if we believe a man guilty of theft we must expect him to be punished. I think you said it was time to dress for dinner. Cynthia is going out, so don't, if you are too tired. We shall be quite alone."

He wanted to pound something, as Flossie had pounded the arms of her chair in his office months before, when he had not answered her. He smiled at the recollection, and somehow the remembrance of Flossie calmed him. He had not thought of her for weeks, hardly at all since that day she asked him whether there would still be a place for her. There had not been, so far, but he wondered now, as he looked at his wife's coldly impassive face, whether he had not perhaps been mistaken. The other was a woman whom he could understand, who adored him frankly and completely, who would never criticise him in her heart while her lips smiled. With her he would never feel the sting of a veiled satire because she had no subtlety wherewith to evolve satire. The very contrast between the woman of his thoughts, and the cold, patrician woman standing patiently before him, made him admire Louise as he had seldom done before because she had in perfection the qualities he secretly wished in himself, while at the same time it made him conscious of a far different, lower need, which she would never satisfy — the need of adulation, of indiscriminating praise. If he told Flossie that Hugh was guilty she would accept the statement as final, not weighing the reasons, but accepting simply because he said so. He felt at that moment that he wanted to see her and to tell her.

“ Well,” Louise said quietly after a minute, during which she seemed to be waiting for his answer, “ will you sit down and read the paper while I order a cocktail for you ? ”

“ No, thank you,” he said. “ I should feel better to have a bath and dress. I shall be down in half an hour.”

She nodded and turned to the table on which lay an open book. Then, when Francis had gone, she seated herself in a low cane chair, the book in her hand. But she did not read. Instead she gazed blindly into the wilderness of trees, beyond which one felt the ocean. Her body and her brain were numb. She did not think of Hugh, except indirectly. It seemed to her that to think of him would only be further to dishonour him unless she gave way once and for all to that inner consciousness which pleaded for him ceaselessly; and that she could not yet do — did not dare, for her own sake, to do. As the weeks passed she had clung always more desperately, because less confidently, to her sudden belief in Hugh's failure to fulfil her ideal, since only in this failure could she find reason to idealise Francis. And as she grew to know her husband better the task became daily more difficult. His efficiency, his worldly success, that had loomed so large at first, shrank to a pitiable insignificance when set over against the multitude of insignificant details



that go to make up the happiness or misery of married life. It seemed to her now that all she had left was her husband's strength and honesty and that even these would prove themselves ghosts, like all the rest, unless his charge against Hugh were true — and unless he believed it true. She had long since forgotten that it had been her own influence, thrown into the balance at a critical moment which had made him believe. However acquired, his faith had become her only anchor. And now even that faith she had begun to doubt; more this evening than ever before and the thought was terror. If Francis had allowed Hugh to be convicted, believing him innocent, she could never again trust his word; his strength would resolve itself into mere, ignoble subtlety. "I do not know. I do not know," she whispered. "I do not *want* to know."

So, in the gathering twilight, she sat motionless while the shadows crept up from the ground and became a part of their parent trees, while the first red stars burned through the misty sky and the birds twittered themselves to sleep. Still she did not think of Hugh but much of Mrs. Mandell, who had the right to suffer in his trouble; thought of her lovingly and with an agony of envy. Cynthia came down, kissed her cold cheek, and rattled away in a

hired carriage. Her fox-terrier came bounding on to the veranda, back from some exciting foraging expedition, rubbed his nose against her feet and lay down to sleep. Still she sat, gazing out with frightened, unseeing eyes, until Francis, coming downstairs, turned on the veranda lights.

Then she rose, slowly and wearily, and went to meet him.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting," he said.

"Oh, no," she answered. "I dressed early so that I might enjoy the twilight while you and Cynthia were changing. Shall we go to dinner?"

She took his arm and they went in. The dining-room was simple, as befitted a country-house — large, low-studded, panelled in dark wood against which were hung a few good etchings that Louise had inherited from her mother. Only the table was lighted by a hanging light with a silk shade that threw the rest of the room into shadow. The glimmer of beautiful old Irish glass gave out a colour and a radiance far more satisfying and restful than the usual silver.

"Don't you ever get tired of white flowers on the table?" Francis asked.

"No," Louise answered, "never. They always satisfy me. Every one, I think, loves white flowers

most of all. But if you want others it will be very simple to change."

"Only as a change," he said. "People love white flowers because there are red ones."

"To-morrow you shall have red ones. When something seems to me perfect I never feel the need of contrast."

"You have absolute standards then. It needs imagination to keep them fresh."

"Yes," she responded. "It needs imagination, but how sad life would be without imagination."

"And how tragic with it," he said.

"Tragic — yes, I suppose it is," she repeated, "at least if one tries to realise the standards. I remember hearing some one say, long ago, that life must be tragic unless one's ideals were purely imaginary. The poets who sang exquisite hymns in praise of their mistresses were singing to an ideal woman who existed only in their minds. There must have been the tragedy of disillusionment for them when they tried to test a real woman by the touchstone of the imagined ideal."

"Through marriage, for example?"

"Yes," she answered, looking at him across the white flowers.

So their conversation during dinner, forced into safer lines, into talk of books and of travel, artificial and formal because always straining toward

and avoiding the subject that filled both their minds, languished finally into a nervous silence.

On the veranda, later, Louise asked to have the lights out. Any pretence of reading would have been too palpable a pretence, so they sat in the darkness, tense, each waiting for the other to speak. Neither was thinking of Hugh as an individual. Each thought of little else but of Hugh as accidentally the supreme influence, for good or for bad, in their common life. It seemed to Louise, however, that by reference to the personal aspect of the question the tension might be broken, so it was with forethought that she said, "I suppose three years in prison is a normal punishment for theft."

Francis started, thankful for the protection of the night. "Rather light, I should suppose. The judge was probably inclined to be lenient."

"Why? The case was proved." She put it almost as a question. It meant so much to her — this proof, this certitude, that she had expected would put her doubts at rest. She waited breathlessly, hoping for a vigorous answer.

But Francis had none to give. "No judge can feel the complete assurance in circumstantial evidence that direct evidence would give him."

"Yet you, Francis, who knew him — all the good in him — you have no doubts."

"As president of the Botolph Trust Company,"

he said, "it was my duty to take every means to recover stolen money."

She drew in her breath sharply. "By accusation of an innocent man?"

"By allowing the law to take its course," he said bitterly. "As president of the Company I am unable to believe Hugh innocent."

"And so you came to me, and proved to me, as president of the Company, that Hugh was guilty," she said in a low but penetrating voice. "And yet you let me marry you as a man."

Francis jumped to his feet and kicked away his chair violently. "As a man," he cried. "Yes — as a man to whom you had been engaged for months, while Hugh still strutted in all the plumage of birth and romance. You saw reasons for marrying me then. I have not changed."

"From the beginning," she said, "my faith in you was based on your honesty. As president of no company could you honestly dissociate yourself from your personality, and more than that, you wanted me to believe that you, as a man, felt what you say you felt only as the mouthpiece of a corporation."

"This is nonsense," he said angrily, "this splitting of hairs. What is more — I did not say it."

"To me," she answered, ignoring his last words, "it is profoundly important. Once more I must

build up my own life — this time on knowledge of the grim realities. I told Hugh my feet were at last on the solid earth. Was it only another mist?"

Francis stood before her menacingly. He was infuriated and at the same time bewildered. And he knew that she had no more fear of him than of the wind or of a shadow. "Build up your life as you will," he said. "Misunderstand me as you will. Replace facts with fancies if you must. But remember that the world of men believes in me and men are quick to discern shams. Your feet will never truly stand on solid ground unless you stand with me."

She laughed — a low, mirthless, pitying laugh. "I am afraid the world of men no longer believes in you," she said.

Francis shivered. "Why?" he muttered. Then he remembered Mr. Thaxter's letter and Mr. Marchmont's, and the cashier's sudden declaration of faith in Hugh, and suddenly he turned away and left her.

## CHAPTER XVII

FRANCIS had breakfast alone the next morning. He had ordered his car for half-past seven and when the time came he was waiting on the steps. During the night the wind had blessedly shifted and the morning air was full of life and sparkle. Sensitive always to the influence of the weather, Francis felt the gloom that was over him lift. The world, after all, might not be such an inhospitable place and if his own house was to be unpleasant for a few days, and his wife to wear a tragic mask, he could easily find amusement elsewhere. There were people still, thank God, who could accept things as they were, who found no morbid pleasure in dissecting motives and in arguing possibilities but who were willing joyously to take the happiness that fell to their lot and to forget the trials. Flossie, for example, might cry and storm, but her moods were momentary — they left no scars. He thought he would go to see her. He had not heard from her for months and surely, by now, she had forgotten her peevishness. At any rate the house in Dorchester had been hers rent free long enough — unless, of course, she was to have a place in his life, as she had so innocently planned.

As he passed Mrs. Mandell's gateway Reggie Turner hailed him. "Give me a lift to the station. I want to talk to you."

"Straight to Boston, if you want," he answered. Reggie's refusal of yesterday, even his rudeness, seemed now natural enough after the strain and heat of the courtroom. And of all Bostonians, Francis thought, Reggie Turner, the genial snob, the sworn friend of Hugh, would be the best of companions to flaunt in the face of the public.

"You bet I will," Reggie said. "No dirty train for me on a clean morning like this if I can find an accommodating automobile. I'm off for the woods in a day or two — planned a trip with Hugh but he's too busy so I shall go alone and keep him in sweet remembrance, as the poets say."

"I should think you might forget about him for the time being."

"Forget!" Reggie laughed. "No, I'll leave that for other people who will get very busy in the next few weeks, forgetting — everybody except Mrs. Mandell and Mrs. Warren and Mr. Thaxter, and Louise — forgive me for saying it — and you, and a few of his most intimate friends, and cherished enemies, if there are such. I'm going to seek the calm of nature's solitudes where I can spend my time



thinking about him uninterruptedly. That's what I particularly wanted to tell you."

"But why me, particularly?"

"Because I want to be square. The thing is settled, now, except for those of us, who will never, as long as we live, get away from it. You're one and I'm another."

"I intend to forget about it as soon as possible."

"Undoubtedly — as soon as possible. And when will that be? Not in this, your mortal life, I'm sure. I don't pretend to be an authority on the future state. Never in Boston! You may forget it to-day and to-night it will burn itself into you so that you'll yell with the pain of it — or the joy of it. I'm impartial now. It has cut too deep into public consciousness for the principals to forget it — ever. The papers have seen to that by forgetting Hugh and making it a class question. It wasn't that, but it is now — for the public — and that fact will keep it perennially alive for us, although for us it will live as a personal matter. We are all too closely bound, in this little section of country, to get away from it. If you succeed in forgetting, Louise won't — and there we are."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, why bother about it more than we have to?"

“ Because it is personal, not national. I haven’t time to bother about the nation yet — nor to forget my friends, and Hugh is the best I ever had. The sooner we get to the bottom of the personal aspect the better for all of us. That’s why I am going to the woods to do a little thinking along approved detective-story lines. I’m going, by the sheer power of my imagination, to find the thief. Now do you understand why I wanted to talk to you? ”

“ Not exactly,” Francis answered. “ If Hugh is not the man nobody would be gladder than I to find the real culprit.”

“ Well spoken,” Reggie cried. “ Now that a jury, in its omniscience, has declared him guilty, the ground is cleared for action. You think, of course, that the jury was right; Louise pretends to think it was; I think it was wrong; and Mrs. Mandell knows it was.”

“ You are not so certain, then, as she is? ”

“ I find it more convenient for my theories to have an open mind. Hugh may have gone suddenly insane. His one cocktail, that was talked about at the trial, may have made him drunk. He may suddenly have changed in his entire character and lost all traces of the common-sense, with which he was plentifully endowed. He may have wanted to go to jail for the sake of the artistic experience. You

can never tell and therefore it is wise to leave all possibilities open to discussion."

"But all these possibilities are so absurdly impossible."

"Oh, of course *you* may take that view," Reggie said, looking at his companion with amusement. "But in doing it you deny the possibility of Hugh's guilt and I don't—that is, the possibility of the physical fact. Of course I deny the possibility of a moral lapse."

Francis flushed. "That last is exactly what I do not deny," he said. "The moral lapse is what makes the physical fact conceivable. It is just that in you people which makes all the trouble—that you won't admit that a gentleman born can do any wrong."

"We people," Reggie repeated. "Whom do you mean?"

Francis would have given a great deal not to have used the phrase. The theory, if not the practice of democracy, was too important for him to uphold to admit of any wholesale distinction. He would have stringent tests, certainly, for admission to the ranks of what the papers called "high society," but he would base the requisites on worldly success, not on mere family names. "I meant simply," he said, lamely,—“it was a stupid way to put it—Hugh's

supporters, those of you who urge that because he was well born he could not possibly do a dishonest thing."

"I wondered if that was what you meant," Reggie responded with perfect seriousness. "We people, except the fools among us, never seriously advance any such absurd proposition. We simply take for granted certain normal lines of action among those of good inheritance and training whose characters seem to fulfil our beliefs. In exactly the same way we take for granted similar lines of action on the part of those who did not have the initial advantage but who have made themselves. We don't ask for their credentials."

Francis quivered at the recurrence of the statement which Hugh had made so long ago as applying to him. And it angered him now, as it had then, making him less careful of his words. "You say that, but you don't really live up to it. You never have the same perfect trust and therefore your protestations are mere wind, the most galling kind of condescension."

Reggie looked at him quickly. He knew that somehow he had touched a raw spot. "Not in the big things," he said. "Perhaps in the little things. And after all that's natural. A river that has changed its course leaves marks in the sand where

it used to flow and the near-sighted man finds it pretty hard to realise that water isn't still flowing in the old channels. I admit that we're near-sighted — like everybody else — and that we make mistakes in the rivulets when the river itself is perfectly plain. And, of course, a lot of it is prejudice. Take this town, now, right here. You and I should probably agree pretty accurately, in essentials, on the type of man that would come out of it. He obviously wouldn't be a gentleman and that fancy would colour our impression even to the third and fourth generation. If the man from here, for example, had exquisite manners, we should always fear that they were acquired, not natural, and should always wonder whether, in a moment of excitement, he might not spit on the floor. If he were fashionably dressed, we should look first to see whether his collar was of celluloid and if we were disappointed there, should console ourselves with the knowledge that he undoubtedly wore a pink silk undershirt. All that is wilful, inherent near-sightedness, but it would not extend to the big things. We should just as surely trust him not to do a dirty trick as we should trust each other. I knew some bully fellows from these vulgar little towns in College, and they never spat on my floor, nor, so far as I know, wore pink silk undershirts."

Francis laughed uneasily. "It is in just that way, I suppose," he said, "that the old families in Boston trust the upstarts who cannot boast about their ancestors."

"No; more than that," Reggie answered. "Boston society is made up of those who have ancestors and those who haven't. Whether the well-endowed talk about their ancestors or not is merely a matter of individual taste because everybody knows about everybody else — and that fact also prevents those who haven't any from pretending. The only people who boast, as you call it, in Boston, are those who come from away and therefore think they can deceive people by calling up visions of plantations in Virginia — Virginia being the only other part of America where ancestors are a recognised asset. Such people do not trust the unendowed because they don't realise that the man born and brought up in Boston can't bluff and, to them, success is all bluff. But the rest of us — we take people pretty frankly as they are, and willingly forgive the minor lapses which are the only ones they make. The only big uncertainty is the fear that they won't think as we do — as in this particular case. The Thaxters and the Warrens will never quite forgive people who don't see Hugh as he really is."

"Who see him as I do, for example?"

"Since you put it so bluntly — yes," Reggie answered.

"Is there any reason to believe that I see him less fairly than they do? That my judgment is less good than theirs?"

"In your judgment of him I think there is. You mustn't get angry, Francis. We are going to understand each other better and you will be less likely to resent my detective work if we are frank. The man who has made a place for himself in society I don't claim to be one bit less good than the man who never had to make it. He may be much stronger, and finer. But I think he is always a little bit more impressed with that idea of birth and of the solidarity of the old families than we are, and just for that reason, if he is not a mere vulgar climber, if he dares to think for himself, he is inclined to lean over just a little too far. You, for example, because you know that certain people are convinced of Hugh's innocence, put it down to a pride of race which you know to be sometimes exaggerated, and therefore say that birth means nothing at all; perhaps, even, that it counts against him, because it can so easily be used as a cloak to hide actual or contemplated guilt. The papers, of course, eager for sensations, take that last view and exalt you as the

champion of the unwashed. The old families won't do that because they know your fondness for water — but they will, inevitably, feel your difference, because you don't see with their eyes."

Francis was silent a moment. His sensations were a peculiar mingling of anger at the truth of what Reggie was saying and of satisfaction that he saw no more deeply.

This thought made him daring. "Yet Louise agrees with me," he said. "She looks with your eyes and sees, I believe, more clearly than you."

Reggie drew a long breath. The remark was obviously a challenge to discuss Louise with her own husband. It was stupid, and for a moment he wondered whether for all these years he had credited Francis with a finesse that did not exist. But instantly he saw it in another light as a bait, which, if he snatched at it in the heat of discussion, would put him hopelessly in the wrong. In talking of Hugh he was on solid ground. In criticising Louise he would have been a cad. From the particular subject of Hugh they had drifted into generalities. He had no intention of being drawn from the safe ground of generalities into the discussion of any other particular person, least of all of Louise. He therefore said only, "Louise is your wife, Francis. She proves what I said — that you over-estimate



the solidarity of the class to which she belongs, both because she does not agree with the others and because, contrary to your expectations, the others do not agree with her."

When they reached Boston and Reggie climbed out of the car he said, "Remember, Francis, I'm going hunting — for the truth, rather more than for wild animals."

"Good luck in both," was the answer.

Francis plunged into his work doggedly, determined somehow to lose sight of himself and the troubles that menaced him on all sides. The day was no different from other summer days, quiet so far as new business was concerned, but he had enough to keep him busy, of work that had been put aside during the hot days of the trial. A visit to Mr. Mason's office was fruitless. The old gentleman was out of town, but Tom Mason, whom Francis had always disliked, assured him that his father's determination to resign as a director of the Botolph Trust Company was quite fixed. He added gratuitously that his father was too old to retain any position where he might be subjected to a nervous strain. The most humiliating experience was his luncheon. He sat always at the same table in the hotel and always one or another prominent man crossed the dining-room to eat and talk of affairs with him.

But to-day he sat alone. His friends came into the room, nodded to him, and took their seats at other tables. One or two stopped to speak but had appointments to lunch with others. Not until he was drinking his coffee did any one sit at his table and then it was Sam Holland, the one man in Boston whom he most dreaded to meet — Holland, the loud-talking, invariably blundering bore who ramped like a bull through society. "Every city has him for the chastisement of its sins," Reggie Turner said.

"Well, well, Evans," he cried, pulling out a chair. "It's luck to find you eating alone — and the day after you've got your famous thief jugged, too. Looks as though your friends didn't like your socialistic tendencies, doesn't it? — resented your attack on one of the upper classes?"

Francis swallowed his coffee hastily. He was white with anger and acutely conscious that all the people in the room, except the grinning strangers, were pretending not to notice Holland's strident voice.

"Don't hurry, Evans," that voice went on. "I want to talk to you. Of course Hugh didn't take the cash. Nobody who is anybody thinks that, but that doesn't make any difference in my feeling for you. Of course you simply had to do something —

on the evidence — hadn't any other course — and I always respect a man who does his duty, even if that duty looks pretty low-down and dishonest considered all by itself. How's your wife?"

"Very well, thank you," Francis answered. "I'm sorry to leave you but I have an appointment." Every one refrained from looking at him as he went out of the dining-room and he suddenly remembered another of Reggie's remarks — "Sam Holland could make even God Almighty ridiculous."

When he reached his office he sent his car to Beverly — at the moment he did not care whether the chauffeur took out a party of a dozen — and with it sent a note to Louise that business would detain him in town for the night. He had enough to occupy him for the afternoon and then, in the evening, he would go to see Flossie.

## CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Francis got out of the brightly lighted electric car a few hours later, in Dorchester Square, he felt that the load of criticism could be forgotten. He walked more buoyantly, now that he was no longer in an atmosphere of critical condescension. He was not one of those with whom reverses go lightly because he had trained himself only to bear success. He had accommodated himself superficially to the ideas of those around him, talking as his friends talked, supposing that he thought as they thought, never dreaming that he could be placed in a position where, in the eyes of the world, he would be compelled to disagree with what those whose good opinion he had coveted above all else held to be of supreme importance. Even after Hugh was arrested — that had been inevitable — he could have waited silently to see how the wind lay and could then have defended him to the best of his ability, thereby gaining honour for himself. But his absurd jealousy had blinded him and made him mad. He had staked everything on Louise, had married her, and henceforth his hands had been tied. That one act had too unmistakably an-

nounced his position to make retreat possible. It had gained him the distrust of those whose trust he wanted and it had not even won him Louise's love. Why that had ever seemed vital to his happiness he could not understand. It would have been far wiser to remain a bachelor, holding the social position which he had made for himself, which flattered his self-esteem while it strengthened his business standing, and which left him free to amuse himself as he chose. He felt that he must find somewhere greater simplicity of outlook as an offset to the necessary complexity of his vocation; and that simplicity for which he longed, was what cheered him now, in anticipation, as he approached his little house in Dorchester.

He reached the cottage at last, turned in at the gate and made his way in the darkness up the stone-flagged path. He could see no light in the windows — a momentary disappointment, but, after all, he could easily wait. Flossie always had books around, works of adventure, and funny little socialist tracts that always amused him. She considered herself a thinker but her theories — the reflection of the latest inflammatory pamphlet she had read — always crumbled to pieces when brought into contact with reality and, to her, reality always meant a dominating personality. Francis remembered with a chuc-

kle how often he had demolished those little articles of a temporary creed by a mere statement of his own practice. It was silly, but after all harmless, and, in spite of its triviality, gave him a pleasant sense of his own power.

He took out his keys and opened the front door; then, with the assurance of habit, went straight through the sitting-room and lighted the gas. He smiled as he looked around the familiar room, but his smile was not one of complete satisfaction. The place seemed not quite so cosy as he remembered; the piles of sofa-cushions were undeniably dingy; there was not the pervading air of Flossie's personality that usually gave an exciting flavour to the atmosphere. The room looked dead, and smelled dead. He stepped to the table, still smiling, and took up one of the yellow-paper pamphlets. It was covered with dust. The table-top was dusty. Francis went hastily to the window and opened it wide. As he did so the curtains threw out a cloud of dust. He was no longer smiling. Instead a kind of horror seized him. He remembered their last stormy interview, and that he had not heard from her since. Perhaps her play-acting had been real after all. Perhaps she had come back and — he caught himself up sharply. Such sordid, miserable little tragedies did not happen to men like him.

His hand trembled, however, as he lighted one of the candles on the mantelpiece.

Francis went into all the rooms on the first floor — all dusty — all dead. Then he climbed the stairs part way, stopped and went back to put out the gas. If anything had happened it would be as well not to let the world know that some one was in the house. The rooms on the upper floor were as deserted, as dusty, as those below. He went last to Flossie's bedroom, and hesitated with a sensation of physical sickness before opening the door. The room, the bed, were empty, and over the smooth white spread was a thin film of dust. Then he sat down suddenly, trembling with relief, and furious that Flossie should have disappeared without warning him. The vacant house must have been the source of endless gossip and wonder in the neighbourhood and he hated the idea of gossip with which his name might so easily be connected. The woman had treated him shabbily, he thought. It was a mean return for all his kindness. He was growing more angry and more confused.

Had she left no word for him, he wondered. He looked into a closet and an old wrapper hanging on a nail brought his heart into his mouth. He opened bureau drawers — all empty or holding only ragged bits of clothes and lace. He went downstairs again

and there, on her desk, he found a letter addressed to Mr. Francis Evans. It was stamped and in her haste she had evidently forgotten to post it. He crushed it in his hand. "Wretched woman," he muttered. It was the crowning outrage that she should have risked this. What if some one else had found the letter and read it? His impulse was to tear it to shreds, but it might be important. He must read it — if he could see for the silly anger that blinded him. He tore open the envelope viciously and read. "Dear Francis: Since I got home this noon I have worked like mad, for fear you, or the police would come — you know why. Now everything is packed and I am going in a minute, to Europe. You'll never find me because I will change my name and won't ever come back. Oh, Francis, you were hard and cruel to me and I loved you all the time. But I was mad all through and that's why I took the money — to pay you back for hurting me. I didn't know it was so much till I got home. Three thousand dollars is a lot, but it will take me to Europe and you won't miss it." His hand began to tremble but he read on, doggedly. He remembered well what day it was that she had gone to his office. "Besides, you owed it to me, and more, because I loved you. It is all over now. I know all men are beasts. You too. But I still



love you and I would kiss you now if you came to put me in jail for a thief. I am not a thief and I know you wouldn't dare to call me one because if you did that other woman, that doll that you pretend to love, would know about us. You will never see me again but you will never forget me — and I am glad. Good-bye. I thought I should never really love a beast but I do love you. Good-bye. Flossie.”

Francis sat down suddenly in one of the dusty chairs and pressed his hands against his burning eyes. Then he laughed aloud. He had a sudden vision of Reggie Turner sitting on a log in the woods and thinking, searching his imagination for the truth. The truth! Here it was, in his own possession, all written down in Flossie's round hand. The truth! He laughed again and this time at his own stupidity. Not for an instant had he suspected Flossie. He had not even thought of her since that day when things of so much more moment to him had happened. And because she had forgotten to post the letter the whole current of his life had been changed. He had married. He had been duped into the accusation of an innocent man. He had been hailed in the papers as the people's champion. He had lost caste socially just because he had believed what any but a man blind with prejudice would believe. He had even lost his grip on affairs. And all be-

cause Flossie had forgotten to post her silly letter!

A few months ago the degradation of Hugh had seemed to him the necessary capstone in his successful career, the final block which would insure the safety of the building. To-day his life was in ruins, or nearly so, and his own rehabilitation seemed possible only through vindication of the man he had helped to disgrace. That very morning he had had a fleeting vision of himself working hand in hand with Reggie Turner, to bring it about; but he had recoiled because it involved admitting himself in the wrong when there was still a possibility that he was right. And it would have meant too, he was convinced, a definite break with Louise for which he was not yet ready. He could not afford to offend her pride. He knew that with proof in his hand he could go to her, trusting in her magnanimity. And already the proof was in his hand.

Francis spread out the letter and began to read it again, but as he read a flush mounted to his cheek. Of the nature of the proof he had not thought. Could he say to her — could he say to the world, "Brandon is innocent. The money was stolen almost out of my own hand by a woman whom I had discarded"? Could he show his proof — this pitiful letter which she had left behind? What would be the effect on him of such a confession? The answer flashed instantly through his mind —

Universal scorn — A man must not be caught. Universal disbelief! — How could he have forgotten the woman's visit? It would mean the end of everything for him.

Again he thought of Reggie, searching for the truth. And he, Francis Evans, only knew the truth. There must be some other way to win back his standing — a longer way perhaps, but sure, and the revelation of this letter would mean the final ruin of his life. And secrecy — He shuddered at the consequences of holding back. He had never done an act which he considered deliberately dishonest. He had told petty lies and lying truths. He had played the game of business under a different code from that which governs games of cards among gentlemen. He had been hard, as he was with Mrs. Mooney, when his cruelty to the individual had been intended to serve higher interests. All these things he admitted to himself, ran them over in his mind — he could not have told whether in unconscious justification of the stand he was now tempted to take or for the purpose of proving to himself the impossibility of the stand. He would probably have said the latter.

To burn the sheet of paper in his hand! It would be the subversion of justice. It would keep Hugh, an innocent man, in prison. It would mean the de-

served contempt of any one whose good opinion he craved — if ever he was found out. But was it possible that he could be found out? He did not really intend to do an act which in his own mind would brand him as a cad, but he saw no harm in arguing the matter with himself. The consequences of speech would be immediate and decisive. He would be ruined and Hugh would be let out of prison. He was — or had been and might again be — a man of power, of vital use in the world. He was strong. Hugh, on the contrary, was weak, would never affect the world for good or evil. His release would please sentimentalists like Mrs. Mandell but would be of no real value to others. Was it fair toward society, then, he thought, to sacrifice the future of one who could really be of service for the satisfaction of a few people with old-fashioned ideals? Francis was convinced that, had he been an impartial judge reviewing the arguments from outside, he would have courage to prevent the lesser for the sake of the greater good. Had that not been at the basis of the history of the progress of civilisation? Had it not been even the secret of the spread of Christianity? And could he not be an impartial judge? That question, also, he answered in the affirmative. It was only weaklings, he thought, who were unable to rise above consideration of them-

selves. And he was looking at the matter from the standpoint of the greater good for the greater number. That good demanded that his own wings should not be clipped. A cad is a man who is so blinded to his own glory that he cannot, or will not, recognise the rights of others. And it was just this recognition of others, Francis thought, which held him back from instinctive but ill-considered speech. He realised, nevertheless, that this logical course of reasoning would not be followed by the multitudes, should the truth ever come to light. There was little likelihood that it would, however, Flossie was gone; would certainly not speak if she reappeared. There was no evidence beyond the letter. The unexpected sometimes happened, of course, but again he must trust fate to be propitious. He was running a definite risk, but he felt, somehow, that the risk was a kind of sanction for what he had made up his mind to do.

He got up quickly, placed the letter in the ashes in the little fireplace and lighted it. When it had burned, he mixed the charred remains with the ashes, blew out his candle, and went quickly from the house. "After all," he thought, "if a man is at peace with his own conscience, he need have no fear of the world's judgment."

## CHAPTER XIX

FRANCIS rang for the cashier. "I wish you would bring me Mrs. Mooney's papers," he said.

Mr. Norton brought them in. "Is there anything else, sir?"

"No. Send the woman in when she comes. I wrote for her yesterday. Her note is due and I think we can get rid of her this time. We have been patient enough with her dilatory methods and we cannot afford to waste more time on her."

"She has been one of our most satisfactory clients," the cashier said quietly. "Only once, when she was in great trouble, was she late in paying her interest. That was the time Mr. Brandon was generous enough to help her."

Francis swung round in his chair to look at him. "Do you mean to be deliberately insulting?" he asked slowly.

Mr. Norton settled his gold-rimmed spectacles on his nose and cleared his throat. He was a little man and when he was frightened he seemed to shrink still more. But he was also a Bostonian to the heart of him, and was possessed of a conscience that never permitted his trembling body to betray the courage

of his convictions. "The truth should never be insulting," he said.

For a moment Francis had no answer. This was the culmination, evidently, of the antagonistic attitude that Mr. Norton had assumed after the trial. Up to now he had felt, rather than experienced it. But he realised instantly that the cashier must be put in his place, somehow or other, then and there. "It may be insulting in its manner of expression," he said. "And that is what I think you intended it to be, Mr. Norton."

"I intended it to be merely truthful."

Francis felt his anger rising rapidly at this attempt to argue with one who merely reiterated his position. "You have assumed an attitude of disapproval toward me for months," he said, controlling himself. "Is this fair toward the Company, do you think? Can we possibly be successful unless our employees are loyal?"

Mr. Norton flinched. He had been a servant of the Botolph Trust Company for thirty years and could no more have been disloyal than he could have been a traitor to his own family. But he did not let this suggestion cloud his perception of the real point at issue. "I am very sorry," he answered quietly, "if I have in any way made my disapproval evident to you. I am sure it has not been so to any one else.

I am sure, also, that I have never disobeyed you, nor in any instance failed to carry out your commands."

"Apparently, then, you try to separate my personality as a man from my position as president of this Company. It is impossible." He stopped suddenly, remembering that Louise had accused him of doing just this when he married her.

Mr. Norton drew himself up. "It is possible," he said.

"As man to man, then," Francis cried. "What do you think of me as a man?" He knew that he was demeaning himself, that this creature's opinion mattered nothing at all, one way or the other, but anger, and with it a craving for something definite, drove him on.

Mr. Norton hesitated. "It might be necessary for me, as cashier of the Botolph Trust Company to speak unpleasant truth to the president of the Company," he said slowly. "It would never be necessary for me, as a man, to speak an unpleasant truth to a fellow-man, unless it were for his good."

Francis pushed his chair back violently and jumped to his feet. "Enough of this playing with words," he cried. "It is perfectly obvious what you think of me; clear, too, that you cannot any longer work in harmony with me. I suppose you look upon me as a monster, as the persecutor of that poor innocent



Brandon boy. I suppose your religion — if anything so narrow can be called religion — teaches you that I have wandered away from the truth. The truth! You hold it all, of course, in your little narrow soul, and judge the world by your own silly standards.”

Mr. Norton made no response. He felt himself superior to all this outburst, that no rebuke could be as effective as silence. He stood quietly for a moment, then asked, “Shall I continue now with my work?”

“Yes, for the moment,” Francis answered. “I shall see you later in the day.” He seated himself at his desk again, cold with anger, because he had talked foolishly and had discovered nothing. After all, he tried to congratulate himself, what this man thought of him was of no importance, and he had the power.

With it all, however, he felt a profound indignation against Boston and all that it represented. Why, he thought, was it his fate to be continually wasting his energy in battling against stagnant conservatism such as was represented, on the one hand by the Puritanism of men like Mr. Norton, and on the other hand by the blind *esprit de corps* of the old families. He felt himself hemmed in, his effectiveness nullified, the power of his will cramped.

And what was it they all demanded of him? The truth. He shivered at the word. He was quite able to invent a truth that would serve all practical purposes. He remembered Flossie's letter; in spite of himself the memory of it affected all he did. He had acted for the best. Was it necessary to go over all that ground again? Hugh was in prison, but what did it matter to the world where Hugh was in comparison with the fact that knowledge of the letter would for all time destroy his own power? He was necessary for the progress of the world. Hugh was not. Any strong man would do as he had done. Subconsciously he knew that he lied to himself, that none of the men whose respect he craved, not to speak of the little men like Mr. Norton whom he despised, would have done as he had done. But he could not admit himself wrong. The fault was in his environment. Boston was too narrow, too small a place. He needed, for the full development of his power, a larger field — such a field, for example, as New York offered, where men were too busy to waste their hours in speculation as to the character of an individual, where standards were not cut out on one pattern for all, but each man was a law unto himself.

An office-boy ushered in Mrs. Mooney. Francis motioned her to a seat. Even this part of his work,

it seemed to him now, although he had chosen to do it himself, was absurd. He swung around in his chair to face his visitor. "Last time, I remember, Mrs. Mooney," he said sneeringly, "you came to say you could not pay interest amounting to fifty dollars. The Botolph Trust Company does not care to bother itself with such small matters."

The old woman looked him straight in the eye. "It's small matters to such as you, Mr. Evans," she said—"small matters to turn a poor woman and her grandchilder into the streets, but not such small matters did it seem to that lovely young man, Mr. Brandon, God bless him."

Francis felt his face burn, but controlled his voice. "It is not a question to-day of fifty dollars and some sentimentalist helping you out. We demand immediate payment of your note."

Mrs. Mooney smiled and somehow the smile made Francis shiver. "And if I can't do it?" she asked.

"You know the consequences." She smiled again and this time it enraged him. "I can't waste my time talking," he cried. "Will you answer me and then get out?"

Mrs. Mooney looked him over from head to foot, curiously, and a faint colour welled up into her wrinkled cheeks. "You don't care if you put me in the streets—me and the little ones? Would the

house in Dorchester you told Mrs. Warren about be for us again, I wonder?"

"It would not. Will you answer me?" He got up to walk back and forth.

"I guessed as much," Mrs. Mooney said quietly. "It might be rented now to those that pay. Miss Flanagan didn't pay, I take it, so it would be easy to throw her out."

Francis stopped short and stood looking down at the woman in a kind of incredulous bewilderment. "What did you say?" he asked at last, hoarsely.

"You needn't to pretend," she said. "You know all about it and I know all about it. And it ain't anything to wonder at. Didn't I know her father, who was my cousin that come over from Ireland when the praties failed, and took to farming in a new country? And poor as he was he scraped enough together to teach her nursing so she'd have a respectable trade. And then when he died she came to live with me and earned her living while she studied, until she drifted somehow into bad ways like so many poor girls that wants a little good times and don't know how. Then she disappeared for a matter of three years or more. And then one fine day came back to me she did, with a handsome pink coat like ladies wear, and said as how she'd found a real man at the last and told me where she lived."

“ Yes.”

“ And then, one day, I went to see her, me being free again, what with Mr. Brandon’s help and my boy at home, and I finding the house all shut up, and Flossie gone — God save her — and the neighbours telling me whose house it was. And then I knew, Mr. Evans — then I knew the real man that was a man, and says I, ‘ It’s fine hands she’s in — bad cess to ’em! ’ ”

Francis stood motionless, looking down on her. He knew that his world was whirling — to destruction? It depended on how much this woman knew. That he must discover. With almost superhuman effort he mastered himself. “ Poor Flossie,” he said. “ I have tried everywhere to find her. I am afraid she may be in need. Could you help me, Mrs. Mooney? If you will not give me her address will you send her money from me? ”

The old woman pushed herself up from her chair and came close to him. “ Help you! ” she cried. “ I’d as soon help the devil. And send her money from you, I wouldn’t either — not even if I knew where she was — the poor lost lamb.”

Francis smiled in spite of himself, partly in intense relief, partly because the likening of Flossie, wilful, perverse, overdressed, to a lamb, struck him as inconceivably funny. He had not considered the effect of that smile on Mrs. Mooney.

“ Laugh, will you! ” she screamed. “ Laugh — because you’ve driven a poor girl to death, or worse! Laugh, because you’ve put a poor, beautiful, innocent young man in jail, will you! Laugh, because you think you’re going to put a poor old woman in the streets, do you! And yet it’s right for you to laugh, to be in with all those that laughs at you — rich folks and poor folks, high and lowly, all laughing at your fine, proud ways, and your pretending to be a gentleman. Oh — you’ll find some day how the world laughs and then it’s you that’ll want to crawl back in your shell to hide; and it’s then you’ll find that even the shell ain’t yours, that others has taken the only house and the only covering that was rightfully yours, but that you left because you wanted to show off your fine feathers. And it’s then you’ll find to your ever-lasting sorrow that the fine feathers was just growing before the eyes of your brain, and that you’ve clothed yourself in the birth-skin of your own nakedness and that it ain’t thick enough even to hide the shivering soul of you. And it’s then that you’ll know shame, and sorrow, and pain like those you’ve trampled on.” She stopped as suddenly as she had begun.

Francis looked at her blankly. Her words had burned away his anger and he spoke mechanically. “ As to the question of the note, Mrs. Mooney — if you really want to renew it — ”

“Renew it!” She flared up again. “Does that mean not to pay it? No, no, I’ll pay. I won’t be bribed to hold my tongue.” She fumbled in her bag and took out a neat package. Francis took it, still dazed and not understanding. “That’s the money, and the interest — all of it, and it’s finished I am, Mr. Evans, with you and your sort for all the time that’s left me. It was a real man that saved me, that I wish Flossie could know the look of, that did not forget an old woman even when he was in jail. That’s the kind that helps poor people and that the Blessed Virgin has in her protection, Mr. Evans.”

“Did Brandon give you this money?” Francis asked unsteadily.

“He did that, sir, by means of a lady and a gentleman that are his friends. Is that all now?”

“Yes,” Francis said bitterly, “unless, of course, you have more to say.” He opened the door and she walked past him, not looking at him, and with the same lowly dignity that had impressed him a year before.

He started to close the door, but some one pushed it open. “Reggie!” he said angrily. “What the devil do you want?”

“You,” Reggie answered, smiling.

“I am busy,” Francis said. “I can’t see any  
e.”

"Just a minute," Reggie pleaded. "Really, you know, you need amusement. You look as glum as sin — or the victim of an obstreperous conscience, I should say, if it were any one but you."

"Conscience be damned," Francis cried.

"Exactly." Reggie smiled sweetly at him. "I supposed that was the case and so I did not class you where I should have otherwise. I won't keep you. I only came to tell you that Hugh was sick. I thought it might stir you on to helping me find the real criminal. It's no fun to be sick in jail."

"Oh, Lord," Francis said bitterly. "Are you still on that hunt?"

"Why? Have you made a discovery?"

"I have been convinced definitely — if I needed any more convincing. The thief is already in jail."

