

FICTION

Charles Neville Buck

Destiny

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION

DESTINY

BY

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THE CALL OF THE CUMBERLANDS, ETC.

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CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

THE KEY TO YESTERDAY
THE LIGHTED MATCH
THE PORTAL OF DREAMS
THE CALL OF THE CUMBERLANDS
THE BATTLE CRY
THE CODE OF THE MOUNTAINS

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DESTINY

PART I

THE LAND OF PROMISE

CHAPTER I

OUTSIDE the subtle clarion of autumn's dying glory flamed in the torches of the maples and smoldered in the burgundy of the oaks. It trailed a veil of rose-ash and mystery along the slopes of the White Mountains, and inside the crumbling school-house the children droned sleepily over their books like prisoners in a lethargic mutiny.

Frost had brought the chestnuts rattling down in the open woods, and foraging squirrels were scampering among the fallen leaves.

Brooding at one of the front desks, sat a boy, slender and undersized for his thirteen years. The ill-fitting crudity of his neatly patched clothes gave him a certain uniformity with his fellows, yet left him as unlike them as all things else could conspire to make him. The long hair that hung untrimmed over his face seemed a black emphasis for the cameo delicacy of his features, lending them a wan note of pathos. On his thin temples, bluish veins traced the hall-mark of an over-sensitive nature, and eyes that were deep pools of somberness gazed out with the dreamer's unrest.

Occasionally, he shot a furtively terrified glance across the aisle where another boy with a mop of red hair, a freckled face and a mouth that seemed overcrowded with teeth, made faces at him and conveyed in eloquent gestures threats of future violence. At these menacing pantomimes, the slighter lad trembled under his bulging coat, and he sat as one under sentence.

Had any means of escape offered itself, Paul Burton would have embraced it without thought of the honors of war. He had no wish to stand upon the order of his going. He earnestly desired to go at once. But under what semblance of excuse could he cover his retreat? Suddenly his necessity fathered a crafty subterfuge. The bucket of drinking water stood near his desk--and it was well-nigh empty. Becoming violently thirsty, he sought permission to carry it to the spring for refilling, and his heart leaped hopefully when the tired-eyed teacher indifferently nodded her assent. He meant to carry the pail to the spring. He even meant to fill it for the sake of technical obedience. Later, some one else could go out and fetch it back.

Paul's object would be served when once he was safe from the stored-up wrath of the Marquess kid. As he carried the empty bucket down the aisle, he felt upon him the derisive gaze of a pair of blue eyes entirely surrounded by freckles, and his own eyes drooped before their challenge and contempt. They drooped also as he met the questioning gaze of his elder brother, Ham, whose seat was just at the door. Ham had a disquieting capacity for reading Paul's thoughts, and an equally disquieting scorn of cowardice. But Paul closed the door behind him, and, in the freedom of the outer air, set his lips to whistling a casual tune. He could never be for a moment alone without breaking into some form of music. It was his nature's language and his soul's soliloquy.

Of course tomorrow would bring a reckoning for truancy and a probable renewal of his danger, but tomorrow is after all another day and for this afternoon at least he felt safe.

But Ham Burton's uncanny powers of divination were at work, and out of his seat he slipped unobserved. Through the door he flitted shadow-like and strolled along in the wake of his younger brother.

Down where the spring crooned softly over its mossy rocks and where young brook trout darted in phantom flashes, Ham Burton found Paul with his face tight-clasped in his nervous hands. Back there in the school-house had been only terror, but out here was something else. A specter of self-contempt had risen to contend with physical trepidation. The song of the water and the rustle of the leaves where the breeze harped among the platinum shafts of the birches were pleading with this child-dreamer, and in his mind a conflict swept backward and forward. Paul did not at once see his brother, and the older boy stood over him in silence, watching the mental fight; watching until he knew that it was lost and that timidity had overpowered shame. His own eyes at first held only scorn for such a poltroon attitude, but suddenly there leaped into them a fierce glow of tenderness, which he as quickly masked. At the end of his silent contemplation he brusquely demanded, "Well, Paul, how long is it going to take you to fill that bucket with water?"

The younger lad started violently and stammered. Chagrined tears welled into his deep eyes, and a flush spread over his thin cheeks.

"I just--just got to thinkin'," he exculpated lamely, "an' I fogot to hurry. Listen at that water singin', Ham!" His voice took on a rapt eagerness. "An' them leaves rustlin'. It's all like some kind of music that nobody's ever played an' nobody ever can play."

Ham's face, looking down from the commanding height of his sixteen years, hardened.

"Do you figure that Pap sends you to school to set out here and listen at the leaves rattlin'?" was the dry inquiry. "To hear you talk a feller'd think there ain't anything in the world but funny noises. What do they get you?"

"Noises!" the slight lad's voice filled and thrilled with remonstrance, "Can't you ever understand music, Ham? There's all the world of difference between music an' noise. Music's what the Bible says the angels love more'n anything."

Ham's lips set themselves sternly. He was not one to be turned aside with quibbles.

"Look here, Paul," he accused, "you didn't come out here to get water and you didn't come to listen to the fishes singin' songs either. You sneaked out to run away because you're scared of Jimmy Marquess an' because you know he's goin' to punch your face after school."

The younger lad flushed crimson and he began an unconvincing denial. "I ain't--I ain't afraid of him, neither," he protested. "That ain't the truth, Ham."

"All right then." The elder boy filled the bucket and straightened up with business-like alacrity. "If you ain't scared of him we might as well go on back there an' tell him so. He thinks you are."

Instinctively Paul flinched and turned pallid. He gazed about him like a trapped rabbit, but his brother caught him roughly by the shoulder and wheeled him toward the school-house.

"But--Ham--but--" The younger brother's voice faltered and again tears came to his eyes. "But I don't b'lieve in fightin'. I think it's wicked."

"Paul," announced the other relentlessly, "you're a coward. Maybe it ain't exactly your fault, but one thing's dead certain. There's just one kind of feller that can't afford to run away--an' that's a coward, like you. Everybody picks on a kid that's yeller. You've got to have one good fight to save a lot of others an' this is the day you're goin' to have it. After school you've got to smash Jimmy Marquess a wallop on his front teeth an' if you don't shake 'em plumb loose I'm goin' to take you back in the woods an' give you a revelation in lickin's that'll linger with you for years." Ham paused and then added ominously, "Now you can do just exactly as you like. I don't want to try to influence you, but that Marquess kid is your softest pickin'."