"That may well be," Reggie said, smiling. "Thieves have a way of getting into prison sooner or later, but so do innocent men — like Hugh, for example."

Francis was walking rapidly back and forth. Already he had forgotten what he had said a moment before, and what Reggie was saying was not worth listening to. But the wrath of Mrs. Mooney — that had in it something sinister. He did not mind particularly that she knew about Flossie. The closed pages in his life might better remain closed, but after



all they were not peculiar to him. The world might chuckle, as it had a habit of doing when it discovered something it might better not have known. He himself had grinned more than once at the public desecration of some whited sepulchre. But, after all, society was inclined to be lenient. The diversion might even be useful as turning men's minds from that all-overshadowing subject of Hugh. It was people like Reggie Turner here, with his officious interference; people like Louise, with her damnable resignation and her cold courtesy, who kept the talk going.

"Oh, well," he cried, suddenly conscious of his own silence, "if that's the way you feel, keep up the search. I should think the historian in you might suffer, but perhaps you'll change your line and turn into a student of sociology. Perhaps the Mooney woman took the money. Perhaps Norton took it. Perhaps it was swiped by some spirit hired by these spiritualist people up the street. You had better look into that. It is a likely lead, and just drop in for more suggestions when you run up against a blank wall. So far as I am concerned I am going to forget it — I told you that before. But I like the sand of a fellow who keeps on playing a losing game, so I shall always have time to remember it long enough to give you some more hints. Only don't expect me

to give up work to chase butterflies when the only specimen I want is safely caught."

Reggie looked at him thoughtfully. "I'm very sorry, Francis. I neglected to remember that you were going to forget the whole business. I hope you've succeeded. Don't worry about Hugh's illness. Good-bye."

When he had gone, Francis turned to his desk. He felt that he was trembling, whether with anger or with fear he did not know, but in any case it was weakness and he couldn't afford to be weak. Suddenly he said under his breath, "I wonder — my God, I wonder how much the Mooney woman really knows." It was a fear, he felt, that could never certainly leave him, and with the wish to be safe himself, he knew there was a wish to keep Hugh in prison. He had wanted to get the boy into trouble. He had succeeded, and now he hated him, not only because Hugh represented a certain class, not only because he was jealous of his friendship with Louise, but because he had done him a definite and bitter wrong. He had once heard a preacher say that the hatred of him who had been wronged never equalled the hatred of him who had done the wrong. At the time Francis had thought the remark silly, but he remembered it now and his contemptuous dismissal of the thought was not sincere.

He closed his desk and put on his hat. He had promised to go home to luncheon and dared not give in to what would have been the weakness of breaking his appointment.

He found Louise already at the table. The flowers were pink, to-day. Never, since the night of the trial, had they been white. Francis took the change as no compliment to himself. Rather it seemed to him a mocking reminder on his wife's part that every incident of that wretched day and evening were stamped indelibly on her mind. He had been silent before, but now he spoke of the flowers, defiantly. "I thought you liked white, Louise. Have you given it up on the table?"

She looked up at him slowly, in the way which used to fascinate him, but which had come only to irritate, because he thought he saw contempt in her eyes. "I am using colour because you once said that you preferred it."

They finished the meal almost without a word, and then went to the library for Francis to light a cigar before returning to the office. On the table he saw, lying open, one of his most precious books. He quivered with anger, but made no remark. Tomorrow he would send the rarest volumes to the vault, where they would be safe.

"I must go," he said. "I have a busy afternoon

before me. And, by the way, did you know that Brandon was sick?"

Louise looked at him with startled eyes, but she, too, repressed her feelings. "I am very sorry, I hope not seriously. It would be horrible if he should die — not for him, perhaps, but for you and me."

"Why horrible for us?" he asked sarcastically. "Why should it affect either you or me?"

"For me," she answered very slowly, "because I misjudged him; because I was cruel to him at a time when I thought my instinct ran counter to my reason — and to my need. For you it would be horrible because you had denied his innocence until it was too late."

"So!" He laughed harshly. "I'm glad you've had the courage to admit it at last, Louise — that you have changed your mind, that you really disagree with me. But you have changed once. Is your opinion fixed this time?"

"Quite." She spoke wearily. "I think you knew it long ago. I wish I knew as surely what you think — your opinion as a man."

Francis walked to the window. He spoke from the other side of the room because he could not bear the straight, thoughtful gaze of his wife's eyes. "What I think or do not think apparently makes no difference to you," he said sneeringly. "Instead of

trying to bring your own ideas into accord with mine — except in silly things like the colour of flowers — you allow your judgment to be swept along by blind prejudice. You are a weather-cock, pointing into whatever breeze blows strongest.”

“My judgment is human,” she broke in coldly. “You know that I have courage to stand with you when I believe you are right — but it must be you, as a man, who regards human qualities, not as a corporation representative basing your theories only on material evidence, or lack of it. In such a judgment I take no interest. It is too incomplete to command assent.”

“Then as a man,” he cried. “I am not, as a man, concerned with this crime any more than I am with the scandals of city government. Whether Hugh is innocent or not makes no whit of difference to me personally. I want to see the world progress and whether he is in jail or out of it will not affect that progress. If he is innocent — well, he should have been clever enough to keep out of trouble. The weaklings of society are a menace and if he was one of them, too weak to look after himself, perhaps his punishment will protect some one who is of higher value?”

“A criminal?”

“A strong criminal is often worth more than a

weakling. But I did not mean that. It is seldom that a criminal stands alone. His fate often involves others whose influence can ill be spared."

"And rather than permit that you would allow an innocent man to suffer?"

"Certainly — unless that innocent man seemed to me of more value to the world than those whom his suffering unconsciously protects."

Louise sighed. "You take much on your own shoulders, Francis. I am afraid that we are further apart than I had any idea of. Injustice, I am sure, can never work for justice, immediate or future. You know that Hugh is innocent and because you have no high opinion of his value to mankind you take no steps to help him."

"I did not say I knew anything, Louise," he interrupted sternly.

"But you dare not say you know he is guilty." She got up suddenly and moved toward the door. Then she turned toward him again. "You know he is innocent! But how?" She put her hands over her eyes. "It is almost as though — Francis! You know who the thief is. You know — and yet you are silent. Is it to protect yourself?"

He came close to her, caught her arm in a brutal grip. "You are mad, Louise," he said in a voice almost inaudible with passion. "You are mad.

What you call instinct is only damnable suspicion — hatred of me, perhaps. Have you forgotten that I am your husband, or do you think it your wifely duty to call me a coward and a liar and a thief? Who made me believe that Hugh was guilty? You did. Who persuaded me into a ridiculous marriage? You did. Who keeps people from believing in me now? You do, with your long face and your tragic eyes. Is this the way we must stand together as we agreed to do when I took you away from your father's house to marry you?"

He stopped abruptly because instead of fear he saw on her face a pale, inscrutable smile.

"Will you let me go now?" she said quietly. "You are hurting my arm."

He pushed her away from him and watched her as she walked slowly, never looking back, through the door, across the hall and up the stairs.

"She's mad," he muttered to himself; but he was trembling. "The women will drive me out of my senses to-day."

## CHAPTER XX

MRS. WARREN had never followed the river of fashion down Beacon Hill to the Back Bay. "At its source the river may be nearly empty," she said, "but the water is pure and some of us have to stay here to see that the spring is properly cared for. From my window I can look down on the lake which would never have been without the river and which might easily become a swamp if the river dried up altogether. Indeed," she added, looking at Louise, "I sometimes think I see swamp tendencies in the Back Bay already and I have too much respect for my health to expose myself to the malarial atmosphere of active social decay. Up here, on the Hill, there is another kind of decay — the gradual drying up of some of the old stock that has let itself drift out of touch with the world and is gradually turning to dust — the kind of thing that makes one mentally sneeze, my dear. People call it tragic. It is not, because tragedy must be conscious suffering or else unconscious waste. Then it is tragic to the onlooker. There is no waste in the dispersion of dust."

"Except that it makes us sneeze," Louise put in.



“And that, I have been taught to believe, is good for us,” Mrs. Warren asserted. “A sneeze is an involuntary expression of the fact that a certain part of us is being tickled. Therefore it is a laugh, and laughing is healthy.” It seemed to her that Louise must laugh, or die.

“Reggie Turner says that is his mission in life, Mrs. Warren — to make people laugh. It does not seem to me a particularly noble mission.”

“Come over here, dear, and sit next to me,” Mrs. Warren commanded. “I know you only came to call on a lonely old woman, but now I have you here I am going to keep you.”

Louise walked slowly across the room and seated herself in a low chair beside Mrs. Warren. “I should like to stay as long as you want me,” she said. “I came for myself — because I needed to. I feel free here. This room has such an air of — well, of being quite sure of itself, that it rests me.”

“And only when one is mentally at rest can one appreciate the dignity of laughter, Louise. If Reggie were a clown — if he tried to make us laugh by tickling us — there would be nothing fine in his mission, my dear. He is no sad, professional funny man who labours in his wit. He understands the value of light-heartedness.” She smiled. “I like to think of him as doing for us all what I should

have done if I had not been a mere ignorant woman. Sometimes, of course, his wit explodes in silly sparkles that are gone in a moment — although you are glad of it, just as you are glad to have seen the fire of a distant sky-rocket. But his mission is more than that. It is to stir the deeper springs of mirth, to make us glad that we live — and sometimes, by loosing the springs of happiness to overwhelm the wells of sorrow. The wit which plays on the irony of our lives, making us understand them more sanely, is Reggie's real wit. That same quality of wit, in a vulgar form, Hugh says, makes many of his poor fellow-prisoners happier, and, he thinks, gives them the opportunity to make good men of themselves."

"I think I understand what you mean, Mrs. Warren, and what Hugh meant, too, about the prisoners. I never had much humour myself,"— she smiled wearily — "and if I had had more I should have been a better woman, and a happier, and less self-centred. Perhaps I should have made fewer mistakes." She hesitated a moment. "Fewer irretrievable mistakes."

Mrs. Warren put her hand impulsively on her shoulder and Louise smiled again, bravely this time. "Can't I help you, dear?" she said. "I am an old woman who has seen a good deal of this world. People say that I am a gossip, but I can keep my

counsel as well as others. I have always felt a little guilty about your marriage, Louise, and if things have gone a bit wrong I think I could sleep better if I had a little hand in righting them. Do you want to talk to me?"

"I do want to if you will let me. I am terribly alone and there is no one to help me. I must talk, Mrs. Warren, or I shall go mad. I know myself too well to be happy. I can find excuses for others, but none for myself, nor for my husband. I thought always only of myself, in relation to myself, never of others, that I might be something for them. Francis thought only of himself, in relation to others, but only for what they might do and be for him. I planned to marry him to do the most for myself. When the time came, I married him to escape from myself. Neither of us thought of Hugh except as he touched us. Neither dreamed that Hugh would be, after we were married, anything in our lives, and he is everything, or what he represents is everything. He stands between us every hour. And he will always stand there until we know the truth."

"But you know it now, dear Louise."

"The mere fact that he did not take the money, yes," she said bitterly. "But that is such a small part of it, and even that Francis has not admitted. He cannot admit it because on the common ground

of belief in Hugh's guilt we married. In justice to my husband I cannot proclaim him innocent because in the world's eyes that would be accusing Francis."

"But if you think the accusation deserved, Louise, in justice to yourself —"

"I do not," she cried. "I *have* thought so. I am wicked enough to have thought so, but I *know*, as I know myself, that it is not true." Louise got to her feet suddenly and went to the window.

Mrs. Warren was a little disappointed. She had cherished all along what others had laughed at, that Francis himself was guilty. She was also frightened for Louise, appalled at the poignancy of the suffering she had revealed. "If you are sure of that, my dear," she said weakly, "why do you worry? We have all, honestly enough, missed a link in the chain."

"Because," Louise said, turning from the window, "Francis has not missed that link."

"You mean —" Mrs. Warren gasped.

"I mean exactly that," Louise said sharply. "I mean it — and I do not know it."

"If you knew it you would leave him."

"Leave him? No," she said; "I am his wife. I should simply start afresh. I could do that if I knew the truth. Should you have left your husband

if you had found he was not quite what you supposed?"

Mrs. Warren hesitated a moment. Then she said decidedly, "I think I should have, if I had found that he had done something to which no gentleman would stoop."

Louise laughed. "I had no right to make you say that, Mrs. Warren. You forget. I knew, when I married Francis, that he was not a gentleman. I thought he was something better."

"There is nothing better," Mrs. Warren said quietly.

"Nothing," Louise echoed. "I know it now. But with open eyes, and with a knowledge of the world that I often boasted to Hugh was wide and varied, with all that, I made my choice."

"You were a child, Louise. Ever since Lydia Morris got her divorce from Sam, thirty years ago, I have been crying out against divorce as the most horrible evil of our American society. I am beginning to see that in some cases it is holy."

"No, no," Louise cried. "Don't say that. I do not dare to hear you say it. You would not say it if I were your daughter."

"You had no mother to advise you," Mrs. Warren answered quickly. "I should never have let my daughter marry Francis Evans." She stopped and

the colour rushed to her cheeks. She remembered that at Sally Thaxter's ball a year ago Mrs. Mandell had said almost the same thing and that she had answered that such a marriage would be an honour to any girl. Surely in her old age she was learning much, but that learning, strangely enough, was a reversion to what she had been taught at her mother's knee, not a growing sympathy with what were commonly called modern, progressive ideas.

"You have been very kind, Mrs. Warren," Louise went on. "You have helped me, by letting me talk. I wish that you could give me, too, your power of looking at things impersonally, of seeing in them all the irony of life, something outside myself that would transform my tears to smiles. That power has made *you* change in the last year." She smiled again. "Perhaps twelve months ago your advice would not have been the same. We have both had to revise our ideas, both to return to our older, truer selves, and for you, Mrs. Warren, that forced retreat has been made smiling because you have a larger vision and can see beyond yourself. For me it has been like a retreat from Moscow, the city of my dreams, a march where every step was agony, and where I felt myself alone, blinded with my tears, and conscious only of the mocking laughter beside my path." She stopped abruptly and then went on with a forced

calm. "It is silly of me to talk this way, but I have been silent so long, and I don't feel, as I used to, that I am old and wise, but very young, and very foolish, and very alone. If you had not mentioned Hugh perhaps I should not have done it — even though we both were thinking of him all the time and even though I came to talk. I wrote Hugh last night — oh, a proper letter. I thought it might make him happier to know that at last I trusted him. But is that all I can do? Must this dreadful injustice go on? And for me, Mrs. Warren — must I always live, with Francis, always on the edge of a revelation, far away from truth?"

Mrs. Warren drew Louise to her and kissed her. "No," she answered, "that would be intolerable. Truth is the breath of intimacy, almost of any human intercourse. It ought to be the beginning of all things, my dear, but sometimes it is not, and then the search for it as a new basis is the test of a strong soul. Patience is the most difficult of virtues and the most necessary. For you, dear Louise, it is the only way. If people had forgotten Hugh the truth might be hidden for years, but no one has forgotten. Your husband's own conscience may finally compel him to confess. That would be best of all."

"His conscience is bound with iron bands," Louise interrupted.

“And sometimes iron bands rust and break,” Mrs. Warren went on quietly. “But Reggie is working silently day by day. He has almost a woman’s intuitions, I think. He will never give up either — and in that he is unlike most women. But if he finds the truth, Louise, your trial will only have begun. If you are right I could not blame you if you left your husband, but I could honour you more greatly — whatever I said about divorce — if you still could find a method of compromise — call it anything you like. Perhaps it would be to sacrifice yourself for an idea, the old idea of the sacredness of marriage, but it would be a noble sacrifice, Louise — to show the younger generation that woman can bear suffering for the sake of a mere tradition, a fine tradition.”

“It would not be sacrifice, Mrs. Warren. If I can once seize the truth I can act and work, and work, in a way, is to live. I have missed the chance of love, at least it seems so now. And for the moment there is nothing to be done?”

“I can see nothing,” the older woman answered. “Come to me when you will, if I can help you. And wait. It cannot be for long. You seem to me so young, my dear. You never had a mother to teach you sweetly to be a woman, and now you are learning painfully.”



"Thank you, Mrs. Warren," Louise said quickly. "I shall try to prove that I am worth your trouble." Then she turned and went out.

Mrs. Warren sat motionless. She felt that Louise had left with her some of the pain and some of the responsibility for the pain. "Why? Oh, why?" she said aloud. "Why did I ever imagine that beyond the bounds of what I knew, there were strong, fine, beautiful people whom it was my mission to discover — and I old and growing blind?" It was not, she felt, that her world included all who were worth while, but only that she, trained in a narrow school, had not the ability to pass valid judgment on those outside. She could not distinguish between truth and sham when its expression was in a language she could not understand. She held still — and Reggie was with her — to her belief in the self-transforming power of the American man, but at the same time she was determined in the future never, herself, to pass judgment on the validity of that transformation. And what was worst of all — she could not escape from the fear that her own support of Francis Evans had thrown Louise into his arms and had, in consequence, brought the suffering she had seen.

She was glad to hear the maid announce Reggie

Turner. Her thoughts were not agreeable company.

"Your maid is growing to realise in me a privileged character," Reggie said, as he came in. "She never says any more 'not at home,' nor even, 'I will see,' but just lets me in."

"I hope," she answered, "that she never said the latter. That always suggests consideration as to whether the caller would be acceptable — a very rude, and to the one calling, a very irritable idea. A maid should always know whether her mistress is officially at home. Did you ever hear of old Mrs. Merton? Probably she died before you were born. She used to shake her white curls and call serenely from her own window, 'Mrs. Merton is not at home.' I never heard that any really well-bred person was ever annoyed by it, although Mrs. Evans, the mother of Francis, had the experience just as she was beginning her social career and amused all Boston for weeks with her protests. I heard the other day that she was on our side as to Hugh. Is that true?"

"Quite," Reggie answered, "and considering her usual attitude toward her prodigy, I don't understand it."

"Woman's intuition," Mrs. Warren said. "She

was born vulgar and so she will die, but she always had a kind of bluff honesty about her that was refreshing. She never even tried to hide her social aspirations, which accounts, in the long run, for her success — such as it is.”

“ Bobbing onward in the wake of her son, I always thought she was,” Reggie remarked. “ But now that his propellers have got clogged so that he’s had to stop for repairs she seems to keep on alone.”

“ Is Francis making repairs? ”

Reggie’s eyes twinkled. “ You’ve caught me perpetrating a bad metaphor, Mrs. Warren — that is, half bad. His ship is sinking and he’s very busy caulking the holes with sand. The delay has given time for the little submarines which have been following him for years to catch up and poke other holes.”

Mrs. Warren laughed. “ Now you are elaborating the metaphor beyond the power of my ancient mind to follow you,” she said. “ What are submarines? ”

“ The hidden sins of youth,” Reggie answered. “ Moralists will tell you that they follow persistently the progress of the ship of fame, ready at the most unexpected moment to pierce its hull and let in the waters of contempt. Moralists lie. These sins — these submarines — never show themselves until the

ship is sinking and then they add little to the process of destruction — except to let out bad odours that do the world no good. Their appearance now around the sinking ship is merely proof of what we knew already, that it is sinking.”

“Please, Reggie,” she interrupted despairingly, “use common everyday language because you sound as though you had something really interesting to say and I want to know what it is.”

Reggie smiled. “It is so much easier to say some things metaphorically, Mrs. Warren. This is not a century of plain speech.”

“No,” she answered. “I know it is not. But I date back almost to the eighteenth century and I am old enough to endure with perfect equanimity the sound of almost any good English word. Therefore, please be briefly and clearly to the point.”

“I will. You have heard of the little house in Dorchester?”

“From you — often. The idea of it evidently appeals to you.”

“It haunted me — but only as a phrase. I don’t know why. If you called it ‘Francis’s Dorchester cottage’ it would only strike me as fact, with a horrid sibilant sound to it. You have also heard of Mrs. Mooney, I think.”

“I knew her before you were born.”

"And you heard, too, that Mrs. Mandell and Hugh paid her mortgage."

"Yes. I think Edith should have let me do it. I knew the woman, and I owed her much. She was a faithful servant in my house for many, many years."

"Then," Reggie said, "you have the elements. I helped Mrs. Mandell about the mortgage and happened to be at the Botolph Trust Company when Mrs. Mooney paid Francis the money. From the highly coloured fragments of sound that penetrated the closed door it seemed to me that Mrs. Mooney might be a person worth knowing. So I went to see her, and she said —"

"What did she say?"

"She said that she had a friend, a kind of relation, I think, a girl who had just about finished studying to be a trained nurse — and she went wrong. Mrs. Mooney lost her, but saw her after two or three years and got her address — a place where she was living rent-free, the owner of the house apparently supporting her. You can imagine where the house was."

"The cottage in Dorchester!" Mrs. Warren drew a long breath and shook her head so that her cheeks quivered. "How loathsome! Poor, poor Louise."

"It was one of those sins of youth," Reggie went on quickly, "that might as well remain hidden. The knowledge of it would do no good to any one and would only make things harder for Louise. Mrs. Mooney will not tell and I should have forgotten except for two details. Francis apparently made a move toward bribing Mrs. Mooney to keep quiet; and the girl disappeared just about the time that Hugh was arrested."

She was startled because the theory so well fitted into Louise's idea that whatever had happened Francis knew. But of that she could say nothing.

"So you think that in some way this girl is mixed up in it all?"

Reggie hesitated. "Think is too strong a word, Mrs. Warren," he said at last. "I feel more as I should imagine a blood-hound or a girl would feel when either scent or instinct was just on the verge of making a discovery. It is not in the least intelligence. I am sure that whatever spark of that divine gift I may have is properly out of sight just now. I am a girl waiting with fluttering heart to know whether or not a particular man is going to propose — and should be frightfully disappointed if he doesn't."

Mrs. Warren laughed. "You are quite impossible this afternoon, Reggie," she said. "You almost

live up to your reputation among people who do not know you, of never taking anything seriously."

"My sensations are too absurd to take seriously," he answered. "Was there ever before a serious-minded student of history who considers himself also a humble member of good, old-fashioned Boston society, who has given up both his work and his usual recreation at the behest of mere, intangible instinct, to go into the business of clearing the criminal record of one of his friends and thereby involving another of them? I am no longer anything but a private detective and no class is more troublesome or, as a rule, more useless to society."

"Now you are really absurd, Reggie," Mrs. Warren cried. "Louise was here, an hour ago, telling me something of what she suffers — poor, motherless girl — and afraid that it was silly to speak out. Now you come, and fear that the fine work you are doing for Hugh may not be the work of a decent citizen. The fear of your generation lest it offend — or is it only that you think of me as a preceptress of good taste? — is lowering to you. Surely I should not question what you do any more than I should question my own acts."

"It is nevertheless reassuring to hear you say it, Mrs. Warren."

"It ought not to be. The need of reassurance

constitutes the difference between your generation and mine — and leaves mine more worthy. Any man who is working to help his friend is doing a chivalrous duty. If you were dissecting Mr. Evans' past life to satisfy an idle curiosity you would be immersing yourself in whatever vulgarity you might find there. A friend of mine once told me that he considered only one thing more degrading than immorality and that was talking about it afterward. I added that it seemed to me there was another, the discussion of people's sins for no purpose other than the satisfaction of the lowest form of curiosity. You are not that kind of man. If you were I should never be 'at home' to you. The tragedy here is that it may drag Louise even more into the mire."

"May it not be the final straw that will force her to leave her husband?"

"Not if he acknowledges it. A woman who has borne what she has borne — in darkness — will welcome a change to what is concrete and in the open. The endurance of a fine woman, Reggie, is a nobler, harder thing than the courage of a fine man."



## CHAPTER XXI

REGGIE went the next morning to the penitentiary to see Hugh, if possible, to find out at least how he was.

“Yes, I guess you can see him,” the warden said. “The rules has to be suspended sometimes when the prisoners is sick and it looks to me as if Brandon was up against it, so to speak. We’d let some outside doctor come to see him,” he went on as he led Reggie through the clean concrete corridors. “We’d do most anything to get him well. He is a wonder — that young man. The other prisoners all got just to love him when they found out he didn’t put on airs, and the attendants would do anything for him short of letting him out. I don’t mind telling you I wouldn’t sleep nights for fear of that, too, if I didn’t trust Brandon himself. And I wasn’t a bit crazy about having to take him in. The swells we get now and then usually make more trouble than anybody else. But Brandon — with his cheerful ways and the work he does you’d never know he was a swell — just like any common man and better.”

“He was just like that outside,” Reggie said.

“Well, I wish more of his kind would get in, then,” the warden said, laughing. “It would make

my job as fine as silk. Here we are now." He unlocked a door and let Reggie into the cell. "I'll give you half an hour," he added, as he went away.

Hugh raised himself in his cot. "That you, Reg," he said huskily. "You were a trump to come. I needed cheering up."

The cell was dim, the window a pale grey square like a piece of blotting paper.

"Asleep were you?" Reggie asked. He could hardly see Hugh, but felt that his hand was hot and dry.

"I was not really asleep. I was lying with my face in the sunlight. It's the nearest thing to being in the open, and when the sun was cut off by the prison wall my thoughts changed to dreams, and so you found me. How is everything outside?"

"Well, you know, everything's pretty well," Reggie answered. He was worried and thought diversion might be what Hugh needed. "The calendar verges on December; the leaves are off the trees; the town begins to look inhabited; all the same people say all the same things — appropriate to the season, of course; by careful calculation I find we are all a year older than we were a year ago. Otherwise Boston is almost exactly as you probably remember it."

In the darkness Hugh did not feel it necessary to

smile, but he put an intentionally careless note into his voice as he asked, "Many girls coming out?"

"The usual number, I should say. The annual growth of the human race does not vary much and baby girls of the same age have a habit of growing simultaneously to baby women of much the same naïve lack of experience. There's another little pig-tailed Thaxter, I believe, whose skirts have extended sufficiently to allow her to appear in society — or 'in company' is the dainty, lavender-scented way of putting it. Have you never had Mrs. Thaxter smile at you through her lorgnettes and ask whether it is possible that 'dear Sylvia is already in company'? It makes a fellow feel awfully crude and also very proud of her belief that he will understand. Beatrice Thaxter's ball will be the event of the season."

"I suppose so," Hugh assented. "Sallie's was. It was there, in the conservatory, that Louise told me she was going to marry Francis. I left immediately and got very drunk. Do you know, that is a frightfully caddish thing to do, Reg, to go and make a beast of oneself because one is not cheerful. It is an insult to the girl, too, and shows that she was quite right not to love where one wanted her to."

"But you weren't in love with her, Hugh?"

"No, I wasn't." His tone was one of polite assent, but to Reggie, who could only dimly see his

face, it had not the finality that would carry the past tense forward into the present.

“Of course the whole thing was a mistake,” he said seriously. “All we can say is that Louise was not a child. Heaven knows she argued it all out with herself and now that she has taken the step will never go back. She is a Boston lady, Hugh — young, but one of the kind who holds her shoulders back and, as the Prayer Book says in a different connection, that is ‘an outward and visible sign of an inward spiritual grace.’ She will feel, I think, that loyalty to herself and to her traditions includes, inevitably, loyalty to her husband.”

“I suppose so.”

“And it’s going to be hard for her, Hugh, in a way that we cannot prevent — you and I and her friends. Did you know that his house in Dorchester — the place he intended would be a refuge for Mrs. Mooney — was not rented, but was where he kept his mistress?”

Hugh caught his breath sharply.

“What is the matter?” Reggie asked. “Does that surprise you so much? It always seemed to me that his published code of morals was a little too beautifully snow-white for everyday use.”

“No, it does not surprise me — particularly. Does she live there still?”

Behind its apparent naturalness Reggie felt the intensity in Hugh's voice. "No," he answered, "Louise will not have that to bear. The woman disappeared just about the time that you were arrested."

"Where did you rake up the story?" Hugh asked after a moment of silence.

"Heard it from Mrs. Mooney, your friend. I've been cultivating her more or less lately. She would do anything for you and somehow I can't help feeling that she may be able to help. She and her chatter have not given me clues — really — but she has scattered seeds that may grow into clues. She is like the beautiful and good younger daughter from whose mouth gold pieces dropped, only from the mouth of the Mooney fall seeds."

"Are you still searching for the unfindable?"

"Of course. You don't think we are going to let you stay here for three years?"

"Perhaps they'll carry me out feet foremost before that time." Hugh's voice was weary.

Reggie laughed satirically. There was no mirth in his heart. "The best way to have that happen is to count on it," he said. "We'll have you all right in a few days. Is there anything I can do for you out in the great, wicked world?"

"Yes," Hugh said. "In the drawer of that table

are two manuscripts, a poem and a story. They are not signed, and I don't want them to be. Send the poem to the Editor of the *Courier*. It is more or less a cry from the depths and therefore he will like it. He leads, or follows the American idea at present that the only true literary art comes from the illiterate and the down-trodden. He will probably think the stuff was produced by a coal heaver."

Hugh's voice was becoming more and more husky and his manner more languid. Reggie was frightened and wanted to get help. He took the manuscripts and stuffed them into his pocket. "I'll see to them," he said. "Don't think about writing now, but go to sleep and get well. I'll be back tomorrow."

When Reggie was gone, Hugh lay staring at the blank walls of his room. Every inch of him ached and he seemed to be floating dizzily, but his mind was acutely awake. The walls pressed against him and the ceiling was very near. Beyond those stiff barriers was life, flowing on without him, heedless of him and not needing him. But he longed with a longing that made his eyes smart to be once more a part of it all. Three years! They were such a weary time in his young life. Three winters, with their gaiety and their crowded events, with their dances and their dinners and their operas, their

frivolity that gave wings to youth; their intimate communions that gave poise to its hopes; their contact with true men and women that developed its power. And from all he was cut off — unjustly. Never before had he so cruelly realised the injustice as he did in this lonely, suffering hour. Three years, and then yet other years to follow — for is not the chapter of progress closed forever to a man who bears the marks of prison? The stain would not affect his soul, he knew, nor would his true friends see it. But the world would. The world could never forget that he had been convicted of theft. Yet as a suspected man he must still hold fast to the twin standards of truth and dignity that were the beauty and the grace of life. He could realise them almost visually in the roll of his friends — real friends who looked beneath the surface. Mrs. Mandell, who was the personification of truth in all her dealings, and whose gentle dignity sweetened the lives of all who came within her influence — what would he not have given to see her beside his bed; Mrs. Warren, garrulously truthful, exuberantly dignified — if such were possible; Reggie, outspoken, honourable, and with all his high spirits and sarcastic humour never boorish; and Louise — Hugh paused. He felt for her letter under his pillow. Yes, Louise too, who had, he thought, so

passionately sought truth that she had deceived herself and had fallen away from dignity, but who had the courage to regain both. Her letter, that said so little, ineffectually concealed so much. Beneath the quiet words was a cry of heart agony. She knew that she had been wrong, and if she knew Francis must know too. Yet he was silent. Hugh shivered as though a blast of moral chill had come to accentuate the physical cold. Francis knew and was silent. But he was the kind who could not know innocence unless he also knew guilt. And if he knew guilt, why was he still silent? Hugh started up in his bed. A sudden hot rage shook him. How Louise must suffer! His own pain seemed trivial in comparison. He must help her. He must protect her. He threw off the blanket and tried to get out of bed, but a great dizziness caught him and he fell back, unconscious, against his pillow.

Reggie made the best of his way back to the city. At the Botolph Trust Company he turned in to speak with Francis. It seemed that somehow he might hurt him by telling him of Hugh's illness, that he might for once pierce painfully that stiff shell of self-confidence.

Francis wheeled in his chair to meet him. It struck Reggie that he looked old and tired. The massive jaw was ineffectual because the eyes were



shifty. He seemed to see the beginning of a wreck and for a tiny instant he was almost sorry. But it struck him most of all that this was the face of a man who was not only fighting a losing cause but who no longer pretended, even to himself, that he was right. It was a struggle in support of a self-acknowledged lie. And like a flash it came to him, as it had come to Louise through her woman's instinct, and to Hugh in the sudden clear perception of his delirium, that this man knew.

Reggie did not stop to reason. "You know that Hugh is innocent," he said brutally. "You probably know the guilty person. Are you going to let Hugh die in prison?"

Francis turned very pale and for a moment the contraction of his throat prevented him from speaking.

"Come along," Reggie went on, "you may be brute enough to hide the truth and let him stay in prison, but will you let him die?"

Then with a supreme effort Francis gathered himself together. With as much firmness as his trembling lips permitted he burst out, "Leave this office immediately. Did you come here to insult me?"

Reggie laughed. "I came to learn the truth, if possible — at least to point out the truth. I have learned something and I have said something that I

needed to say." Then he went out. Francis leaned forward on his desk, his heart beating so that he could hardly breathe. He could not believe that anything had been found out and yet events moved rapidly. Louise and now Reggie Turner, had hit on the bit of truth that, if it could be proved, would condemn him. But it could not be proved. He held fast to that. He could and would deny it. The lies that he must tell seemed morally inconspicuous, almost a duty. Reggie had accused him, directly, brutally, and with no proof to support him. It was intolerable that such things could happen. He had not answered because at the moment he could think of nothing to say. But, after all, the course he had taken in self-defence was the most dignified. In the future he could simply avoid meeting the man. He tore up an invitation to a dinner of his college club. The curious hesitation he had felt about accepting it had made him decide angrily that he would accept, but this settled it. Reggie would be there and it was not worth the possibility of a scene. They would probably drink Hugh's health.

Hugh's health! That reminded him that the boy was sick. He hoped that he would die and then, suddenly, the possibility opened to him of doing an unnecessary and therefore telling kindness. People would have to acquit him of vindictiveness,

at least, if he bestirred himself to make Hugh comfortable.

Francis called for his motor and went directly to the prison. He told the warden who he was and why he had come. "Is Brandon really ill?" he asked.

"Yes," the warden admitted. "He's a pretty sick man — pneumonia, the doctor thinks. He's been removed to the infirmary. We found him in a dead faint after his friend Mr. Turner left."

"Can he have a private nurse?"

"H'm." The warden looked doubtful. "It isn't just according to rules, but we'd do most anything for Brandon, short of letting him go, as I told Mr. Turner. He's the whitest prisoner I've ever had and sometimes I can't help thinking as how he really oughtn't to be here — begging your pardon, sir."

"Fortunately for your peace of mind you don't have to decide that," Francis said coldly. "You think that it might be arranged to give him a private room?"

"One of the attendants might give up his and bunk in with somebody else."

"Find out about it, will you?" Francis said. "I'll pay him for his discomfort."

"I guess that wouldn't be needed," the warden

answered as he turned to the door. "They'd most of them be glad to do something for Mr. Brandon."

Francis smiled disgustedly. Even the prison attendants were apparently becoming sentimental about Hugh. It was almost amusing — not quite, he thought, because it made one ashamed of the shallowness of human nature. But at least it would save his pocket book. He stood looking out on the prison yard where the prisoners were sitting about talking. A hard set they seemed, most of them, men of all nationalities and colour — all in the process of being Americanised, he thought grimly. Perhaps they gave Hugh an opportunity to do some missionary work. Perhaps they too could do good work with him by rubbing off a little of the boy's pride. But, even as he thought it, he realised angrily that Hugh's pride was of the right sort, not the pride which reaches out to offend others, but which is self-contained and self-supporting, unconscious, making for keener appreciation of the good in others, not looking for their faults. He took out his watch and stood with it in his hand until the warden returned.

"It is all right," the man said. "I've fixed it with Bill Jones. They'll move Brandon into his room as soon as the doctor comes."

"Good," Francis said. "And now about a nurse."

Will that be allowed? It is important if Brandon really has pneumonia."

The warden hesitated a moment. "Oh, well; go ahead," he cried. "I'll get it in the neck from the authorities, but I've given satisfaction for twenty-seven years. I guess they won't fire me."

"Perhaps I can manage that," Francis said. "I know some of the prison commissioners. I'll get a good nurse somewhere and send her out." He thought a moment. "Can I use your telephone?"

"Sure. There it is."

Francis looked in the register and rang up a hospital. "Is Dr. Byrne there?" He waited a moment then—"Hello, Arthur, this is Francis Evans. Can you tell me where to get a nurse? For what? Pneumonia—No, none of my family. It's for Hugh Brandon." Then he told of Hugh's illness and of his own wish to make things as comfortable as possible.—"Yes, I will hold the line."

After a few minutes Dr. Byrne said that he could send a nurse immediately. "She's just finished her training," he added, "wants work and, as she has just had two or three bad cases of pneumonia in the hospital, will be as good as you can find. Shall I send her along?"

"Yes," Francis answered, "as quickly as you can. And don't bring my name into it at all, please. I

will pay her through you. I want Brandon's family to feel that everything is being done and I don't want them to know I have a hand in it. People would talk and that is always tiring."

He hung up the receiver and as he left he said to the warden, "Remember that, please. No word of any kind about me. I'm simply not in it. Take the credit to yourself if you want it." He intended to tell Louise of what he had done and knew that, through her, the people whom he wanted to have know would hear. Perhaps, at last, even Hugh's family, even Mrs. Mandell, would be compelled to admit that he was sometimes able to be unselfish and disinterested.

## CHAPTER XXII

THE succeeding three weeks were an anxious time for Hugh's friends. Nor, as Mrs. Warren said, were they even allowed to suffer and worry in peace. The papers found much to print about his illness and that, of course, gave them an excuse to discuss the trial again and to draw new lessons from it for the public benefit. "Lest we forget," Reggie remarked. The most sensational sheet of all, that which claimed to speak with the voice of the people, printed in bright red letters a stirring account of the special privileges accorded in prison to the sick young aristocrat. According to it the Senator from Massachusetts had pulled wires, as is the way of senators, to enable Hugh to live in luxury; his "apartments" in the prison were "fit for a king"; an army of nurses hovered about his bed; the other prisoners were treated to a display of the power of money such as they would hardly have seen in Fifth Avenue.

And Hugh, in the meantime, in his tiny bare room, cared for by a faithful nurse, fought for life and won his fight. The news came by telephone to Mrs. Mandell one beautiful Sunday afternoon and she

passed it on to Mrs. Brandon and Mrs. Warren and Reggie and to many of Hugh's other friends. Then she sat down in her library, tremulously happy, to think, and to read again the poems and the story which Hugh had written during the last months.

After a few minutes she put down the magazine. "I knew he could do it," she said softly to herself, and once more took up the paper. It opened naturally to a poem. She read it through again, though she already knew it by heart. She did not pretend to be a judge of poetry, although she had always loved it and had in her mind too many of the world's great poems to go far wrong. She was conscious, too, in this instance, that her love for the author might warp her judgment, as it had in his early, slim, lavender-covered volume of verse. And yet she felt that now she could force herself to be coolly critical as she had then refused to be. In this poem, Hugh had abandoned the dainty melody of the earlier verse. There was no longer imitation, nor groping for form, but rather a contemptuous disregard of form that resulted in an irregular and intense harmony. She could not classify it, but she felt its power vibrate through her. She could not fully understand it but knew that in it Hugh was groping toward articulate speech that should stir the hearts of men. And Reggie had told her that



another poem, which Hugh had given him, was even more profoundly real.

The sunlight, reflected from the river, danced on her ceiling and Mrs. Mandell darted to the window to lower the shade. Some one was almost sure to come for tea at five o'clock and the shimmer, that was company for her, was often annoying to others. Mrs. Warren had said that it was too reminiscent of the waves that play tricks on the ceiling of one's stateroom at sea to be anything but horrible in suggestion, and Mrs. Mandell, who loved everything about a sea-trip, had ever since been prepared for the possible prejudices of her guests.

Her maid came in to arrange the tea-table, left, and almost immediately returned with a card.

"Mr. Herbert Marchmont," Mrs. Mandell read. "Ask him to come up." For a moment she was at a loss, seeing the very un-Boston name and then she remembered Hugh's New York friend. How had he found her out, she wondered, and what did he want?

But Mr. Marchmont left her no time to think. He came directly across the room and shook her hand. "How do you do, Madam," he said. "I came to talk to you about Brandon. I have no other excuse."

"To people who have been kind to Hugh my

doors are always open," she said gently. "May I give you a cup of tea?"

"Thanks," he said, pulling up a chair. "I'd like it."