Facing the dread consequences of such a dilemma, Paul went slowly and falteringly forward with the unhappy consciousness of his brother following warily at his heels.

"Come to think of it," suggested Ham casually, "I guess you'd better write a note before we go in--it seems a kind of shame to treat Jimmy like that without givin' him any warnin'." He set the bucket in the path and fumbled in his pocket for a scrap of paper. "I'll just help you out," he volunteered graciously. "Start with his name--like this--'James Marquess; Sir--'"

Paul hesitated, and Ham took a step forward with a cool glint in his eyes before which the other quailed. "I'll write it, Ham," he hastily whimpered.

"James Marquess; Sir--" continued the laconic voice of the directing mind. "If you think I am afraid of you, you have erred in judgment. I don't like you and I don't care for your personal appearance. If you so much as squint at me after school today I intend to change the general appearance of your face. It won't be handsome when I get through, but I guess it will be an improvement, at that.

"Respectfully,

"PAUL BURTON."

The coerced writer groaned deeply as he scrawled the signature which pledged him so irretrievably to battle. He felt that his autograph to such a missive was distinctly inappropriate, and invited sure calamity. Ham, however, only nodded approval as he commanded, "When you take the bucket up, lay that on his desk and be sure he gets it."

Yet as Paul plodded on, a piteous little shape of quaking terror, Ham let the glance of militant tenderness flash once more into his eyes, and his voice came in sympathetic timbre.

"Paul, I can't always do your fightin' for you. If I could I wouldn't make *you* do it--but you've got to learn how to stand on your own legs. It ain't only the Marquess kid you're fightin'. You've got to lick the yeller streak out of yourself before it ruins you." He paused, then magnanimously added, "If you trim him down good and proper, I'll get you a new

violin string in place of the one you busted."

It was a very unmilitary shape that huddled in its seat, watching his adversary read the ultimatum. As for the heir of the house of Marquess, he allowed his freckled face for a moment to pucker in blank astonishment, then a smile of beatitude enveloped it. It was such beatitude as might appear on the visage of a cat who has unexpectedly received a challenge to mortal combat from a mouse.

An hour of the afternoon session yet intervened between the present and the awful future and upon Paul Burton it rested with its incubus of dire suspense. It was an hour which the Marquess kid employed congenially across the aisle. Whenever the tired eyes of the teacher were not upon him he gave elaborate pantomimes wherein he felt the swelling biceps of his right arm, and made as if to spit belligerently upon his doubled fist. Sometimes his left hand seemed struggling to restrain the deadly right, lest it leap forth untimely in its hunger for smiting. These wordless pleasantries were in no wise lost on the shrinking Paul in whose slight body slept the spirit of the artist unfortified with martial iron of combat.

The world of boyhood has little understanding or sympathy for a soul like Paul's; a soul woven of dreams and harmonies which knows no means of attuning itself to the material. This lad walked with his head in the clouds and his thoughts in visions. His playmates were invisible to human eyes and he heard the crashing of vast symphonies where others felt only the silences. Now in a little while he was to have his face punched by a material and normal young savage whose very freckles shone with anticipation.

Ham Burton, looking on from his desk, recognized that in the frail lad who "wouldn't stick up for himself" burned the thin hot fire of genius without the stamina that alone could fan it into effective blaze. For Ham, whose face revealed as little of what went on back of his eyes as an Indian's, was the dreamer, too, though his dreams were cut to a different pattern. As he dealt in visions, so William the Conqueror may have dealt when a boy in his father's bakeshop; so Napoleon may have dreamed before the world had heard his name. The younger lad dreamed as the hasheesh-eater, for the vague and iridescent glory of visioning, but the elder dreamed otherwise, in preface to achievement.

The teacher rose at length to dismiss the classes, and as the children piled out into the crisp air, the Marquess kid was first on the hard-trodden soil of the school-yard--for there triumph awaited his coming. Paul was less impulsive. He collected his books with the most deliberate care, dusting them off with an unwonted solicitude. Then he spent an indefinite period searching for a stub of slate-pencil, which at another time would not have interested him. He hoped against hope that Jimmy Marquess would not have time to wait for him.

At last, the laggard in war felt Ham's strong hand on his coat-collar. Vainly protesting and sniffing, he was hustled toward the rotting threshold and catapulted upon his enemy so abruptly and skillfully that to the casual eye he might have seemed bursting with impatience for battle.

And as he stumbled, willy-nilly, upon the Marquess kid, the Marquess kid joyously gathered him in and began raining enthusiastic rights and lefts upon the blanched and blue-veined face.

Suddenly Paul Burton woke to the fact that at his back was an extremely solid wall; on his right an equally impassable fence; on his left his implacable brother and at his front--nothing but the Marquess kid.

Of the four obstacles Jimmy seemed the most vulnerable, and upon him Paul hurled himself with the exalted frenzy of a single idea: an idea of boring his way out of an insupportable position. That Jimmy's blows hurt him so little astonished him, and under the spur of fear he fought with such abandon that to Ham's face came a slow grin of contentment and to that of the Marquess kid an expression of pained amazement, followed by one of sudden panic. Of this particular mouse, the cat had had enough and amid jeers of derision the cat withdrew with more of haste than of dignity in his departure.

But five minutes later as Paul trudged along the forest path toward his home, the unaccustomed light of battle that had momentarily kindled in his eyes began to fade. There glowed in them no such lasting triumph as should come from a boy's first victory. Instead, they wore again the far-away look of dreamy pensiveness. Already, his thoughts were back in their own world, a world peopled with fancies and panoplied with imaginings. Suddenly he halted, and threw back his head, intently listening. High and far away came the honking cry of wild geese in flight; travelers of the upper air-paths, winging their way southward. Distance softened the harshness of their journeying clamor into a note of appealing wanderlust.

Paul's lips were parted and his eyes aglow. The memory of the fight he had dreaded was effaced; the bruises on his sensitive face were forgotten. His heart was drinking an elixir through his ears, and at the sounds floating down from the heights new fancies leaped within him.

Ham with his eyes shrewdly fixed upon his brother swung his books to his other hand and shrugged his shoulders. He, too, was looking in fancy beyond the misty hills, but not to the flight of geese. He saw cities with shaft-like structures biting the sky and dark banners of smoke floating above the clash of conflict. His heart was burning to be at the center of that conflict.

He, too, heard a song of sirens, but it was such a song as Richard Whittington heard when bare-footed in Pauntley the notes of the Bow bells stole out to him:

"Sang of a city that was blazoned like a missal-book,
Black with oaken gables, carven and inscrolled;
Every street a colored page, every sign a hieroglyph,
Dusky with enchantments, a city paved with gold."

Then he gazed about the desolate country where morning wore to night in a sequence of hard chore upon hard chore, and he groaned between his set teeth.

Here and there along the way stood deserted houses where the wind searched the interiors through the eyeless sockets of unglazed windows and where the roof-trees were broken and twisted. They were blighting symbols of this soul-breaking existence in a land of abandoned farms where Opportunity never came. They were mutely eloquent of surrender after struggle. They summed up the hazard of life where to abate the fight and rest meant to lose the fight and starve.

His heart told him that no other battle-field was hard enough or desperate enough to spell his defeat. The world was his if he could go out into the world to claim it, but here in this meager land of barrenness his soul would strangle without a fight. The things that had long flamed in his heart had flamed secretly, like a smothered blaze which gnaws the vitals out of a ship whose hatches are battened down. He, too, had kept the hatches of silence battened. But through many wakeful nights the voice that speaks to those whom the gods have chosen cried to him with the certainty of a herald's bugle. "What the greatest have been, you can be! Of the few to whom impossibility is a jest, you are one! Nothing can halt your onward march save--want of opportunity. You have kinship with the world's mightiest, but you must go out into the world and claim your own." For that was how Ham Burton dreamed.

As the Burton boys came to the farm-house where they had been born, the sun was sinking behind the ragged spears of the mountain-top, and its last fires were mirrored in the lake whose name was like an epitome of their lives--Forsaken.

The house seemed to huddle in the gathering shadows with melancholic despair. Its walls looked out over the unproductive acres around it as grimly as a fortress overlooks a hostile territory, and its occupants lived with as defensive a frugality as if they were in fact a beleaguered garrison cut off from fresh supplies. This was the prison in which Ham Burton must serve his life sentence--unless he responded to that urgent call which he heard when the others slept. Tonight he must share with his father the raw chores of the farm, and, when his studies were done, he must go to his bed, exhausted in body and mind, to be awakened at sunrise and retread the cheerless round of drudgery. Every other tomorrow while life fettered him here held a repetition of just that and nothing more.

The white fire of rebellion leaped mutinously up in Ham's heart. He would go away. He would answer the loud clarion that called to him from beyond the horizons. The first line of hills should no longer be his remotest frontier. And if he did that--a whispering voice of loyalty and conscience argued insistently--who would wear the heavy harness here at home? His father would never leave, and upon his father the infirmities of age would some day come creeping. There was Paul--but, at the thought of Paul with his strong imagination and his weak muscles, Ham laughed. If he went away he must go without consent or parental blessing; he must slip away in the night with his few possessions packed in his battered bag. Very well; if that were the only way, it must be his way. The voices were calling--always calling--and it might as well be tonight. Destiny is impatient of temporizing. Yes, tonight he would start out there, somewhere, where the battles were a man's battles, and the rewards a man's rewards.

But at the door his mother met him. There was a moisture of unshed tears in her eyes, and she spoke in the appeal of dependence--dependence upon her eldest son who had never failed her.

"Son, your father's in bed--he's had some sort of stroke. He's feelin' mighty low in his mind, an' he says he's played out with the fight of all these years. I told him that he needn't fret himself because we have you. You've always been so strong an' manly--even when you were a little feller. You'd better see him, Ham, an' cheer him up. Tell him you can take right hold an' run the farm."

Ham turned away a face suddenly drawn. A lemon afterglow hung above the hills, and where it darkened into the evening sky, a single star shone in a feeble point of light. It was setting--not rising--and to the boy it seemed to be his

star.

"I'll go in and see him," he said curtly.

Thomas Burton lay on his bed with his face turned to the wall. When his son entered, he raised it and shifted it so that the yellow light of an oil lamp shone on it above the faded quilt.

It was a hopeless, beaten face, and for the first time in his life Ham saw the calloused hand which crept out to his own shake feebly.

He took it, and the father said slowly:

"Ham, somehow I feel like an old hoss that just goes as long as he can an' then lays down. Right often he don't get up no more. It's a hard fight for a boy to take up, this fight with rocks and poor soil, but I guess you'll have to tackle it. I didn't quit so long as I could keep goin'."

The boy nodded. He composed his face and answered steadily: "I guess you can depend on me."

But outside by the barn fence he set down his milk-pail a few minutes later and in the coming night his face twitched and blackened.

"So after all," Ham told himself bitterly, "I've got to stay."

He reached out mechanically and began loosing the top bar from its sockets, while he called in the cows to be milked. So many times had he taken down and put up that panel of bars that his hands knew from habit every roughness and knot in every rail.

"Mornin' an' evenin' for three hundred and sixty-five days a year;" the boy said to himself in a low and very bitter voice. "That makes seven hundred and thirty times a year I do this same, identical thing. I ain't nothin' more than servant to a couple of cows." He stood and watched the two heifers trot through the opening to the water-trough by the pump. "By the time I'm thirty-five," he continued, "I'll do it fourteen thousand and six hundred times more--When Napoleon was thirty-five--" But there he broke off with an inarticulate sound in his browned young throat that was very like a groan.



CHAPTER II

MARY Burton was eleven. Of late, thoughts which had heretofore not disturbed her had insistently crept into the limelight of consciousness. One morning as she stood, dish-towel in hand, over the kitchen table, her eyes stole ever and anon to the cracked mirror that hung against the wall, and after each glance she turned defiantly away with something like sullenness about her lips. Elizabeth Burton, the mother, and Hannah Burton, the spinster aunt, went about their accustomed tasks with no thought more worldly than the duties of the moment. It never occurred to Aunt Hannah to complain of anything that was. If her life spelled unrelieved drudgery she accepted it as the station to which it had pleased God to call her, and conceived that complaint would be a form of blasphemy. Now as she wielded her broom, her angular shoulders ached with rheumatism, and, in a voice as creaking as her joints, she sang, "For the Master said there is work to do!" Such was Aunt Hannah's creed, and it pleased her while she moiled over the work to announce in song that she acted upon divine command. To Aunt Hannah's mind, this lent an august dignity to a dust-rag.

When Mary savagely threw down her dish-towel and burst unaccountably into tears, both women looked up, startled. Mary was normally a sunny child and one not given to weeping.

"For the name of goodness!" exclaimed the mother in bewilderment. "What in the world can have struck the child?" It was to Aunt Hannah that she put the question, but it was Mary who answered, and answered with a sudden flow of vehemence:

"Why didn't God make me pretty?" demanded the girl in an impassioned voice. "They call me spindle-legs at school, and yesterday Jimmy Marquess said,

'If I had a sister Mary that had eyes like that,
I'd put her out of pain with a baseball bat.'