As she poured his tea she tried to look at him, to discover, if possible, what manner of man this was whose power had so impressed Hugh, and whose honest testimony at the trial, in spite of his obvious belief in the boy, had done much to send him to prison. Her first impression, like Hugh's, had been of a man on the verge of collapse, but as she watched him she realised that his nervousness was, like hers, superficial, a habit rather than a disease; in the concentrated energy of his deep-set eyes she forgot the flabby cheeks and the swollen veins of his neck. Her impression she had to gather in bits, when he was looking about the room, or vigorously stirring his tea — while he was off his guard, although she felt that, never, really, was he that. Rather, she thought, he intentionally gave her opportunities to study him, wanting her, as far as possible, to understand at least the surface of him before he spoke out.

"I came to talk about Brandon, Madam," he said once more as he sat down his tea-cup. "I went first to see his mother."

"She will be grateful."

“I hope she is not a friend of yours, Mrs. Mandell, because I must say what I think. The woman is a fool.”

Mrs. Mandell knew that she ought to be very angry, but curiously enough the complete honesty of the man appealed to her with more force than did his rudeness. Still, because she was a true Bostonian and knew that she ought to be angry, there came a flutter of red to her cheeks and she sat very prim and silent in her chair.

Mr. Marchmont, who had been watching her keenly, suddenly laughed out. “I know just how it is, Madam,” he cried. “You know you ought not to allow me to say it and yet it’s said. You know you ought to be angry at *what* I said, and that you would have been if I had said it of some one else — and that was why you flushed — not at what I *said*, but because you were not angry as you should have been.”

“I shall be very angry in a moment, however,” Mrs. Mandell interrupted, wondering whether to laugh or cry but finally deciding to laugh because she felt sure that, if she cried, Mr. Marchmont would tell some one else that she, too, was a fool.

“I’m going to tell you why I think she is a fool,” he went on. “I called to tell her that I was interested in her son and she began to cry” — Mrs. Man-

dell was more than ever thankful that she, herself, had not cried — “and told me that with Hugh in prison, not knowing whether he was guilty or not — think of it, not knowing — she really almost felt that she had no son. Do you suppose that if some scoundrel got my boy into prison I should feel him any less my son?”

“No, I do not,” Mrs. Mandell said fervently. “Your loyalty to Hugh, whom you hardly know, has proved that.”

“I know him well,” he asserted. “It is my business to know people well as soon as I meet them. I spent several hours with Hugh. He is unpractical, honest, lacking in humour, good stuff through and through — and he is a poet.”

“Have you seen his poem in the last number of the *Courier*?”

“Have I seen it?” Mr. Marchmont exclaimed. “Is there anything else in the recent magazines worth seeing? I congratulated his mother,” he added, making a wry face.

“I am afraid Evelyn Brandon does not appreciate poetry,” Mrs. Mandell said gently.

“Appreciate it,” he cried. “No, honestly, she gets the full flavour of nothing but her own misfortunes, and them she has sucked so long that they taste sweet. She said she had read the poem but

hoped that I would not judge Hugh by it. He had been very musical in his verse, she said, but the roughness of prison life had seemed to make it harsh and difficult to understand. She was glad he had not signed his own name. She can't see beyond a certain polish and shallow sentiment. I would call her a 'curfew-tolls-the-knell-of-parting-day' woman — the kind who would love to have the world left to 'darkness and to her.' ”

Mrs. Mandell laughed. There was a kind of good-hearted bluntness about the man that made his outspoken vulgarity endurable, really refreshing. She thought it gave her an understanding of Hugh's sympathy with the prisoners, and was so ashamed of the thought that she blushed again. And once more she had the uneasy sensation that Mr. Marchmont was aware of what went through her mind.

“Mrs. Brandon would not like that. She is too fond of talking.” She wondered whether the instinctive remark had been disloyal.

“Yes — about herself,” he broke in — “not that that's anything to be ashamed of though. We all like it. I talk about myself from morning till night, because I'm proud of the success I've made. It's conceit, if you want, but conceit's a good thing when there's something worth being conceited about. The trouble with Mrs. Brandon is that she talks about

her failures, because she's proud of them — and that's devilish, Madam — the kind of thing that makes you ashamed of human nature. The one thing that Hugh's mother has to be proud of is that she is his mother and all she said of him was that he will get well — for which God be praised. If she could see the beauty and the strength and the uplift of that poem," he cried, picking up the magazine and shaking it over his head — "if she could see that, she'd be a fool still, perhaps, but a fool with bells to make the world laugh — not with bag-pipes to make it cry.

"Now I'm going to talk about *myself*, Madam," he went on before she had time to speak. "And this time" — he smiled — "neither with bells nor bag-pipes but because it concerns Hugh and I know that you are a lady who really cares about him in the right way. I began as a poor boy, Mrs. Mandell, in the Middle West. God gave me, I guess, a kind of business sense that made me get ahead. It wasn't any credit to me. I married a girl out home — a wonderful girl she was, too, but I guess it was better for her that she died after the boys were born. It most killed me then, Mrs. Mandell, but I see now that she never would have been happy. She was the kind that needed work to make her cheerful and the work that rich women find to do —

well, she just would never have known how. It wouldn't have seemed like work to her. It would have been just folly — all except the charity. I never saw her read a book, except the Bible on Sunday and some kind of a cook-book that a book-agent got her to take. So she died, leaving me with two boys to bring up, Herbert and Ted, and with an ambition to give them just about the best there is in the world. Herb died when he was twelve years old — just after we'd moved to New York and I couldn't see anything ahead that would be too good for them. That was a terrible setback, Madam ” — he hesitated a moment and then went on more quietly. “ But there was Ted still and he was worth all I could do for him — as fine and clean and straight a lad as ever lived — gets through Yale this year.”

“ I am sure he is,” Mrs. Mandell interposed. “ Hugh told me about him one day when I went to see him in — in prison.”

“ Did he really? I want those two to be good friends some day. All this probably seems to you, Mrs. Mandell, an unnecessary revelation of my own past — but I want you to understand. I worked hard, and the money came fast — too fast, I think sometimes, because I couldn't grow to keep up with it. My house in New York shows that. I guess

it's pretty bad — in fact I know it is from the feeling I get that a house like this is the real thing. The last few years I've been catching up. I haven't been trying to get richer, I've been learning to think. I've read probably more solid reading in four or five years than you've done in all your life — not so well in some ways because it's been too fast, but better in some ways because I had life and the world to test it by and you had only Boston, and other books. Am I boring you?"

"Oh, no," she said; "please go on."

Mr. Marchmont got up to walk about the room as he talked. "It seemed to me a few years ago that this fine new country of ours was doing just about the best thing possible by itself, and in the country I saw only New York, and in New York only myself as typical. Then one night I came home tired. Ted was away at school and somehow I couldn't bring myself to tackle the papers I'd brought home with me. I kept thinking about a book the kid told me he'd read at school — 'Ivanhoe' it was — and suddenly I was ashamed that I knew nothing of Scott or Carlyle, or Shakespere or Milton or any of the men on my library shelves — men whom the world had agreed to call great. I was ashamed for Ted's sake and for my own, too, and I took down 'Ivanhoe' then and there and read it through



that night. It opened a new world, Mrs. Mandell. I knew that we went ahead, decade by decade, building on the past. That had always been my quarrel with the socialists — that they ignored the past and were building without foundations. But I found that my idea of the past was as weak as theirs. To me it had been nothing but the original source of modern ideas. It never had occurred to me that in our hurry we might have missed something — left something really worth while behind us — that those people, way back hundreds of years, may have had ideas of courage, and honesty, and truth, that would make the world to-day better than it is. But all those things I found in books and I had to believe because you have to believe in spite of yourself when things are not preached about or advocated but are merely implied, and when they are proved by their effect on the life about them. I looked about me in New York for traces of this older life. I almost forced my way into the houses of those who called themselves the old aristocrats — people I had despised before because they were not leaders of finance — to see whether, perhaps, they had preserved the elder virtues. I found a little more grace, perhaps, a little more appreciation of the really beautiful, less display of material things, but also arrogance, a kind of racial ostentation that

neither their characters nor their ideals could make sweet. They had had talents given them which they had grossly misapplied. And then, at last, Hugh Brandon came, the messenger of a man I had already learned to despise. I am quick at reading character, Madam, and in him I recognised instantly what I had been searching for — the gentleman who took himself for granted and made no display of himself. A few months before Evans would have seemed to me a better type — that is, as a self-made man. The fellow himself I had never trusted, because he was all for getting what he could out of the world and gave nothing in return, nothing unselfishly, I mean. Brandon was a young man, who had instinctively those fine old-time virtues which I had begun to fear were dead.”

Mrs. Mandell's eyes filled. “You would find many such in Boston, I think.”

“Many as fine as Brandon?” he shot back at her.

“No,” she admitted, “none, I believe, so fine as he.”

“I thought not,” he went on quickly. “And he was more than I had hoped for. He was a poet, too, although he had not found himself — as he has now,” he added, touching the magazine. “What was more, he was not merely passively what I wanted him to be. He felt the incongruity between

himself and New York, between himself and my home — except for the simplicity of Ted's swimming pool, which he loved. He had thought — a little — not as much as he has now. He was not sure that the times were wrong and that he was right, but he was sure that the times could be made better if they could see themselves through his eyes, after he had learned a little more to understand them. He wanted to think — and to write — preferably in verse."

Mr. Marchmont returned to his chair and sat down again. "Do you agree with me?"

"Entirely," she responded. "You understand Hugh perhaps better than he does himself."

"Good," he said. "Listen, then. This country of ours has given me all I have. Since I learned that it was not perfect — even if it is the best in the world — I've wanted to give it what it needs, if I can. There are plenty of men to build libraries and churches and to endow schools. They are all very well in their way, all necessary to give the spiritual perception that the people lack, if the people will make use of them. Some do and some don't. Those things are remote from actual life. When I found myself what poetry really was, I asked who our American poets were. Nobody could tell me, because there was none to tell about. When

Shakspeare's plays were the only plays and crowded the theatres the Elizabethans couldn't help being better for them because it was one of themselves speaking, expressing their own local aspirations and beliefs in a better way than they knew how. Poetry became a habit because it was in the air, and when men and women breathe poetry their spiritual sense grows. I want to make poetry a habit here, in America, in the twentieth century, and I want Brandon's help."

"But Hugh does not write plays, Mr. Marchmont," Mrs. Mandell twittered in her excitement.

"But he writes verse, doesn't he," he cried, picking up the magazine again, "verse that counts? And I don't know any other American with the right background who does it. We've gone crazy — many of our best men in these days — about the literature of the people. We talk all kinds of rot about wanting to know the life of the masses. The lower a man's morals are the more wonderful we think he is. Our women read the vice reports of various cities. Why? They answer with another question — 'How can we reform what we don't understand?' It is a stock phrase, Madam, and it's so deadly true that they get it off with a sad and pitying conviction. Most of them are honest about it, but if you press them to know what they are going to

do, when they understand, you can't get any answer that means anything. Some of them read the stuff because the 'reform' cry is a sanction of idle curiosity. All of them are hurt by it and none of them will do any serious reforming. The trouble is that we're working from the wrong end. It won't help the masses to have the best people dragged down to the level of their understanding. What they need is to be dragged up to appreciate better things. And that's what Brandon's doing. His last story was printed because it was an account of prison and about prisoners — therefore your reforming citizens would want to read it. But the thing that appeals to me is not what it may tell me, but what it may tell the prisoners themselves. There's where it's different from the vice reports and the cries from the depths! It's the real thing because it shows the men themselves,— not how bad they are, but how good they might be if they simply let loose the good that's in them. It shows their sense of humour and the saving grace of it — not glittering society humour but the deeper kind that comes from a knowledge of the irony of life — the humour of Dickens' characters that makes people be good to save them from being ridiculous. If you can persuade an agitator that he is silly, he will stop agitating. Brandon doesn't 'reveal vice' and he doesn't

preach. Thank God for both. He doesn't pretend to see life through the eyes of a scavenger, either, but he makes the scavenger look at himself from a high point of view. Now that's what we need, Madam. I'm going to print his stories and his poems, and any other stories and poems of that kind we can find, and I'm going to scatter them broadcast — make them so omnipresent that people will have to read them and by reading will get the habit. I don't know how it's going to be done, but somehow, and we'll get the big men of the land back of us. I told Hugh that New York was going to absorb the whole country. It is, and it's going to carry along with it a great light that came out of the staid old town of Boston."

"But what can Hugh do — in prison?" Mrs. Mandell asked, a little frightened at his vehemence.

Mr. Marchmont looked at her. "Just now," he said, "he can help by finding out all that's in himself and in other people and by writing more of the real thing like this. Then, when he gets out, we'll send him West to get full of clean air and sunshine and then we'll make a kind of twentieth century missionary out of him. If he gets the revelation fad, he can show up some of the cads of this world like his old friend Evans. I'm sorry I talked so long. You might tell Brandon, when he's well enough to

listen. I don't believe he'll stay long in jail. Good-bye, Madam, and thank you."

Almost before Mrs. Mandell knew it he had gone and she sat back, breathless and excited, to think over this strange, abrupt man and his strange, abrupt ideas which she felt were somehow ordered in his own mind and would somehow be carried out.

## CHAPTER XXIII

To Hugh, convalescent, all the problems of life seemed very simple — or rather they had for the time being ceased to exist. He had seen Mrs. Mandell and Reggie. His aunt left with him a sense of peace and Reggie made him laugh, which was good for him. But his interest centred in his nurse, during the first few days only because she made him comfortable and brought him things to eat, later because he found her interesting to talk with and to watch. In her face were many stories and most of them, Hugh thought, were sad. She read to him, stories and essays and poetry in books that Mrs. Mandell brought him. At first he thought he could not endure her uncultivated accent and her difficulty with the hard words, but he soon found that he could forget it in watching her dawning interest in what she was reading. And then they discussed what they had read and Hugh was amazed at her naïve interest in books, her childish criticisms, which became mature only when she tested the truth of what she had been reading by what she knew of life. And that knowledge, he found, was intense along narrow lines. She sel-



dom talked of herself but he soon learned much of what she must have known through her comments on people and events, and still more through her omission of any reference to large sections of life.

When he lay on his bed alone, half asleep, Hugh wondered about her. She was not a type that pleased him. She was pretty but not refined and her hair had been cut short. It was now in the very unattractive half-long state when it never looked well. She was sometimes surprisingly hard in her judgments, intolerant and contemptuous. Apparently she had never met a thoroughly good man. He felt always that she was holding him at arm's length as though she were afraid of him, not because he was a prisoner, but because he was a man. But very slowly, as the days passed, she became more trustful of him and therefore more outspoken. She was afraid of Reggie, drew back from Mrs. Mandell and yet watched her and listened to her almost with adoration. And it was Mrs. Mandell's affection for Hugh that turned her toward him.

"How good she is," she said abruptly one morning. "I suppose she never had any temptation to be anything else."

"She has had a sad life," Hugh answered, "and all her sorrow has made her sweeter."

"It isn't sorrow that hardens," she said quickly. "It's wickedness."

That afternoon she read him part of "Wuthering Heights." It left her silent.

"Don't you like it?" Hugh asked.

"I hate the man," she answered. "He is the truth of most men and he doesn't hide his wickedness. He is the man I have known, only the shams are stripped off."

"Have you really known such horrible creatures?"

She was silent a moment. "I have never known any others," she said, "except I sort of feel that you are different. You must be to have somebody like Mrs. Mandell love you so."

"Can't you forget them all?" he asked. "Haven't you any other memories that you can bring back?"

"Not many. I lived in the country when I was a kid, but the country don't mean — doesn't mean — what it does to you. To you it's the birds and flowers and the wind across the fields that you talked about when you were sick. To me it means hard work, and heat, and horrible cold in winter and ragged clothes and coarse, bad farm hands. I only wanted to get away from it, into the city, where a girl would have a chance and could live."

“And so you left it?” he said gently.

“Yes, I left it, but I didn’t have any chance. No girl that’s pretty in a way, and that wants to live, ever does have any chance. This is the first time I was ever really happy, here in this prison, taking care of you, and talking about decent things, and reading, and seeing your friends. Even Mr. Turner that — *who* laughs at everything and frightens me — I know is honest and not like the others. And you’re getting well, so this can’t last, and the thought of what will come next scares me because it makes me think of all that happened before.”

“Should you like to tell me about it?”

She nodded. “I would and I wouldn’t — but I would more because you’ve been kind to me and your friends have, and I wouldn’t want you to be sorry for me without knowing I’d been a bad woman, Mr. Brandon.”

“Many a good woman has been bad by force of circumstances,” Hugh said. “I have seen them on the streets at night, women with sorrowful, painted faces, that seemed to me to show such wretchedness as I could not bear to know about. They were not bad women.”

“Oh, yes, they were,” she broke in — “But they were paying for their badness in a hunt they didn’t know was hopeless.”

“A hunt for what?”

“For a man — a real man — who’d do the little bit for them that it wasn’t too late to do. I was one of those women, Mr. Brandon — only I knew how to hide the pain that was eating me. And so I found the man — not your kind. I didn’t know there was one like you — that would speak to a girl that had gone to the devil — for the sake of the girl. Perhaps you wouldn’t either — wouldn’t speak at all, I mean — but I think you would if it would help her. I found a man that spoke to me for his own sake — and I loved him. He wasn’t terribly rich, and he didn’t like to spend money he didn’t have to spend. But he gave me a little house of his to live in — out in Dorchester, it was, where I could have things as I wanted.”

“In Dorchester!” Hugh exclaimed involuntarily.

“Yes,” she went on, “in Dorchester. It was home to me — that house. Sometimes he came often — sometimes not. He didn’t give me much money, but I took in sewing — and I didn’t need much. Then I saw in the papers that he was going to be married.” She stopped, and leaned over so that Hugh could not see her face.

“And then?”

“Then,” she said. “Why — nothing, Mr. Brandon. There was nothing I could do — and you

see, I wouldn't have, anyway, because I loved him. But I did not hear from him, and he did not come, and one day I saw him,— in a sleigh, with his girl. The next day I went to him — in his office. It was wrong. He'd told me not to. And he was angry with me for wearing my fur coat in the rain — it wasn't cold any more. And I asked him for a little money. He said I could earn my living all right. And I asked him if there wouldn't always be a place for me. I'd be so good. He laughed, and said in the wide world he wouldn't see me, nor even in a little narrow room."

"And then?"

"That was all. I went away. He did — give me some money. It was three thousand dollars, and I went to Europe."

Hugh was silent for a moment. The miserable, common, sordid little tragedy affected him deeply as coming from her lips. And somehow, too, it all seemed to have a bearing on his own life, though he could not have told why. "So you went to Europe," he said finally. "That was last spring."

"Yes. Europe was just like America — just men who followed me. I had yellow hair then and I suppose I looked my part. The money went, all but enough to get home, and I came. I couldn't go back on the streets, Mr. Brandon. I wanted to be

good. I had nearly finished a course of nursing and they were kind and took me back into the hospital. They said they always thought that I'd make a good nurse."

"They certainly knew," Hugh cried. "But the man — didn't he help you?"

"He couldn't," she responded. "I'd changed my name. He didn't know where I was. I don't believe he would have helped, anyway."

"I wish he was here," Hugh muttered. "I should like to punch his head."

"Oh, no," she said, straightening, and glancing at Hugh in a frightened way. "Oh, no, I'm glad he isn't."

"Why?"

"For you — and for him — and for me. I guess you wouldn't understand. For you — I want you to be different — not the fighting kind, and then," she laughed, "as your nurse I couldn't let you. For him — no. He taught me so much, Mr. Brandon. He was a gentleman. He never was cruel until that last day, and then he was mad with me because I'd disobeyed — and because I wore that fur coat that made everybody look at me when I went to his office. And for me — that I know you couldn't understand. If he was here, and you tried to hit him, I'd get between and take the blow myself, Mr. Bran-

don. He made me love him and I can't help doing it — always. He couldn't make me stop, and you couldn't. Nobody could — because I don't want to stop."

Hugh drew a long breath. It seemed horribly wrong to him and yet withal there was a splendid constancy about it, that was a distorted reflection of the noblest virtues.

"You see," she said suddenly, "he was the first to make me think. He taught me the world was not just hell."