"It ain't fair that I've got to be ugly."

Mrs. Burton, confronted with a situation she had not anticipated, found herself unequipped with a reply, but Aunt Hannah's face became severe.

"You are as God made you, child," she announced in a tone of finality, "and it's sinful to be dissatisfied."

But, if dissatisfaction was wicked, Mary was resolved upon sin. For the first time in her eleven years of life she stood forth mutinous. Her eyes blazed, and she trembled passionately through her slender child-body, with her hands clenched into tight little fists.

"If God made me this way on purpose, He didn't treat me fair," she rebelliously flamed out. "What good can it do God to have me skinny and white, with eyes that don't even match?"

Aunt Hannah's face paled as though she feared that she must fall an innocent victim to the avenging bolt which might momentarily be expected to crash through the roof.

"Elizabeth," she gasped, "stop the child! Don't let her invite the wrath of the Almighty like that! Tell her how wicked it is to complain an' rebel against Infinite Wisdom."

They heard a low, rather contemptuous laugh, and saw Ham standing in the door. His coarse lumberman's socks were pulled up over his trousers' legs and splashed with mud of the stable lot.

"Aunt Hannah, what gave you the notion that there's anything wrong about complainin'?" he demanded shortly, and Mary knew that she had acquired a champion.

"Complainin' against God's will is a sin. Every person knows that." Aunt Hannah spoke with the aggrieved uncertainty of one unexpectedly called upon to defend an axiom. "An' for a girl to fret about her looks is worldly."

"Oh, I see," the boy nodded slowly, but his voice was insurgent. "I guess you think Almighty God wants the creatures He made to sit around and sing about there bein' work to do. I wonder you don't feel afraid to eat buckwheat cakes that He doesn't send down to you by an angel with His compliments. My idea is that He wants folks to do things for themselves and not to sing about it. As for being discontented, that's the one thing that drives the world around. I think God made discontent just for that."

Aunt Hannah moistened her lips. For decades she had been the member of a God-fearing, toiling family whose righteousness was the righteousness of stagnation. Now she stood face to face with radical heresy.

"But," she argued with some dumb feeling that she was defending Divinity, "the Scriptures teach contentment an' it's worldly to be vain."

"Why not be worldly?" flared the boy with a new and indomitable light in his eyes. "As for me I'm sick of this life in a place that's dry-rotting. What I want is the world--the whole of it, good an' bad. I want what you can win out of fighting. Mary wants to be pretty. Why shouldn't she? What does any woman get out of life except what men give her--and what man gives much to the ugly ones?"

"It ain't what men give that's to be counted a prize," came the pious rejoinder. "It's what heaven gives."

"Heaven gave you a dust-rag and rheumatism. If they suit you, all well and good. I'm going to see that the world gives Mary what she wants. If a girl can be made pretty Mary's going to be pretty. It's what a woman's got a right to want and I'm going to get it for her."

With a violent gesture the boy flung himself from the room and slammed the door behind him.

Because it was Saturday and there was no school that day, Ham left the house and turned into the woods. He tramped with his brow drawn and a hundred insurgent thoughts swirling in his brain.

He passed across hills holding to their final flare of color, where leaves were drifting down from trees of yellow and crimson. He threaded alder thickets and passed through groves of silver birches that shivered fastidiously in the breeze. Wild apple trees raised gnarled branches under which the "punches" of hooves told of deer that had been feeding. At last, he came to a clearing where fire had eaten its way and charred the ruins of the forest. There a large buck lifted its antlered head among the berry bushes and stood for a moment at startled gaze. But Ham made no movement to raise the rifle that swung at his side, and as the red-brown shape disappeared with a soft clatter, the boy did not even throw a glance after it. He was saying to himself: "William the Conqueror was a baker's son; Napoleon was the friend of a washer-woman; Cecil Rhodes was a poor boy--but they didn't stay tied down too long."

Now and again, a rabbit scuttled off to cover, and often with the whir of drumming wings a grouse rose noisily and lumbered away with spread tail into the painted foliage. But all the beauty of it was a beauty of wildness and of nature's victory over man. For such beauty Ham felt no answer of pulse or heart.

Of the cabins he passed, most were empty and those quiet vandals, Weather and Decay, were noiselessly at work wrecking them. Here a door swung askew; there a chimney teetered. Every such tenantless lodging was an outpost surrendered on a field scarred with human defeat; a place where a family had fought poverty and been put to flight. Once he paused and looked down a long slope to a habitation by the roadside. The miserable battle was just ending there, and, though he stood a quarter of a mile away, he stopped to watch the final act. The family that had dwelt there for two generations was leaving behind everything that it had known. John Marrow was at that moment nailing a padlock to the front door, a lock at which the quiet vandals would laugh silently.

In a farm wagon was heaped the litter of household effects. These people were whipped, starved out, beaten. Ham Burton turned on his heel and trudged away. His father's farm was little more productive than this one, but his father had that uncompromising iron in his blood that comes from Pilgrim forebears. He would hold on to the end--but to what end and how long?

That Saturday afternoon, Mary was walking along the sandy road that led to the village. She had no purpose, except to be alone, and she carried an old fashion paper which she meant to con. This newly discovered necessity of beauty was a very serious affair, and since she meant to devote herself to its study she conceived that these pages should give tidings from the fountain head.

She did not expect to meet anyone, and she was quite content to spend that Indian-summer afternoon with her companions of the printed page. These were beautiful ladies, appareled in the splendid vogues of Paris and Vienna. There were delightful bits of information concerning some mysterious thing called the *haute monde* and likewise pictures that instructed one how to dress one's hair and adorn the coiffure with circlets of pearls. Mary's sheer delight in such mysteries was not marred by any suspicion that the text she devoured told of fashions long extinct and supplanted by newer edicts.

On the great rock which jutted out from the wooded tangle into the margin of Lake Forsaken, with lesser sentinel rocks about it, she sat cross-legged until she glanced up at last to see that the west was kindling, and that she must start back to the duller realities of home. She had been interrupted by no break in the silence except the little forest twitter of birds and now and then the cool splash where a bass leaped in the lake.

But as she made her way along the twisting road she heard the rattle of wheels on the rocks and turned to see a vehicle driven by a man who obviously had no kinship with stony farms or lumber camps. She paused, and the buggy came up. Its driver drew his horse down, and in a singularly pleasing and friendly voice inquired:

"Can you tell me, little sister, how I can get to Middle Fork?"

Middle Fork was the village at the end of the six-mile mountain descent, and Mary, who knew every trail and woodland path, told him, not only of the road, but of a passable short-cut.

The girl had come to judge human faces through the eyes of her own circumstance, and those of the men and women about her wore for the most part the resignation of surrender and hardship, but this man's face was different. He was a man to her eleven years, though a more experienced eye would have seen that he was hardly more than a prematurely old boy. Lines traced a network around his eyes, but they were whimsical lines such as come from persistent laughter--the sort of laughter that insists on expressing itself even in the face of misfortune. His open mackinaw collar revealed a carelessly knotted scarf decorated with a large black pearl, and as he drew off a glove she noticed that his brown hand was slender and that one finger wore a heavily carved ring, from whose quaint setting glowed the cool, bright light of an emerald. Her frank curiosity showed so plainly in her face that the fine wrinkles about the young man's eyes became little radiants of amusement centering around gray pupils and his lips parted in a smile over very even teeth.

There are a few men in the world whom we feel that we have always known, when once we have seen them, and upon whom we find ourselves bestowing confidences as soon as we have said, "Good-day." Perhaps they are the isolated survivors of knight-errant days, whose business it is to listen to the troubles of others.

It was only the matter of minutes before Mary was chatting artlessly with this traveler of the mountain road, and since she was a child she was talking of herself, while he nodded gravely and listened with a deference of attention that was to her new and disarmingly charming.

He, too, was just now an exile here in the hills, he explained, but before he came he had lived all over the world. He had studied under tutors while traveling about the Continent, and being prepared to take up his work in the banking house which his grandfather had established and his father had extended in scope. Then it had happened.

"What happened?" The child of Lake Forsaken put the question eagerly, and his reply was laconic, though he smiled down from the buggy seat with a peculiarly naive twist of his lips. "Bugs," he told her.

"What kind of bugs?" It seemed strange to Mary that a man would let such small creatures as flies or spiders or even big beetles stand between himself and a great bank.

"I beg your pardon," he laughed. "I forgot that you lived in a world unsullied by such argot. You know what a lunger is?"

That she did know. It is a term familiar enough in the mountains to which come refugees from the white plague, seeking in the tonic air a healing for their sickened lungs.

"And so you see," said the strange young man, "I have built me a log shack back in the hills where I amuse myself writing verses--which, fortunately, no one reads--and doing equally inconsequential things. Now I'm going down for a few days in the city. I can only go when the weather is fine and when winter sets in, I must come back and bury myself with no companions except some books and a pair of snowshoes."

"Are you going to die?" she asked him in large-eyed concern.

"Some day I am," he laughed. "But I'm rather stubborn. I'm going to postpone that as long as possible. Several doctors tell me that I have an even chance. It seems to be a sort of fifty-fifty bet between the bugs and me. I suppose a fellow oughtn't to ask more than an even break."

She stood regarding him with vast interest. She had never known a man before who chatted so casually about the probable necessity of dying. He grew as she watched him to very interesting and romantic proportions.

"What's your name?" she demanded.

"My last name's Edwardes," he told her. And it was only her own out-of-the-world ignorance that kept her from recognizing in the name a synonym for titanic finance. "In front of that they put a number of ridiculous prefixes when I was quite young and helpless. There is Jefferson and Doorland and others. At college they called me Pup."

In return for his confidence, the girl told him who she was and where she lived and how old she was.

"You say your name is Mary Burton? I must remember that because in, say ten years, provided I last that long, I

expect to hear of you."

"Hear of me? Why?" she demanded.

The stranger bent forward and coughed, and when the paroxysm had ended he smiled whimsically again.

"I'll tell you a secret, though God knows it's a perilous thing to feed a woman's vanity--even a woman of eleven. Did anyone ever tell you that you are possessed of a marvelous pair of eyes?"

Instinctively little Mary Burton flinched as though she had been struck and she raised one hand to her face to touch her long lashes. Silent tears welled up; tears of indignant pain because she thought she was being cruelly ridiculed.

But the stranger had no such thought. If to the uneducated opinion of Lake Forsaken, Mary's face was a matter for jest and libel, the impression made on the young man who had been reared in the capitals of Europe was quite different. He had been sent, on the verge of manhood, into the hermit's seclusion with the hermit's opportunity of reflecting on all he had seen, and digesting his experience into a philosophy beyond his years.

Perhaps had Mary been born into her own Puritan environment two centuries earlier, she might have faced even sterner criticism, for there was without doubt a strange uncommonplaceness about her which the thought of that day might have charged to the attendance of witches about her birth. The promise of beauty she had, but a beauty unlike that of common standards. It was a quality that at first caught the beholder like the shock of a plunge into cold water, and then set him tingling through his pulses--also like a plunge into an icy pool.

To the farmer folk Mary was merely "queer," but as the man in the buggy sat looking down at her he realized the promise of something strangely gorgeous. As she shifted her position a shaft of mellow sunlight struck her face and it was as though her witch--or fairy--godmother had switched on a blaze of color.

"I wasn't making fun of you," declared the stranger; and his voice held so simple and courteous a note that Mary smiled again and was reassured.

The child was still thin and awkward and undeveloped of line or proportion, but color, which many painters will tell you is the soul-essence of all beauty, she had in the same wasteful splendor that the autumn woods had it in their carnival abundance.

Her hair was heavy, and its gold was of the lustrous and burnished sort that seems to tangle in its meshes a captive fire glowing between the extremes of amber and tawny copper. Yet hair and cheeks and lips were only the minors of her color scheme. The eyes were regnantly dominant and it was here that the surprising witch-like quality held sway. The school-children had said they did not match, and they did not, for with the sun shining on her the man in the buggy realized that the right one was a rich brown like illuminated agate with a fleck or two of jet across the iris, while the left, its twin, was of a colorful violet and deeply vivid. Young Edwardes had read of the weird beauty of such mismatched eyes, but had never before seen them.

"Jove!" he exclaimed, and he let the reins hang on his knees as he bent forward and talked enthusiastically.

"There are eyes and eyes," he smiled down. "Some are merely lenses to see with and some are stars. Of the star kind, a few are lustrous and miraculous, and control destinies. I think yours are like that. One can flash lambent fire and the other can soften like the petals of a black pansy--it has just that touch of inky purple--and in their range are many possibilities."