Hugh's eyes grew misty as he watched her. "I understand," he said. He remembered that while yet a boy he had gone into the country to buy a dog — hardly more than a puppy it was. But all it had learned of life had been from the farmer, who taught it, and abused it. For years that dog had been his beloved friend, but whenever the two of them, in their country rambles, passed by the farm, the dog had left him to run fawning on the rough man who had been its teacher. The animal mind had been so vitally marked by this first affection, these first lessons, that no later love could dim their traces. He felt that it was no indignity to this woman's humanity to understand through such an analogy. She might progress to the highest of which her broken nature was capable and still feel with loving grati-

tude that the basis of all she learned was in this man, who, bad as he was, had at least been better than any one she had known. And comparatively, therefore, he had been good. "Can't you write to him?" Hugh asked.

She shook her head. "I could. What's the use, though? I guess he's married now, to the lady he was engaged to. He's forgotten about me, or anyway, he wouldn't want to see me. He wouldn't ever forget, really, because I left a letter for him when I ran away. It was to say 'Good-bye'—and because I didn't want him to forget."

"But you don't want to see him now?"

"Of course I want to—but I'd be afraid, and I know it's better this way. I've learned things from you, Mr. Brandon, and from your friends, that he could never have taught me. I can keep on better by myself now. Only I'm not being a good nurse letting you talk so long. Will you try to sleep while I go to get your milk?"

A tiny square of afternoon sunshine burned like a patch of flame on the red blanket of his cot-bed. Hugh moved so that his head was in the sunlight. He could shut his eyes and with the light pressing through his lids could imagine himself out-of-doors, his face upturned to the sky. But here, as in the open, it was his soul, rather than his face, that he



wanted drenched and cleansed with the sunlight that fell so cleanly from the endless blue dome. That act of imagination, perhaps, might be what he could teach Miss Gregerson. And such lessons he could teach her here, in jail, as well as in the open, for the learning was an act of will, not a matter of influences.

The pathos of the woman was, he thought, her shut-inness. She was like a dweller in one of those remote villages which straggle along the New England hill-sides, who has for so many years been oppressed by the same unchanging sights and sounds, who has so long endured the marble silence of winter, the hopeless unrest of spring and the thankless toil of summer, that the very sky has become a burden, that the aspiration which expresses itself in prayer has trembled into a mute repression, and the surface become, at the last, impervious to new suggestion. But with her it had not been the monotony of outward, physical life that had hardened the surface. Rather, he thought, had it been an inward force, steeling her shame against despair. Her girlhood days had been spent in drudgery, against which she had fiercely rebelled, and as an escape from this she had drifted into a life of sin. But as her will had prevented her from becoming a drudge, so it had later preserved her soul when, physically, she

had lived the life of other degraded women. From the beginning, he thought, her attitude must have been one of repulsion to all external surroundings, until finally, through the force of a dogged will, she had encased herself in a coat-of-mail that not only shut others out but shut in her own spirit. Probably never had she revealed herself as she had to-day, and even to-day it had been a revelation of fact rather than of personality. It was not, Hugh knew, that she did not want, or did not dare to show herself — simply that she did not know how. Her only spontaneous giving out of her own personality had been to this unknown man, and its failure — inevitable as it must have been — though it had not destroyed her belief in the man, or in goodness, had simply closed, like a violent astringent, the last, quivering opening through which her spirit could emerge.

It seemed to Hugh, as he lay on his bed, feeling, through his eyelids, the soft pressure of the declining sunlight, that through this woman he was learning a little to understand the complexity of modern life which, as he grew stronger, began once more to oppress him. He could not see even her simply. He considered the way in which a man like Dekker would have revealed such a character three hundred years ago, the complete simplicity of his method, the final appealing correctness and pathos of his result.

Such work was, of course, high art, but Hugh doubted whether the method would be true to-day. It was not only that the artist was more complex. His subjects, too, were more complex. The bad man who had opened to Flossie possibilities of good was of complex character. Sin itself, like virtue, had grown to be the expression of a hundred conflicting emotions, these in turn controlled by a hundred conflicting theories. In the Boston of his ancestors men and women had acted under the sanction of laws, divine and human — or had been carried away by passion and broken these laws. They had precise standards which they adhered to or from which they fell, as the case might be. But in the modern Boston, hurrying to keep step with New York, each man was more or less a law unto himself; each, in society as in business, was striving to get the better of his neighbour; morality — or the lack of it — could no longer be defined in general terms; the motives and the conditions which had made Flossie what she was were of a complexity which no Elizabethan dramatist, with his simple exposition of simple character, could ever have fathomed.

And the man, too, who had first taught her, who had been the first to give her a glimpse of her own possibilities — what had been the forces which led him

to her and then carried him away, Hugh wondered. There was something sinister about him, something beyond the crude heartlessness of most men of the type. There was a secretiveness and meanness about the little house in Dorchester that accorded ill with his final extraordinary generosity; a wide rift, too, between the consideration he must have shown to gain her grateful devotion and his apparent brutality at the end. And if this brutality, why the sudden gift? She said that she had almost wanted for food. That argued anything but lavishness on the man's part, yet when he was tired of her he had been lavish. She thought him a gentleman, yet in his anger he had taunted her with the reminder that she "knew how to make her living." The man must have had an ungovernable temper or else was a brute — but that was impossible, he thought. After all, this speculation was useless. Motives, simple or complex, were unimportant since the man existed, had done, unconsciously, his best, and consciously his worst, and then had passed forever out of her life. Yet Hugh could not help playing with the subject. Not once had he really connected Francis with this unknown man, and not once had Francis been out of his mind. Except for the house in Dorchester — and God knew that Dorchester was made up of houses — there had not been a suggestion of

Francis, the man, at least as the world had known him before Hugh's arrest. But there had been insistent resemblances of him as somehow he obstinately remained pictured in the back of Hugh's mind. Hugh allowed himself at last frankly to think of him as the surest way to dispel his suspicions. He thought of him as Louise's husband, the man who was to make her life, and who, in making hers, must, through contact with her, make his own finer. And yet always there lingered confusingly that other idea of Francis, of a man in whom there was not the old-fashioned, well-bred spirit of truth which spoke its own language whatever the consequences.

His thoughts grew more confused, more in the nature of a moral pageant, unrolling sordid and beautiful pictures of life that had meanings which he could not grasp. Personalities weakened into types, and types into misshapen, glowing or sombre abstractions, until, as the last-sun-rays faded, Hugh fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE doctor says I'm really all right, Reg," Hugh said to his friend a few mornings later. "I am to move back to my own apartment. You needn't look glum about it because my bed is comfortable, and I get a bit of sunshine, and the warden will look after me. Miss Gregerson leaves to-morrow." He hesitated a moment. "I am worried about her, Reg. I wonder if Aunt Edith would take her in for a few days."

"I imagine she'd put up the devil if you asked her to. But why this solicitude? You don't imagine yourself in love, do you?"

Hugh laughed. "Far from it, but she's frightfully pathetic. She's one of those people who've never had a chance."

"Like nine-tenths of the people in the world. What's her particular complaint?"

"She doesn't complain. It's just a bit of the usual story of the poor, pretty country girl who comes to town." He repeated part of her history and added, "Don't let her know I told you. She's a little afraid of you as it is. The thing that appeals to me is her loyalty to the wretch of a man who did, after all,

teach her a thing or two and gave her a lift without meaning to."

Reggie was not listening. "I wonder how much the brute gave her," he said with apparent carelessness.

"Three thousand, I think," Hugh answered. "It was little enough and yet anything was an insult."

"Of course. And she went abroad last spring. I'll see Mrs. Mandell before luncheon, Hugh, and get her to telephone Miss Gregerson this afternoon. For heaven's sake don't imagine that you're an ox for strength and try chopping wood for the rest of the day. Good-bye."

He hurried out because he was quivering with excitement and did not want Hugh to see it. Almost at the door he met the nurse. "How do you do," he said abruptly, and then remembered that he had already seen her. So he stopped, if possible to counteract the impression. He wanted her to be friendly. "I'm awfully sorry you're going. Without you we should hardly have pulled Mr. Brandon through, I think. What I really wanted to say was that you've put all his friends under a big obligation. If there's anything we could do for you — is there?"

"If you think I'm worth it you might recommend me as a nurse to nice people," she answered. "That would help more than anything else, Mr. Turner."

Still Reggie hesitated. "Do you return to the hospital?" he asked.

"No. My training's over. I've got to find lodgings." Reggie thought she said the last a little defiantly.

Then he had an inspiration. "I wonder. Mrs. Warren told me that an old friend — dependent kind of person — and good woman, had a room she wanted to let. She lives almost in the Beacon Collar Factory." He saw Miss Gregerson put her hand to her cheek. "Mrs. Mooney, her name is. You might look her up. You don't know her by any chance, do you?"

"Yes — she's a kind of an aunt." The nurse almost whispered the words. "I — I hadn't thought of her for a long time — and it was such a surprise hearing you speak of her."

Reggie frankly could think of nothing more to say. "Good-bye." He turned, almost ran to the street, climbed into his taxi, and sank back against the cushion. Then he slapped his knees very hard and said aloud, "Reggie Turner, refrain from being either a silly ass or a doddering idiot." He tried to think; to make out whether all the ideas that jostled each other in his mind had any real connection with each other or all together meant anything tangible. Hugh's nurse was the lady of the little house



in Dorchester. She had gone to see Francis just about the time that Hugh was arrested. Francis had given her three thousand dollars — just the amount Hugh was supposed to have stolen. She, of all people in the world, had been sent to the prison by Francis. Reggie hugged himself with glee. Whether it all meant anything or not that last fact was really too beautiful. But did it mean anything? He leaned out of the window and gave the chauffeur Randolph Byers' address. Then he tried to think of something else — his motor, for example, and the streets through which he was passing. As they jolted over rough pavements and swung recklessly around blind corners as is the fashion of taxi-cabs, he suddenly thought of himself as a modern incarnation of Addison's Angel who "Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm." At least there was as much sense in comparing himself in a gasoline motor to an angel as there was in giving wings, as Addison had done, to the great Marlborough. And it was all because he had a reckless driver and because the city government could find pleasanter ways of spending tax money than in paving the streets and because — most of all because he was doing something unusual and had allowed himself to be carried away by instinct. And it was all happening in Boston, where, to say the

least, Utopian vagaries were rare. Life was usually rigidly defined by hedgerows of the customary. The same people met in the same houses; there were the usual dinners where one met the same guests; the proper number of dances, the inevitable theatre-parties where one heard mediocre actors mouth the lines of silly plays and, between the acts, talked with still the same people. It was a life of delightfully dependable, if somewhat soul-deadening regularity, intellectually balanced because generations had tested its sanity, as far as possible from the comic-paper idea, however, of intellectual, Browning-worshipping Boston. And yet there was in it a numbness of purely sensuous perception that came of the hardening of traditions, which, in their steadfast opposition to modern vulgarity, had come to have an eighteenth century distrust of enthusiasm. So all these months of feverish excitement, culminating in this last voluntary pursuit of a phantom that drew its being from emotional instinct, were due primarily, he realised, to the intrusion into the traditional ranks of a very vital alien element, Francis Evans. For himself, with all his sympathy for Hugh and for Louise, he gloried in the disruption of the normal. It made life, somehow, important.

Had it not been for Francis, Louise and Hugh would have married, in the usual dull way of the

old families. They would have been models of social propriety. Hugh, gradually, as his boyish innocence settled into rigidity, would have lost what little saving sense of humour he had — Reggie had never laboured under the illusion that Hugh had either vivacity or wit. Louise would have been slowly transformed into an admirable marble, always satisfying to the eye and to the mind, but emotionally dead. Together they would have become palely beautiful relics of a vigorously righteous ancestry. But Francis had stepped in to shatter the inevitable. It might well seem to Louise that the figure of Hugh stood between her and her husband. To Reggie the idea was grotesque. A thousand times married to Francis, he would always be the intruder; he would always stand between her and the man she should have married. And yet to Reggie this seemed, from the point of view of a providence greater than custom, inevitably wise. Louise was strong enough to emerge from her suffering with her essential nature unchanged but with her eyes and heart forever open, and the superficial coldness of her burned away. And for Hugh also, when he was finally vindicated, it would mean a broadening of vision, a knowledge of men and women outside of his narrow circle of friends, an escape from an intellectual prison which he had not

recognised, into the windy spaces of opportunity. A marriage of propinquity would never have revealed to him the meaning of love, but that, Reggie thought, he had learned through loss, and through what must now be passionate renunciation. All this would give him finally, had already given him, perhaps, an understanding of the humour that underlies the divisions between man and man, between class and class, and would enable him to write effectively, not vaguely.

Reggie thought of himself a moment, too, as he peered through the dirty cab window to see that he was approaching his destination. All that Hugh was escaping would be his own lot, he knew — the calm round of social life, pleasantly amusing, provincial, so far as he was concerned undisturbed by the metropolitan influences that must inevitably draw the business world and the political world of Boston into their current. He knew his own future and had no thought of dread, nor of lost opportunity, because he had in himself none of the prophetic zeal that burned in Hugh's heart and that this disaster was to set free.

The taxi-cab stopped with a final jolt and Reggie jumped to the ground.

He found Randolph Byers tipped back in his desk chair smoking in the thoughtful way which lawyers

have. Without waiting for preliminaries Reggie poured out his story.

"It is a rather ingenious theory," Randolph Byers said slowly. "You have collected your evidence very intelligently, for a beginner, Reggie. If we had known four months ago what we know now, I don't believe Hugh would have been convicted — I don't believe it, I say. You never can tell what will or will not affect a jury."

"Can't the case be tried over again?"

"Not yet. We have nothing really definite, after all, on which to call for a re-trial: You have built up, as I said, an ingenious theory that legally would not hold water but that sentimentally would have probably swayed the jury and that certainly would have created a popular opinion quite the opposite of what the newspapers proclaimed with such vociferous unanimity. But you haven't any facts. Possibly you have an outline into which we can fix the facts somehow."

"He gave her exactly three thousand dollars at just the time that three thousand dollars were stolen."

"An extraordinary coincidence, to be sure, but Evans could perfectly well have afforded to give her that amount, or any other, within reason."

"You don't think we have enough to arrest Francis?" Reggie looked crestfallen.

Byers smiled. "You are a vindictive cuss, aren't you?" he said.

"I am," Reggie answered bitterly. "This idea that the whole business was a put-up job on his part has been kicking around in the back of my head for months. I've throttled it. I've held it at arm's length, with the white light of everyday Boston shining through it until it became invisible because it was so damned absurd. And then I've gone cheerfully on my way, and it has bobbed up again to interfere with some more plausible theory. And now, at last, it has grown so strong that when I hold it up to look at it, instead of fading, the confounded thing seems more real than the background against which I see it. I may be a silly ass — but I know just what I'd like to do to Francis Evans."

"There might be a few others who'd enjoy helping," Byers said, laughing. "And actually, Reggie, wouldn't some kind of private personal chastisement be the ideal punishment?"

"It wouldn't get Hugh out of jail."

"No, it wouldn't," Byers assented. "You are sure I have all your facts now. I don't care about the theories." He took up his pad and read the

notes he had made while Reggie was telling his story. "How about the letter Hugh told you she left for him? Did he ever get it?"

"That's one point I did miss," Reggie said quickly. "I went out to Dorchester the other day to see the house. I suppose you will say that was morbid curiosity, and perhaps it was, but I decided that as long as I had started on the thing I might as well do it thoroughly. The house isn't rented yet, so I got the man next door to show me over it. When I came out, the wife of the agent — the kind of woman with bleary eyes which never miss anything — told me all about the place; how a young woman had lived there who was a friend of the owner, and how they all didn't 'just like the look of her,' and how she had gone off suddenly with a pile of trunks. The house has been empty since, she said; nobody ever in it except one or two people recently who thought of renting it. And then she said that the owner had been there in August, the first to go in after the woman left. He came in the evening and stayed only about half an hour. If there was a letter he probably found it."

"H'm. That's interesting, but I don't know that it gets us anywhere. You see, you did not actually find anything. We seem always on the verge of something, but we never quite connect."

"We're helpless?" Reggie asked.

"By no means," Byers said sharply. "By no means. Only legally we are helpless — and by that I mean legally in the narrowest sense. Do you want to come along with me to the Botolph Trust Company? We may find out something there."

"From Francis, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Do you think that's wise?"

"Yes. It can do no harm. He has no idea how much or how little we know. We may know more than we do after an interview."

As they walked down the street Reggie asked whether he was to keep in the background.

"By no means," Byers answered. "This is more a case for common-sense and wit than for a lawyer. Talk all you want to."

Just at the door of the Trust Company they met Tom Warren. "Going to see Evans?" he asked.

"Yes," Reggie answered, "a happy duty. We like sometimes to break in on the lonely isolation of the social lion. You don't mean to say you've been there?"

"Yes. Oh, yes," Warren groaned; "I often go. I've always been fond of him, you know, and I am a director. I am just coming from a Directors' meeting now, and we left the President in a



mood that I should not advise you to encounter. Good luck, however."

"A thoroughly good exhibition of temper might really make things easier for us," Byers said softly to Reggie, "that is, if he'll let us in."

"That's easy." Reggie turned to the office boy who was lounging near the President's door. "Is Mr. Evans alone?"

"Yes, sir. What name, sir?"

"It's not necessary to announce me," Reggie said as he passed the boy and himself opened the door.

Francis turned angrily. His eyes were bloodshot and his face drawn. For a fleeting instant Reggie was again sorry for him and then he remembered Hugh. "What do you mean by this intrusion?" Francis cried. "I cannot be interrupted." Then, as he saw the lawyer behind Reggie his face went suddenly white.

"I am sorry, Mr. Evans," Byers said quietly. "It is absolutely necessary that we should have a talk with you. Would some other time to-day be more convenient?"

Francis looked at him, his eyes narrowing, and the anger in them giving place to an expression of cunning.

"The fellow is even forgetting how to act his part," Reggie thought. "The last months must

have been a strain. So much the better." And yet he felt a shrinking from it all. Francis had been at least outwardly his friend; Louise was surely his friend still; and any revelation that Francis made of himself was degrading to her and something, therefore, to be ashamed to witness. He sat down near the window, wishing himself among his books in his own study in Cambridge where he belonged.

Then Francis spoke, and his voice, controlled, courteous, seemed to Reggie evidence of such astounding hypocrisy that the rush of hatred returned. "I cannot imagine," he said, "what business can be so pressing, but as it seems important to you perhaps it would be as well to finish now."

"We wanted to tell you that we have found Miss Flanagan," Byers said.

Reggie, watching Francis intently, could see no change in the supercilious smile on his mouth. The massive chin seemed to control that part of his face. There was a sudden, very slight, narrowing of the eyes, and that was all.

"I am glad," he continued quietly. "It was kind of you to let me know, though perhaps I can hardly believe"—his smile grew pitying, as though he was sorry to find such meanness in human nature—"that you took the trouble to come here merely to give *me* pleasure, though why it should give *you*

pleasure to gloat over the unveiling of a man's youthful sins, I am unable to understand. I knew, of course, that when Mrs. Mooney discovered accidentally that I had been foolish — wicked, if you prefer — the story would be very soon public property. I am sorry — for my wife's sake — but I could not prevent it. A woman in Mrs. Mooney's class — a washerwoman is she? — is always listened to by those who call themselves the upper classes. Servants, and people who have no work to do, love scandal."

"They do come together strangely," Reggie interrupted sarcastically — "the upper and the lower classes. The best of them have ideals in common. It is always those in between who have different standards from either."

Francis glanced at him disgustedly. "Still trying to be epigrammatic, Reggie? I should think a little of your verbal energy translated into work might make a useful man of you." Then he turned back to Byers, exhibiting, Reggie thought, the true middle-class deference to the legal profession. "As to this woman. If she is in want and you are a committee to collect money for her I shall be glad to subscribe — although Heaven knows I owe her nothing. Or if she has decided to reform I shall

gladly use my influence as a director to have her admitted to the Hopeview Rescue Home."

"She is not in want. She is well cared for," Byers said quietly.

"Then I do not understand your intrusion here," Francis said. For the first time his voice, trembling a little, showed that his anger, though held down, had not been mastered. Perhaps also, Reggie thought, it betrayed the fear of a man who draws back from a crisis which he feels imminent, but does not understand and is not yet ready to meet. "Have you anything more to say?" he asked.