"But--but," she stammered for a moment, irresolute and almost tearful, "they aren't even mates and anyway eyes aren't all." For a moment she hesitated, then with childish abandon confided, "I'd give anything in the world to be pretty."

The stranger threw back his head and laughed. "And when they are misty, let men beware," he commented half-aloud, then he went on: "What makes you think you'll be ugly?"

"They call me spindle-legs at school and--and--" she broke off, failing to particularize further.

The man glanced smilingly down at the slight figure.

"Well, now," he conceded, "in general effect you are a bit chippendale, aren't you? But that can be outgrown. The rarest beauty isn't that which comes before the 'teens. If you never have anything else, be grateful for your eyes--and remember this afterward. Be merciful with them, because unless I'm a poor prophet there will come times when you will do well to remember that."

"I'm going to tell the boys and girls at school that I'm not ugly after all." She spoke with no trace of vanity, merely

with a frankness which had yet to learn the arts of coyness.

"No," counseled her new adviser, "don't do anything of the sort. Simply wait and after awhile everyone will be telling you."

"But nobody ever told me before that having eyes that didn't match was pretty," she argued.

"Some day, if you happen to live where men make fine phrases, which after all may not be such a blessing," he assured her, "they will whisper to you that you are a miraculous color-scheme. It's a bit hard to express, but I can give you examples--" He broke off suddenly and laughed at himself. "After all," he began again in a different voice, "what's the use? I forgot that the things I should compare you with are all things you haven't seen. They would mean nothing."

"Tell me, anyhow," she commanded.

"Very well. There is a style of architecture in the Orient: The Temple of Omar at Jerusalem has it. The Taj Mahal has it. Interiors crusted with the color of gems and mosaics and rich inlay; the Italian renaissance has it; splashed from a palette that knew no stint--no economy. It's a brilliant, triumphant sort of paean in which the notes are all notes of color. You have it, too--and now I'm going to drive on. But don't forget that it's easier to be kind when people call you spindle-legs than it will be when they come with offerings of flattery."

"You must have seen a lot of things." Mary Burton's voice was that of admiring wonder, and the young man's face became grave, almost pained for an instant.

"In a way," he answered, "I have. But I may not see much more. Most men look back on life when they are old and wise, but I am doing it while still young and perhaps the backward glance is the same in age or youth. It's a summary."

"I don't understand half of what you are saying," she confessed a little regretfully. It seemed to her from what she did grasp that the rest would be well worth while.

"If it were otherwise," he laughed with a return of the whimsical glint to his pupils and the little wrinkles about the corners of his eyes, "I should not have said half of it. A good part of my conversation has been in the manner of soliloquy. Hermits often talk to themselves. I shall now say something else you won't understand. Wield leniently the dangerous gift of your witchcraft--the freakish beauty of your perfect unmatched eyes."

And all the way home Mary Burton walked on air, and the lonely woods seemed to have grown of a sudden spicy and glorious. When she stole up to the room under the eaves and looked again into the little mirror, she did not turn away so unhappy as she had been. The brown eye dared to meet the brown eye in the glass--and the violet eye, the violet.

Under her breath she repeated over and over, lest she forget some of its polysyllables, a sentence which was half-incomprehensible to her, yet which was sonorous enough and grandiloquent enough to impress her deeply. At last, also lest memory prove illusive, she wrote the sentence down: "Wield leniently the dangerous gift of your witchcraft--the freakish beauty of your perfect unmatched eyes."

Down the road, two miles from the Burton home, was the wayside church with its small and unpretentious organ, and this afternoon Paul had been pumping its wheezy bellows while the young woman who contributed the Sabbath music practised. As he came out of the small building and took his way across the hills, Paul was exalted as he always was by music.

Once he had passed through the gates of dream, which swung wide to a key of sound, he wandered on, fancy led, until some actuality broke the spell, bringing him back with a shock and an inward sigh for the awakening.

But when he drew near the house, a footstep crackled in the underbrush, and Ham emerged from the woods. As the elder boy came up, Paul, roused out of his dreams, gave a start and then fell into step.

"Been out there listenin' to the leaves fallin' again?" inquired Ham shortly.

"I've been pumping the organ." Paul's reply was half-apologetic.

"You don't think about much except music, do you, Paul?"

"Isn't music all right?" For once the lad spoke almost aggressively in defense of his single enthusiasm.

"I wasn't exactly finding fault, Paul. Only, I don't see much hope for a feller in this country that doesn't think about anything else. You're in pretty much the same fix as an Eskimo that can't be happy without flowers. Grand opera doesn't come as often as the circus, and some years the circus doesn't come. Listen!" He put one hand into his trousers' pockets, and noisily rattled a handful of coins. "That music is understood everywhere. Even in this God-forsaken place, they know how to dance to its tune."

"Where did you get it?" For an instant Paul halted in his tracks and forgot his air-castles. Money was so rare a thing in their narrow little world that even to his impracticability it partook of magic.

Yesterday Ham's pockets had been as empty as his own and today there emanated from them the clash of silver--not the tinkle of light nickels and dimes, but the substantial clatter of halves and dollars.

"I sold some lambs to Slivers Martin," was the succinct reply, "and I got ten dollars for 'em."

"Some lambs?" Paul's face puckered with perplexity. "But, Ham, you haven't got any lambs."

Ham laughed with a debonair indulgence. "Sure I haven't," he cheerfully acquiesced, "but I've got the ten."

Paul shook his head, baffled. "I don't see," he persisted, "how you could sell something you didn't have." They were drawing near the house now, and Ham stopped him in the road.

"Who sells more wheat than all us farmers, Paul? Men in Wall street, don't they? And how much wheat do you suppose those fellers have got amongst the lot of them? Not enough to feed a sick pigeon with. I sold these lambs first--for ten dollars. Then I bought them off of Bill Heffers, an' Henry Berry an' Ben Best--for seven dollars."

He paused a moment, then added, while a grin of satisfaction spread over his face: "What's more, Slivers Martin had to go an' get 'em, an' he had to go in three directions. If he'd had sense enough, he could have got 'em himself in the first place for seven instead of ten. The three dollars I got clear was my margin of profit, Paul, an' a margin of profit is what a feller gets by turnin' his margin of brain into money."

The younger lad looked up with a mist of perplexity in his deep eyes. He realized vaguely that Ham had accomplished a feat somehow savoring of business acumen, which was a matter he could not hope to comprehend. Yet some comment seemed expected of him, so out of a slack interest he inquired, "Were they good lambs, Ham? What were they like?"

The embryonic speculator favored his brother with an indulgent laugh. "I guess they were all right," he enlightened casually. "As for me, I didn't see 'em--any more than the Wall-street men see the wheat they buy an' sell."

"Oh!" The little boy with the cameo face found himself still more at sea. For a while they trudged along in silence; then, with an impulsive, almost impassioned gesture, Ham clapped his hand on the other's shoulder and halted. Paul, too, stopped, and, looking up, was startled to behold features set in a rapt expression and dominated by eyes glowing with an inward ardor.

"Listen to me, Paul," began Ham in a voice which carried an electric thrill into the dreamy soul of the listener. "You love music and you live in a place where they don't know the difference between Tannhauser and a tom-tom. Mary would like to be pretty and she lives in a place where if she was as beautiful as Cinderella, nobody but a bunch of hill-bullies would ever see her. I want power, power that the world's got to bow down to and acknowledge--and I might just as well be locked up in somebody's hen-house. Well, maybe it's enough for you only to dream about the music you don't ever expect to hear, but as for me, I dream, too, and a dream ain't much use to me unless I can turn it into facts. I'm going to make your dreams come true--every one of 'em. I'm going to make Mary's dreams come true. There ain't no better blood in the world, Paul, than you an' me have got in our veins an' I'm goin' to see that we get what we're entitled to."

Paul's pale cheeks colored for an instant and something deep within him stirred in response to the trumpet-like confidence of the voice which spoke with such assurance of the absurdly impossible. Suddenly he awoke to the innate music of the inspired human tongue, and there was that in the face and figure of the taller stripling which abashed him, as though he had intruded on a prophet in his moment of exaltation. Ham was listening to voices silent to other ears, and in his eyes glowed such resolve and invincible purpose as must have characterized the minute men when they steeled their hearts to meet and conquer the seemingly unconquerable.

"Out there beyond them piled-up rocks and God-forsaken fields," swept on the other, "there's a *real* world where the tides are tides of gold, an' for me they are goin' to sweep in with a plunder of riches an' power that all hell can't stop! Out yonder there are cities where men are doing things an' ships are lyin' at the wharves with stuff that comes from the ends of the earth--an' those ships are goin' to go an' come when and where I tell 'em! They're goin' to carry cargoes at my biddin' an' my people are goin' to have what they want. Instead of a wheezy little bellows organ that acts like it had

the asthma and cracked voices singin' hymns out of tune, you're goin' to listen to operas, an' Mary's goin' to have men that the world knows come courtin' her--in the place of ignorant lumber-jacks." The young speaker paused for breath, and when he spoke again it was in a voice that defied contradiction or doubt. "I'm goin' to make the name of Hamilton Montagu Burton the best-known name in the United States of America!"

"How do you know you can do all them things, Ham?" The question stole from lips that trembled excitedly under the hypnotic spell of the announcement, and the answer came quickly, unfalteringly, gravely.

"I know it by something that tells me. It don't say 'maybe you can': it says 'there isn't power enough between heaven an' hell to stop you.'"

Paul's eyes were large, but as his brother paused he timidly inquired: "Where did the Montagu come from, Ham? I didn't know you had any middle name."

"I took it," announced Ham imperiously. "I took it because it's the name of one of the biggest financiers the world ever knew, but not as big as I'm goin' to be. I took it because I'm a brother to men like that--but I'm going to go beyond 'em all, an' I'll carry the name further than it was ever carried before. I haven't ever talked about this to any livin' soul else. Folks wouldn't understand. First of all, I'm goin' to leave this country an' get out into the world."

"Will Pap let you go?"

Ham laughed again. "Pap can't stop me. Nobody can't ever stop me. You can't hold a river back from the ocean. That's the difference between a river an' a pond. It's the difference between followin' a star of destiny an' just goin' on livin' the same as an animal in a God-forsaken country like this."

"This ain't such a bad country, Ham," argued Paul weakly, with the timid demurrer of one who sees only the difficulties. "There are some mighty-good people here, an' out there in the big cities a feller's got to fight mighty hard to get along, I guess."

"It's a good country to come from," was the swift and contemptuous rejoinder, "and a damn' poor one to stay in. They've got raw material here that's all right--like us--but you've got to take it away to finish it up. As for the hard fight you talk about, Paul, that's what I'm huntin' for. No man's ever lived that had it in him to be greater than me."

Upon Paul, with his measureless faith in his brother and his passion for dreams, the mad arrogance of the declaration was lost. The ecstasy with which Ham spoke tinged the promise with a fire of conviction--so that Paul wondered and believed.



CHAPTER III

IN the Burton household that fall, a leaven was working. Mary's mismatched eyes held a tranquillity of quiet self-satisfaction. She had found somewhere a second fashion magazine and often when she was alone in the little room under the eaves she snipped industriously away at the imaginary patterns of gorgeous gowns, or listened to the fervent pleadings of make-believe suitors.

But the secret was all her own of how something in her had awakened. This little girl would never again be precisely the same Mary Burton who had started out that Saturday afternoon with a heart full of rebellion and who had come back appeased.

And Ham, his mother feared, was finding his burdens too heavy for young shoulders. He had made no complaint, but an expression of settled abstraction had come into his face and at home he was always silent.

After the falling of the first heavy snow neither Paul nor Mary ventured out to school, but Ham's avid hunger for education lost no coveted day of the term. When his morning work was ended, wrapped in patched mackinaw and traveling on snowshoes, he made the trip across the white slopes, where only the pines were green, and came back at the day's end for his evening chores. The trip was a bit shortened now because the lake was ice-locked and he could cross between the flag-marked holes of the pickerel-fishers. He had been afraid to speak of those things which were burning consumingly in his mind; afraid that if once he let slip the leash of restraint he would be carried away on a tide of passion. But some day he must speak, and, strangely enough, the match that lighted the train of powder was the second coming of the young man who had met Mary on the road.

He came near nightfall, on snowshoes, and when he knocked it was the girl who opened the door. At first, she did not recognize him because the mountain tan had given way to a pallor of recent illness and the face was very thin. But as soon as he smiled, the whimsical eyes proclaimed him.

"You--you haven't died yet," Mary Burton spoke instinctively, and stood holding the door open to the blustering of the sharp wind, quite forgetful that she was barring his way. But the young man who had come out of the thickening twilight laughed. He shook the snow off his mackinaw, for a fresh downfall was making the air almost as white as the drifts below.

"Not yet," he assured her, "but unless you let me come in out of the cold I shall probably perish on your doorstep."