"Several things," Byers answered. "Turner and I, as you very well know, Mr. Evans, have not the slightest interest in the sins of your youth — except as we should want to hide them, for the sake of your wife."

"There is no necessity of bringing Mrs. Evans into this discussion," Francis interrupted sharply.

"You did it yourself," Reggie said. "The man who walks through mud is bound to contaminate his wife, however superior to him she may be — and if her friends can make him clean up a bit they are doing her a real service."

Francis turned toward him angrily and yet with a sinking heart. Reggie would not have dared to

“speak so brutally, he thought, unless he was sure of his ground. “Perhaps then,” he said, sneeringly, “you have come here as Christian labourers — you have joined the Salvation Army, I suppose — to warn me of the inevitable punishment of sin — and, for the sake of my wife, since she is a lady, to lead me into the paths of righteousness.”

“It strikes me that all this, although undoubtedly interesting, is quite beside the point,” the cool, sarcastic voice of the lawyer cut in.

“Is there any point?” Francis cried.

“There is,” Byers said — “a point you have understood perfectly, Mr. Evans, ever since we came in. There is that omnipresent question of Hugh Brandon.”

Francis grew very pale and gripped the arms of his chair. For a moment he was silent, then asked in a voice that was meant to be courteously surprised but that actually was frightened, “Brandon? What connection, if you please, has Brandon with all this? I supposed that case was settled last summer.”

“It will not be settled, Mr. Evans,” Byers said sternly, “until justice is done. You know as well as I that Hugh Brandon is innocent — Don’t interrupt, please.— The connection of the case with Miss Flanagan, however, is something which must be

solved and for your wife's sake — note, please, that it is entirely for her sake — we wish to make our investigations as quietly as possible.”

“ I am sure my wife will be grateful.”

“ As to the points to be settled,” Byers went on quietly: “ Miss Flanagan disappeared just at the time that the money was stolen — disappeared and took with her a large sum.”

“ I gave it to her. I was sorry for the woman.”

“ You often seem to have regrets at the last moment,” Reggie said.

“ Was that an excuse for perjury?” Byers asked suddenly.

Francis sprang from his chair. “ This is intolerable,” he shouted. “ No man can endure insults interminably.”

“ Nevertheless,” the lawyer continued, “ when I asked you at Hugh's trial who had been in this office on the morning when the money disappeared you did not mention Miss Flanagan.” It was a shot in the dark.

“ I had forgotten,” Francis answered, and sat down again, as though the strength had gone from his knees.

Byers smiled. “ You evidently remember now?”

“ I will answer no more questions,” Francis said, bringing his hand down violently on his desk. “ All

this is brutal and illegal. You will kindly leave — both of you.”

“I am sorry you speak of legality, Mr. Evans,” Byers said. “Of course it may come to that, but we hope not.”

“For my wife’s sake, I suppose,” Francis said, sneeringly.

“Exactly. But we want to be fair to you, also. To-morrow morning Turner and I are going to have a talk with Miss Flanagan. Should you like to go with us?”

Reggie started, but the lawyer motioned for silence.

Francis took up a paper-cutter and turned it over slowly. For a moment he did not answer. “Yes,” he said finally, “I will go with you. She is not an honest person and if I am there she will be more likely to tell the truth. That is all I want, as I hope you will finally believe.”

“We knew that, of course,” Reggie said sarcastically, as he got up to go. “You have always been a stickler for the exact truth, whatever its effect might be on you.”

When they left him Francis sank into his chair and let his head rest on his arms. He thought of flight, of beginning anew somewhere else. But no.

Flight would suggest his own guilt and he was not guilty.

He must fight it out on the old ground. The game was not lost yet. His enemies were playing into his hands, because they had no thought that in Flossie herself he would still find an ally. He knew his influence over her. He thought rapidly. She must say that he had given her the money — three thousand dollars. She would be protecting herself and him at the same time. There would be no mention of the letter.

On the whole Francis had still but few misgivings as to his own ability to extricate himself from what was certainly a dangerous situation. He even welcomed the necessity of action. And this time, he thought, the matter would be settled once and for all. For two reasons he was happy. It would be a keen delight to prove Reggie a fool, and he felt a very unusual, almost sentimental pleasure at the thought of seeing Flossie again and of having her as his ally.

There was a knock and his door opened slowly.

“Well, Norton?” he said, almost pleasantly.

The cashier had aged in the last month. “I have been thinking, sir,” he said,—“I’m afraid my services here are not as useful as formerly. I should



like to give you my resignation, sir." He held out tremblingly a sealed envelope.

Francis pushed back his chair. "I won't take it," he said. "Think it over again. There's really no reason why we should not work together if each of us forgets and forgives some of the things the other has said. It would be real Christian charity, wouldn't it?" He smiled. "Think it over, Mr. Norton, and we will discuss it again a week hence."

The old man drew back his hand and his eyes filled with tears. "As you please, sir," he said weakly, and backed himself out through the door:

## CHAPTER XXV

PROMPTLY at eleven o'clock the next morning Reggie arrived at the prison gate. It had snowed all night and the boisterous air was still filled with icy particles that seemed shot from the leaden sky or that whirled up from the ground and blindingly around the corner of the wall. Reggie tramped back and forth, the collar of his fur coat turned up to keep his ears warm, his hands plunged into his pockets. The wild weather suited his mood and he could have shouted in his excitement.

He had not long to wait. A carriage ploughed through the drifts and Byers, with Francis, stepped out. "We could have brought you just as well," the lawyer said.

"Thanks. The walk was great. I liked fighting the snow." Reggie nodded to Francis.

Byers had to show his pass, as it was not the hour for visitors, and in silence they proceeded to the prison office.

"Morning, Mr. Turner," the warden said genially. "Your friend is about well. Do you want to see him? Good morning, Mr. Byers."

"We have come to see Mr. Brandon's nurse this

time, please," Byers said. "We should like to talk with her alone."

The warden motioned to them to sit down. "You can see her right here," he said. "I've got to go the rounds, so you won't be disturbed. Make yourselves at home, gentlemen."

Francis threw off his coat and drew a chair to the window. He turned over in his mind what he must say and do, but after all it must depend on circumstances. To think that it had all come about through his own interference, through his own kindness to Hugh! To think that of all people in the world he had sent to Hugh as a nurse, Flossie Flanagan. He might have thought of the possibility that she would reform and take up her old work, but even so — it was all too absurd and too horrible. "You fellows may be used to prison life," he said, with forced cheerfulness; "for me it's a new experience and somewhat depressing."

"It is not particularly gay," Reggie admitted. "Even Hugh is not enthusiastic." He threw himself into a chair as far from Francis as the narrow confines of the room permitted.

Byers took out his note-book and read to himself. The silence was broken only by the whisper of the snow against the window, a mournful, insistent, lonely sound that intensified the dreariness of the

prison as keenly as, under different circumstances, it would have made more radiant the comfort of home.

"Hush!" Reggie said, suddenly. "I think she's coming."

"To say 'hush' is nonsense when no one is speaking," Francis complained, with a nervous quiver in his voice.

Byers looked up from his notes and smiled.

The door opened. "Here she is. I'll leave her with you," the warden said and closed the door behind him.

Flossie came in nervously. The warden had told her there were two men with Mr. Turner who wanted to see her alone, and she could not understand. "What is it you want of me?" she asked in a frightened voice. Then she saw Francis standing by the window, uttered a little cry, ran toward him, and stopped midway, supporting herself on the warden's desk. "Oh! I know," she cried, putting her hand convulsively to her throat.

"It's all right, Flossie," he said, reassuringly. "I'm glad to see you again but sorry to frighten you. These gentlemen want to talk to you — ask you some questions, I think, and they let me come with them." He smiled at her and patted her shoulder.

She looked quickly around at Byers and Reggie, then back, pleadingly, at Francis.

Reggie watched them curiously and with a growing disgust. He was more sure than ever that they had made a mistake in bringing Francis.

"We don't want to worry you, Miss Flanagan," Byers said, and she turned quickly at the note of cool authority in his voice. "We think you can help us, perhaps, to settle a matter in connection with a friend of ours. Will you sit down?"

She took the chair indicated and Francis moved his seat near hers.

"You won't understand, Miss Flanagan," Byers said, "just how the questions bear on our friend, but answer truthfully, please, and perhaps we can explain later. We want to know first exactly how much money you had with you when you went to Europe." He spoke quietly but in his legal voice and with a courtroom manner that evidently frightened her.

She turned quickly to Francis. "Tell the exact truth, Flossie," he said. "They are not going to hurt you and they can't hurt me."

"Three thousand dollars."

"I think I told you," Francis said, sneeringly, to Byers, "that it was exactly that amount I gave her."

Again she looked up at him and there was in her eyes a glow of gratitude which the lawyer could not understand.

"He was always good to me," she added suddenly. "That morning, when I went to his office, he was angry with me, because I should not have gone, but he was still good —"

Francis stopped her firmly and kindly. "That's enough. You do not have to defend me. Just answer any questions Mr. Byers asks you."

"You knew, Miss Flanagan," Byers went on, "when you went to the office, that Mr. Evans was going to be married. Did you ask him for this money as final settlement of any claim you might have on him?"

She held her head proudly. "I did know he was to be married. I would never have made trouble. I *always* knew he'd get married and I was ready. I didn't want so much money, because I didn't want him to pay me and then forget about me. That's why I wrote him the letter. You got it, didn't you, Francis? It made you feel a little sorry for me, didn't it?"

Francis hesitated a second. "Yes, I read the letter," he said. "But that was not necessary to make me remember you."

Reggie glanced quickly at Byers, who kept his eyes fixed gravely on Flossie. "In that letter, what did you say?"

"That is a question that she need not answer," Francis broke in angrily. "It was an entirely private letter and one that has nothing whatever to do with the case in point."

"As you please," Byers said, shrugging his shoulders. "Will you tell me, Miss Flanagan, where the money came from which Mr. Evans gave you?"

"I—I don't remember," she answered. "I think I did not notice."

"Please try to remember."

"Think, Flossie," Francis said quietly. "The safe in the wall—don't you remember that—"

"You will please not put words in her mouth, Mr. Evans," Byers interrupted sharply.

Flossie looked at him and the colour mounted to her pale cheeks. A new idea flashed into her mind, that although Francis was evidently doing his best to protect her, he was at the same time defending himself—she had no idea from what, but obviously something in the intricacies of business that was beyond her comprehension. She was disappointed, a little, that his championship was not purely unselfish, but at the same moment was thrilled with the knowledge that she could be his ally, help him, per-

haps, and thus weigh down the balance of obligation.

She looked calmly at Byers. "I said I did not remember. I do not, but I know that Mr. Evans got up from his desk, went across the room and came back with the money."

"You saw no other money in his office?"

"None," she answered without hesitation.

"Thank you, Miss Flanagan." Byers folded up his papers. "We may have to ask you to repeat all this in court. I hope not."

"I don't believe she has told the truth," Reggie blurted out, "or if she has she certainly knows nothing that will help us to get Hugh out of prison."

"I did not suppose she would," Byers responded quietly. "Things don't move as fast as that."

Flossie turned towards Reggie and her eyes blazed with anger. It seemed to her, in the face of this unexpected accusation, that she had been truthful — absolutely so — and it cut her deeply that the joy of this reunion with Francis, this unexpected fighting by his side for the moment, should be poisoned by any new suspicion of her. She started to answer, but stopped as Francis spoke for her.

"It doesn't do — that sort of thing, Reggie. Just because a person does not happen to corroborate some cock-and-bull story that you have made



up is hardly an excuse for calling her a liar." He spoke with defiant sarcasm and could not keep the exultation out of his voice. Things were going so well for him. "I told you before that you could not possibly connect this voluntary gift to Miss Flanagan with Brandon's theft."

Flossie had risen from her chair and stood watching him, delighting in his words. But when he mentioned Hugh's name she shivered and fell back a step. "Brandon," she whispered; "Brandon. Is that my Mr. Brandon? What is it about him?"

"Nothing. He has nothing to do with you except as your patient — unless he, too, was a friend of yours in the past," he added suddenly with a sneer. The sudden thought delighted him. They had planned through this woman's testimony to clear Hugh. There would be a picturesque justice if her testimony should break down that glittering reputation of his. He had not been looking at Flossie; but Reggie and Byers were watching her wonderingly. Then Francis saw her too and caught the back of his chair in what was almost terror.

She had risen and moved away from him, as far as she could get and was standing against the wall, her arms out, the backs of her hands pressed against the plaster as though she were nailed there. She was breathing rapidly and the lines of her face were

rigid with fright. The smile was frozen on her lips but there was no longer joy in it, only a groping horror, as though she were losing her hold on the realities that saved her from madness. She moved her head slowly back and forth. "I must understand," she cried, and then again was silent, waiting.

Reggie suddenly felt cold. Again he thought of his room in Cambridge as a sanctuary — he, who hated tragedy and expected life to be a long, sparkling comedy.

Only Byers appeared unconcerned. "It is just this way, Miss Flanagan," he began, and without moving her body she turned her face toward him. "On the day that you went to the office the cashier of the Trust Company had given Mr. Evans a roll of bills, twenty thousand dollars, to take up some stock."

"Is there any need of rehearsing all this?" Francis interrupted angrily. "Miss Flanagan knows nothing of business."

"Go on," Flossie cried, shrilly.

"Later, Mr. Evans gave the money to Mr. Brandon to deliver. He turned over only seventeen thousand dollars. He was arrested, convicted of theft. Since then you have known him."

She let her arms fall heavily. "It is impos-

sible," she said; "he could not steal. He's honest."

"You too, Flossie!" Francis spoke scornfully. "What do you know of him? What do you know that would make the yielding to sudden temptation impossible?"

"He wouldn't do it," she responded dully. "He couldn't. He's not that kind. You know it, too — if you know him. He didn't do it."

"What makes you so sure?" Byers asked quietly.

When she did not answer Francis spoke up again. "Don't pester the poor girl. Can't you see that she simply does not understand, is frightened with all this unnecessary, brutal questioning?"

"I know," Flossie went on — "I know because I took it myself." She swayed where she stood and Byers supported her to a chair.

"This is nonsense," Francis cried, furious. "She's already told you all she knows. She's gone mad."

Flossie shook her head. "No, I'm not mad. I guess I was — mad to think anything but truth would pay. I lied to protect you, Francis." Her voice gained in intensity. "I thought — you were trying to save me and I said what you wanted me to say, even when it was a lie. I wanted to help you. I thought you were a real man — but no man would

do a mean trick, even to save a woman. It was a mean trick — a dirty, low-down trick like any of the men I used to know would do. And I loved you. I wanted to help you, even when you left me, because I thought you were better than them. But you're not any better. You're worse, because you try to make people think you're good, and they don't care. How you must have hated Mr. Brandon to do it — I don't know why." She stopped suddenly and covered her face with her hands.

Francis sat very still. Was this the end of it all? "I did not know, Flossie," he said in a voice that tried to be stern but that was broken and uncertain; "I had no idea you had taken the money. I thought Hugh must have taken it."

"That's a lie," she broke out. "It's a lie if you knew him. Perhaps you didn't think of me but you knew it wasn't him. And how about the letter? I told you in that — all about it."

"Yes, how about the letter?" Reggie asked sarcastically.

The letter! Francis turned toward him, his eyes blazing, but Reggie only smiled. "She forgot to post it," he said weakly. "I didn't find it until August. It was too late then."

Reggie laughed.

"It was too late then," Flossie echoed bitterly.

"Yes, it was too late then, because you'd said something different, and you couldn't bear to have folks laugh at you. That was one thing you never could bear, Francis — to be wrong. It was better then for Mr. Brandon to stay in prison — just to stay, even if you knew he'd never done anything to put him there, than to have to say yourself that you'd made a mistake."

"I had you to think of," he interrupted. "I —"

"No, no, no," she cried, putting her hands over her ears, "I don't want to hear any more. You'll say something I can't forget — ever. And perhaps I can forget all this — some time." A pathetic smile twisted her mouth. "It's so funny, you know, Francis, but I can't help it. I couldn't let Mr. Brandon stay in prison. He's good and he talks so wonderfully, and he's given me a little confidence in myself." She had forgotten Reggie and the lawyer and was leaning toward Francis. "And he didn't do it, you know. He is a thousand times better than you — but somehow — that's what's so funny — I think I shall forget the mean thing you did — forget it all, Francis, because I love you. I know you're married, and you don't care if I die, or what happens — and still I can't help loving you just the same. I guess I always will."

Francis sprang to his feet. "You choose a cu-

rious way of showing it," he said brutally; and then, to Byers, "There seems to be nothing more for me to do here. I'll leave you to continue your splendid work alone."

"As you please," the lawyer said, opening the door. "We shall only stay to get Miss Flanagan's evidence in writing so that Hugh can be freed as soon as possible."

Francis rushed through the door without glancing again at Flossie who sat in the corner of the room, crying.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE lights in Mrs. Mandell's peaceful sitting-room were turned low. The corners were dark and the wonderful colours of the portraits glowed dimly. But the three people sitting before the fire were too happy to care whether it was day or night.

"It is absolutely beyond my comprehension. I could understand if he had taken the money himself. But this!" Mrs. Warren subsided, settling back into her chair.

Reggie Turner stood by the fire-place smoking a cigarette. Mrs. Mandell was almost invisible, hidden in a huge wing-chair.

"He probably had some strange reason which satisfied his conscience," she said. "We don't know, Bessie, just how that kind of a conscience is made."

"Of course we don't, thank goodness. We were born with ready-made consciences that each of us has developed in her own way, but that no one of us has decarded. People may laugh as they please about the Puritan conscience. It's an exceedingly valuable asset. It may make us timorous but it never permits us to be wicked. I think Mr. Evans has no conscience at all."

Reggie chuckled appreciatively.

"Oh, no, Bessie," Mrs. Mandell cried, "for Louise's sake we must never think that. The poor girl is tragically pathetic."

"She is. And if I had not brought the two together I should say that she richly deserved to be. Of course, my original mistake does not really make her any the less to blame but it does lay on me the duty of helping her all I can now. And as a matter of fact, when I am actually with her, I forget every feeling except that of pity."

"The only way we can really help," Reggie said, "is by keeping the whole thing as quiet as possible. Francis made a bad blunder — that's what the public will think, and it will be punishment enough for him — for the phenomenon who never makes mistakes. Even Flossie Flanagan recognises that trait in him."

"Please do not mention that woman's name, Reggie," Mrs. Warren cried. "Just because she has saved Hugh now must never make us forget that she is really the cause of all the trouble. If she had not taken the money Hugh would never have been arrested; Louise would never have married her husband; we should all have had our usual, restful winter."

Reggie laughed. "And Hugh would never have



learned to see outside of himself — the part of himself that was bounded by his narrow circle of friends. He would never have written real poetry. And we, Mrs. Warren — think how bored we should have been, just doing the same things that we always have done and that we shall begin to do again. Except that, of course, now, we shall be more contented since we have learned the horrors of the unusual. Hugh is the only one who has really suffered and it has been most good for him.”

“It may have been an interesting experience for you, Reggie,” Mrs. Mandell protested from the recesses of her chair. “But you are young. We are old, and for us this disruption of life’s routine has been very sad. When for seventy years a body has never emerged from the charmed circle it is hard. I was contented. I should have remained so to the end — and the end can’t be very far off now. I am too old to have any influence on our country that is to be — too old, and too tired. If all this misery is going to make it a little finer I should be content, but I don’t think I quite see it. Hugh’s imprisonment has seemed to me just a piece cut out of a brave young manhood; and Louise’s marriage — I am afraid it can never lift her husband, for he will never see the light, and for her — for her it is just the ruin of a beautiful young life.”

"Speak for yourself, Edith," Mrs. Warren said vigorously. "Your voice comes out of the shadow like the voice of a selfish, unprogressive old woman. So far as our own feelings are concerned I stand with Reggie, and if I am young enough to do it, so are you. We old people can be an aid to progress by checking it, lest it go mad. And about Hugh he is right, too. Hugh ought to be one of the wild spirits whom we are here to restrain. Without this terrible awakening he would never have been that — not in Boston, at least. He would have continued to be what he was, old before his time, and that would have meant withering away into an historic fact by the time he was forty-five. One can't be old for more than a certain length of time — usefully old, I mean."

"Bravo, Mrs. Warren," Reggie cried. "I almost think that you appreciate the excitement, now that it's over, just as I do. But I'm glad it's over, just the same. I am weary of one eternal subject of conversation. I want to be able to work again with a quiet mind, and to make footless remarks without feeling somehow that I am being frivolous at a funeral. When Hugh gets out on Mr. Marchmont's Wyoming ranch he will no longer be a disturbing factor. We can forget him with a good grace."

"We shall feel that he does not any longer need our thoughts," Mrs. Mandell corrected him. "I don't believe we shall forget him."

"And then the Marchmont poetry campaign," Reggie chuckled. "What was it he said, Mrs. Mandell? That New York was going to continue to dominate the country but that first it was going to see a great light that would come out of Boston — Hugh being chief torch-bearer or something of that sort?"

"Yes," she answered, "something of that sort. It is fantastic — his idea — but with a man of his power behind it you can never tell what good it may do."

"You and I can never appreciate anything, my dear," Mrs. Warren concluded, "anything at all of the doings of people outside our ken. And Mr. Marchmont is that just as much as Mr. Evans. But in this case I can sit back comfortably and watch with the serene knowledge that my existence is perfectly negligible to his plans. I did not make *him*."

"He's safe," Reggie put in. "He has already made his mark and he has learned for himself what any other man but Francis would have learned in college."

"Poor Mr. Evans," Mrs. Mandell murmured.

"No, Edith," Mrs. Warren cried, "that you shall

not say. There is a point beyond which charity ceases to be a virtue."

"Mrs. Evans," the maid announced.

Reggie gasped. "Oh, why didn't I go home an hour ago?" he said. "I so love my own little room."

"Don't be a coward now," Mrs. Warren said almost fiercely.

The three were standing as Louise came through the door. It was Mrs. Mandell who darted to her and kissed her and brought her across the wide room, her arm around her.

"You have heard, of course, the wonderful news," she said, breathlessly. "Reggie has told you?"

"Yes," Mrs. Warren answered, "he has told us. We were afraid that you did not know."

"It was Francis who told me," she said radiantly. "And I am so happy. I wanted the three of you to know — and no others in the world, except Hugh. My happiness is for him — and for myself — almost more, I am afraid, for myself. I have always been selfish."

Mrs. Warren and Reggie glanced involuntarily at each other as they all sat down. "How much do you suppose he told her?" he whispered. Mrs. Warren shrugged her shoulders helplessly. Mrs. Mandell sat close to Louise, still holding her hand.

For a moment there was silence while the fire crackled and outside an automobile blew a musical horn as it passed.

It was Louise who spoke first. "I am glad you are all here together. I wanted to see each one of you; I have not seen Francis yet. He wrote me from his office."

No one made any response but Mrs. Mandell leaned toward her protectingly. "Why doesn't some one say something?" Louise asked. "You are not as happy as I am but you must be happy. You all love Hugh. Of course you are not suddenly free — as I am."

"Free!" Mrs. Warren and Reggie exclaimed together. Mrs. Mandell drew back, a frightened question in her eyes.

"Yes, free," she continued, "because at last Francis has told me everything."

"But has he?" Reggie wished that his lips had been sewn together before they uttered the words.

"You mean that he has told you enough so that you feel justified in leaving him?" Mrs. Warren questioned. "You know, Louise, I told you the other day that sometimes I thought divorce was justified."

"Oh, but Mrs. Warren!" she cried. "I said

then that you did not mean it, and I am sure you don't now."

"Then what *do* you mean by free?"

Louise looked at her, looked at Reggie and at Mrs. Mandell, and smiled. "You all thought he had not told me everything," she said, "or that, if he had, I should do what you would be ashamed of me for doing. It was the *not knowing* that bound me — that made me hate myself — and him. I am sorry for the past — but it is the past, and the future is mine. Francis and I will have to begin at the beginning, and there is nothing so terrible in that since we shall know now, just where we are. Not knowing, even a beginning was impossible. And the woman? I am grateful to her as my husband will learn to be grateful. She has spoken from the silence of the past, not willingly, but her words have brought justice."

"Should you mind if I smoke, Mrs. Warren?" Reggie got up and moved to the fire. "Don't you all want to smoke? It's wonderfully soothing."

Mrs. Mandell looked at him reproachfully.

"You may do anything you please, Reggie," Mrs. Warren answered, "so long as you remember that levity is not always in good form."

"No," Louise cried, "Reggie is quite right. I

was too serious, but it was the solemnity of happiness. It would be better for us all to laugh."

"I don't feel like laughing," Mrs. Warren exclaimed.

"I have long since forgotten how," Reggie moaned.

Then they all laughed, except Mrs. Mandell, who pressed Louise's hand, and smiled.

"He told me everything," Louise went on, "about the woman, Miss Flanagan — who she was, and how she took the money — how, later, he found her letter, and still did not speak. I am sure that he concealed nothing. He offered no excuses — it would not be like Francis to excuse himself, although he might defend himself. He told me the story and said that he would be at home at ten o'clock. I have talked with you because you knew already. But somehow I should not care if all the world knew. It would make his justification of himself in the years to come all the finer."

"And you plan to stay with him?" Mrs. Warren questioned, incredulously.

"Of course she does," Mrs. Mandell cried.

"Of course I do," Louise echoed. "Mrs. Mandell knew."

"Yes," Mrs. Warren admitted, "she knew as a matter of course. She has never yet doubted virtue

that is supernatural. I am too worldly, Louise, and you — I thought once that you were more worldly even than I."

"So I was and am, Mrs. Warren," Louise responded, smiling. "I am completely worldly but also completely Bostonian."

"The two qualities are incompatible," Reggie interrupted.

"Not at all." Louise shook her head. "What would be worldly in New York would be vulgar here. The term is dependent on locality."

The maid at the door announced, "Mr. Brandon, Madame."

For a moment the silence was breathless, while they listened.

"Hugh?" Reggie said, incredulously.

"Oh, do you think so?" Mrs. Mandell cried, and started for the door. "It is. Hugh, my boy, I'm so glad," and she threw her arms around his neck.

"I came right to you, Aunt Edith," they heard him say. "They told me you were here and I came. Are you alone? Oh, no. How d'y'do, Mrs. Warren."

"I couldn't be anything but well, seeing you here, Hugh," she answered, sailing across the room to him, both hands outstretched.



"And Reg," he said. "All my friends together. It is wonderful."

"And Louise, too," Mrs. Mandell added. "She is as good a friend as any."

"Louise?" Hugh started as she came forward from the dark corner where she had retreated.

"Yes, Hugh," she said, taking his hand. "You will let me be glad with the others, won't you?"

He gazed at her, his eyes glowing, and she looked back at him fearlessly. "Your gladness," he answered in a voice so low that none of the others heard, "is best of all, Louise. It is life, for me."

She drew her hand away quickly. "You see," she said awkwardly, "we have all read your poems and we all expect great things of you now."

Hugh turned to the others, smiling. "Isn't that like Louise — talking still as though she were my grandmother, remotely interested in my career? Even you, Reg — I believe that even you think you are about ten years older than I am."

"I'm sure of it," Reggie answered drily. "Haven't I brought you up and taught you everything you know?"

"There, you see." Hugh laughed. "After all my experiences, I am still looked upon as a child."

"If you were President of the United States you

would still be a child to me," Mrs. Mandell said, shyly.

Hugh put his arm around her. "You, Aunt Edith, shall have the privilege to think of me always in any light you please, no matter how demeaning."

"It always was easy," Reggie interposed, "to grant favours like that. 'Call me a dog if you will,' says the lover to his lass — knowing that she will say 'my King Charles.'"

"Reggie!" Mrs. Warren cried. "Sometimes you are a fool."

"But his mission, Mrs. Warren, is to make us laugh," Louise reminded her. "You must not go back on what you said to me a few days ago — especially now when I am sure that you were right. I want to leave you all laughing."

"You must wait to hear Hugh tell how he escaped, at least," Reggie said.

"No — not even that. I can't. Hugh will come some day to tell me himself."

"I'll go with you now, Louise — take you home and then come back. You don't mind, Aunt Edith?"

"Of course not, dear. Don't hurry." When they had gone she turned to Mrs. Warren. The tears were in her eyes and her voice trembled as she said, "It is cruel, Bessie. Ever since they were

children I have seen them together. And it would have been so suitable, so wonderfully right."

"But so wonderfully dull, Mrs. Mandell," Reggie added.

## CHAPTER XXVII

THE snow-storm was over. In the clear sky stars glittered coldly, piercing the netted branches of trees on the Boston Common.

“The cold is bitter — but oh, so gloriously pure,” Louise said, smiling up at Hugh as they stepped into her motor. “You don’t mind — you think it’s safe, after your illness? Button your coat, tight.”

“Mind! I mind nothing. I am warm for the first time in months — because my heart is warm again.”

“And yet your verses, Hugh — they were burning, and all that you wrote before were merely cool, graceful exercises.”

“One’s brain may be on fire, Louise — and yet leave one’s heart shivering with the cold. That is what I mean. At last I, too, am warm — because I am with you again.”

She did not answer as they stopped at her door. “May I come in a moment?” he asked.

“A moment; yes. You must not forget that Mrs. Mandell is waiting for you.” She wished that she could have refused. She was afraid for herself and for him. She knew that never again could they be

on the old safe ground of the days when he had made love to her, not because he loved her but because it was the natural, socially preordained thing for him to do and because he was jealous. She feared him now, because she knew he really loved her, at last, when the old golden days were dead. And she knew at last, too, that she could have loved him, that in her fear for herself she had taken ir-retrievably the wrong turn in the many-branching path of life. With all her struggle to retain her old attitude of a teacher, she knew that it was futile because she knew that Hugh was a man grown, morally as well as physically. And this frightened her — the fear of what might come to both of them if he chose to break through the paper walls of her defences.

Hugh stood in the middle of her reception room looking eagerly around him. "It is like *you*, Louise," he said at last, a little unsteadily — "the room, I mean. Some of your things I recognise. I have never seen you before, you know, except in your father's house."

"It should look like me. A woman must make her surroundings. She lives in her house far more that does her husband."

"And yet — I was afraid. He is very dominat-

ing. He wants those around him to conform to his ideas."

"I think you overestimate him," she answered, smiling. "If I were criticising I should say, rather, that he is too willing to adopt the ideas of others."

Hugh threw out his hands hopelessly. "Superficially — yes," he cried — "when it does not interfere with his own comfort. He never thinks of others. He did not think of me, God knows — although that does not matter. But does he think of you?"

"He is my husband."

Hugh shivered. "But he does not love you," he cried. "And you do not love him — you couldn't — a man like that." He stopped a moment and then the words burst from his lips. "*I do love you, Louise. And you — you might have loved me. That gives me the right to speak. Surely it gives me the right — doesn't it?*"

She shook her head. She had sunk into a low chair, the one he remembered in her father's house, and was leaning forward, staring into the fire. The crisis had come as she had felt instinctively that it must come. She only shook her head.

"Must I lie and pretend," he cried, "because in a moment of folly you married that man? Must I

eat out of his hand, and fawn on him for the right to speak to you? I have told the truth too long, Louise, to lie now and perhaps — yes, surely, I have forgotten how to speak truth gracefully. I have been living for these months close to the heart of life — and yet, not that — rather in the entrails of life, and I see with quite new eyes. The theory of the prisoner is never to submit but to fight. And he is right. I cannot draw the cloak of my old, passionless, well-bred life about my contempt for Francis. My manners will not protect him.”

“But they should protect me.”

Hugh, looking down at her, grew slowly very pale as her words sank into his consciousness. “I can’t think of you as his — wife,” he faltered at last. “It has never seemed real. And, Louise, I need you so terribly.”

“Not as much as Francis needs me,” she said, leaning back in her chair and looking up at him bravely. “You have the whole world before you, Hugh — and no dishonourable past behind. You have standards and ideals which will never grow dim, if you go out with them — alone. And unless I held fast to mine, too, yours would be tarnished. Without this taste of tragedy we might have found happiness together — who knows? More likely we should never have learned really to know each other.

You would have gone on thinking of me as a pleasant fact and I should have considered you always as a boy to be fond of. We only learned to know when it was too late."

"But is it inevitably too late?"

"Yes. You know that, Hugh, as well as I do. Whatever else we may be we are Bostonians, with all the New England traditions, and that means that sooner or later our consciences would punish us ruthlessly if we slipped away from those traditions."

"My conscience died in prison, I think," he said, sadly.

Louise smiled. "Was that the reason for your helping Mrs. Mooney? Was that why the poor girl, your nurse, spoke up for you at last?"

Hugh flushed. "Don't speak of her," he cried. "That spoils all my happiness to think that she will have to go to prison in my place. Byers says it will not be for long. It must not be. She has lost forever the man she loved, and that is punishment enough."

"She will find herself," Louise said quickly, "and later we shall all help her, we owe her much."

"But she will still be alone," Hugh said. "Tragedy comes in the long, weary years, the barren years that loom up in the mists of the future — for her, and for me, too."



Louise sprang to her feet. "They will not be barren years, Hugh. They must not be. You are too proud for that, too fine for that — unless all I have dreamed for you, always, has been false. Your eyes are open now, your heart is open, and you have work to do. You are not a coward and the man who fulfils my aspirations will never play the coward's part. He will use to their fullest the gifts God has given him — and God has been generous with you. Let me be your mentor for the last time, Hugh. You will be free of any guidance soon but I want to be the one who says, 'Go out and be a man — a big, strong man who counts; whom the world will applaud because he never falters in his work.' That is how you will reconquer happiness for yourself — and for me, too, because in watching you it will give me courage."

"Is happiness possible for me, without you?"

"Surely," she cried. "You must realise that it is possible *only* without me. If I left Francis — if a court should grant me a divorce — I should despise myself and in time you would learn to despise me. Not for nothing have we inherited that rocky Puritan conscience. So far, perhaps, it has only guided us in the petty things — has made me sit up straight, but we have never yet tested it. Now it has become the Everlasting Yea and the Everlasting Nay

and we can no more break it than we could break any other elemental law of life. It is an inheritance from which we cannot escape and it is the inheritance which permits us — I say it humbly, Hugh — to hold high the old standards that our country is forgetting.”

“And at the same time it imposes on us the burden of wretchedness.”

“No,” she answered. “No. People who have it find their reward in the joy of duty accomplished.”

Hugh shrugged his shoulders. All his life he had had what he wanted, if it was anything he wanted badly. His months of uncongenial work in the Botolph Trust Company, work faithfully done, had taught him something, but not enough. It had been no real deprivation. Nor had his weeks in prison — weeks crowded with new sensations, with the amazingly sudden opening of new channels of thought. He had not been there long enough to feel the grind, but had only tasted intellectually and appreciatively the tragedies and the meannesses of the lives around him. He had come out expecting to find his own little world unchanged. He had accepted the fact of Louise's marriage without actually taking it in and had thought somehow, that his release would make everything right again. Instead he found him-

self confronted with a condition that made the future turn to ashes. She talked to him still in generalities, as though he were a boy, but under the generalities he felt the keen sound of rebuke, edged with the contempt of a woman who knows that the man does not play fair. He knew her to be right and the knowledge both angered him and made him ashamed.

He turned toward her suddenly. "I am going now, Louise. You must forgive me. I did not understand — nor do you fully. Some self-sacrifice is useless, and then it ceases to be either noble, or true."

"True!" she cried. "Nothing is worth while but the truth, and truth does not always smile."

At that moment Francis came in. They both turned sharply at the sound. Francis stood, clutching the red velvet curtains, and his dark eyes were burning in his white face. Then he came slowly toward them, staring at Hugh.

"Byers has evidently worked quickly," he said sarcastically and his dry lips seemed hardly to move. "I hope my wife has been as kind to you — and as true to me — as Flossie was." He tried to smile but the smile twisted involuntarily into a snarl.

"Now do you understand, Louise!" Hugh cried bitterly.

"I understand that it is time for you to go back to Mrs. Mandell," she said firmly, but she was as pale as her husband.

Hugh laughed. "Poor Aunt Edith. *She* would wait for me forever. Good-night, Louise." He made his way quickly from the room.

Louise sat down by the table and took up her knitting. Francis seated himself before the fire and with the poker began jabbing at the logs. "I won't have that boulder in my house," he said suddenly. "Remember that, Louise. I really should have thought he would be decent enough to keep away. If I catch him here again I will kick him out of the door."

She made no response. The only sound was the click of her needles and the crackle of the fire. "Have you nothing to say?" he asked at last. "You are always so keen about the truth. How do you like it?"

"It makes me very happy," she said quietly.

"Happy!" He turned around in his chair in his amazement. "Happy! Did they amuse you — all the things I told you?"

"Not in the least," she answered, wincing. "But they make it possible to begin life all over again."

"How?" he cried. "What do you mean? Do you think you can get a divorce on the facts in that

letter? You can't do it. I was damn careful about that."

"Please don't, Francis." She folded her knitting and put it in her bag. "Mrs. Warren and Mrs. Mandell and Reggie and — Hugh, did not understand me," she said wearily. "I don't see why they should."

"What a couple of meddling old women, and a clown, and a romantic fool think, has nothing to do with me," he cried angrily.

Louise held up her hand protestingly. "Please don't, dear," she said again, and the "dear" made him tremble. "Listen, Francis, I never loved you. I thought I should be happier not to love and that is why I married you. I thought you were strong and honest. Neither is the truth — but both may become true. I was beginning to doubt the possibility and that was why I wanted to die — because I *have* wanted to, very often."

"Go on," he said brutally. "I can stand insults as well as any one."

"And then, this afternoon, your letter came. It told me that you had done a cruel, cowardly, ungentlemanly thing."

"The kind of thing I could not have done if I were a Brandon or a Warren or a Thaxter, I suppose?"

"No, my dear. I did not say that, nor think it. You are the only one who thinks of it at all — are always bothering about credentials. You have done a dreadful thing, an almost unforgivable thing, but — you told about it — all there was to tell. You told the facts, and you did not try to excuse yourself. That tells me that the time of my despair is over."

Francis looked at her curiously, with outward contempt, but the hand holding his cigarette trembled. He smarted under the lash of her words and still, unwillingly, he felt something salutary in the smart. "And yet you say that what I did was unforgivable," he sneered.

"I did, Francis. There are some things that can never be forgiven — even between people who are very close together. But that does not mean the end of confidence, as some moralists will tell you. Those unforgivable things can be buried so deeply under new, good things that they can never show their ugly heads again."

"And my treatment of — of Hugh, you call one of these things?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steel-cold. "The mere fact that I was silent when speech would have let a useless loafer out of prison a few months sooner — when that speech would have destroyed my own usefulness in the world — is a simple matter of expediency unforgivable?"

"It is better to be despised by the world than to despise oneself."

"But, good God, I don't despise myself."

She looked up at him calmly. There was not even a question in her eyes, but there was a light he had never seen there before. He turned away from her and leaned his head against the cool marble of the mantelpiece. In spite of himself his anger had all melted away in that unaccountable sense that something very unexpected and very good was happening to him. He realised with a start that for the first time in months they were speaking the absolute truth to each other — or she was speaking it, and he felt it. Perhaps it was that feeling, showing in his voice that made her eyes like stars. And if her eyes could still shine for him? He knew that deep in his heart he had not thought it possible any more. All day he had tried to put her from his mind, to exclude her from consideration in the life that he must build up for himself anew. Perhaps it was that which had caused the ache that seemed to permeate his whole being — the pain he had not been willing to admit might be because he had closed the door to her, forever. Perhaps she would leave him. But instead she was speaking truth to him, sure of his comprehension. And in her eyes was a light he had never seen shine for him. Some unguessed

depths within him were responding. Suddenly he knew. He loved her — it came over him with a rush. He loved her with a new, tender, self-sacrificing love such as he had not dreamed existed except in imagination. For a long time he stood there silently. Then he turned, went behind her, and, leaning down, very gently kissed her hair.

She had taken up her knitting again and he could see the needles quiver. He stood with his hands on her shoulders in a kind of self-demeaning exaltation.

“I hope Hugh will make a great success with his poetry,” she said at last. “Did you read his poem in the *Courier*?”

“Yes,” he answered, “I read it. There was something that touched even my unpractical soul. Perhaps it was its truth.”

THE END

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