Tom Burton, the father, sat gazing at the stove in the center of the room. He was propped in a heavy chair with cushions about him, and he, too, had grown thinner and rawer of joint. He had been for some time thus silently staring ahead with a pipe long forgotten and dead of ash in his hand and an old newspaper--so old as to be no longer a newspaper--lying where it had dropped near his side. A painter might have seen in the pose a picture of the felled and beaten fighter; the burden-bearer chafing under enforced idleness and the imprisonment of an irritable convalescence.

"Yes, come in, or go out, whoever you are--and *shut the door!*" There was no hospitality in the irascible greeting of the manor's lord, and the face he half-turned to inspect the stranger was devoid of welcome. It was mirthless from its deep eyes to the lips and chin that were hidden in a patriarchal spread of beard.

Mary for some reason flushed deeply as she stood aside and timidly smiled as though in amends of courtesy.

The young man went straight to the stove and began loosening the collar of his heavy mackinaw. For a moment, without rising or taking any notice beyond a curt nod, old Tom Burton bent upon him eyes of incurious gravity.

"I take it you are Thomas S. Burton," began the young stranger. "My name's Edwardes and I have a shack back in the hills. The snowstorm has delayed me and I must throw myself on your hospitality for the night."

"Yes." Thomas Burton spoke slowly and dully, and this, too, was a result of his illness, for in past days his voice had rung stentorian above the blows of axes in the timber. "Yes, I've heard of you. You're the millionaire hobo. When a man's got plenty of money and chooses to live alone in a country that 'most everybody else is leavin', he's tolerable apt to be heard of."

The comment was not softened with the modification of banter, but rasped with the twang of suspicion as though the speaker expected to give offense--and did not care. Young Edwardes received it with a peal of laughter so infectious that the man in the chair looked up, surprised.

"So that's how they figure me out, is it?" inquired the traveler. "I suppose though," he added as if in answer to his own question, "no man knows what portrait public opinion paints of him. At all events I'm a harmless hobo and quite

willing to pay when I put my fellow-man to inconvenience. I live in the mountains by the sentence of my doctors."

"Lunger, eh?" Burton nodded his head comprehensively, but quite without sympathy; and the guest bowed his assent.

"Some folks turns lungers away," commented the host reflectively, "but that's only in the summertime when the vacation boarders kicks on 'em. As for me, I don't take in boarders summer *nor* winter, but when the snow drives a man in I don't drive him out."

"So they accept us in the winter, do they, and cast us out in the summer when the ribbon-clerks come?" Edwardes spoke musingly, yet amusedly, and in his accustomed manner of self-communion. "After all, men are much alike everywhere, aren't they? The lepers must not walk the streets of Jerusalem, but they may sit in full concourse at the Jaffa and Damascus gates where their wrappings are brushed by every caravan that goes in or out."

Ham, who was just entering, stood on the kitchen threshold in time to hear a man, whom he had never seen before, talking casually of the world beyond the seas. Perhaps this man knew, too, the cities that brought conquerors as well as prophets into their own; perhaps to him the sepia-tinted monuments of Rome and the great tomb in the Place des Invalides were familiar spots! And the man was young himself--almost a boy. For an instant, Ham stood there while his eyes traveled around the room, contemptuously taking in the cheap lithographs and offensive ornaments which he knew so well and hated so sincerely. He straightened resolutely, and his hands clenched. There would be a time when the earth's greatest artists should contribute paintings for his walls, and palaces give up to him their bronzes and tapestries.

When a half-hour later Ham Burton was alone with the stranger he found himself asking and answering many questions. He had not meant to impart his secret of discontent, but just as Mary had confided her troubles at the roadside, so Ham told his as he sat on the edge of the bed in the chilly attic-room of the farm-house. Perhaps it was because this man had actually seen the things that existed beyond the sky-line, and had walked through the veil of mystery which the boy himself so burned to penetrate. At all events it transpired. Ham had shown his little store of greedily conned books and had bared to the gaze of the other his naked and scorching torture of ambition. The lad knew something of the men who had made themselves masters of the world and wished to know more. Edwardes had not even laughed when Ham declared with naive conviction: "None of them men ever did anything I couldn't do, if I got the chance." It was impossible to laugh, though listening to such boundless egotism, in the face of so deep a sincerity and such an implicit self-belief as shone from those young eyes.

"Sometimes the great man knows his greatness in advance," said the visitor gravely. "Sometimes it surprises himself. But most of the mightiest *made* their own chance."

"I know that. I'm going to make mine. Power is what I want an' it's what I'm goin' to have. But I've got to get away from here. Julius Caesar couldn't do nothin' here."

When Jefferson Edwardes came down stairs Mary, who had slipped timidly away, edged into the room, bashful and adorned. She had put on her best dress, and her lustrous hair was braided and coiled on her head, after the instruction of one of her fashion plates. As the visitor saw her he once more checked his inclination to laugh, for the marvelous mismated eyes were fixed on his face and they held an almost passionate anxiety to be approved by the man who had prophesied her beauty. The thin child with her hair so inappropriately dressed in the style of her fashionable elders--or what she fondly believed to be their style--would have been a ludicrous little figure had she not been, in her eagerness, too serious for humor. The one detail in which she thought she could follow the dictates of Fashion's decree was this arrangement of her hair, and that she had attempted. Now she stood first on one foot then on the other, watching in suspense to see if she had succeeded.

So the stranger slipped over unobserved and with a courtier's smile raised a tiny hand to his lips.

"I am a good prophet," he assured her, and now he let the suppressed merriment dance at will in his pupils, "but don't forget that a queen's queenliest necessity is--kindness."

And so, while Mrs. Burton and the elderly aunt busied themselves over the stove and the father napped restlessly, the sleeping thing that had not heretofore given warning was ripening for its outburst.

When the evening meal was finished and the family sat listening to the stranger's talk, Thomas Burton suddenly demanded: "Are they still quittin' over your way?"

Young Edwardes nodded.

"Except for one or two shiftless fellows like myself," he responded, "my immediate section is deserted. A half-dozen

families moved out this fall. The general verdict seems to be that the fight's not worth while."

Tom Burton growled deeply. "The country mayn't be much," he grudgingly admitted, "but how do these fellers that are leavin' all they own behind 'em expect to better themselves? Ain't a few rocky acres better'n none at all? That's what I asks 'em and they ain't got no answer to give me. Ain't a little bit better than nothin' whatsoever?"

The visitor did not immediately reply. He seemed to be reflecting, and, when his answer came, Ham straightened himself in his seat and sat rigid as if struggling to fix a seal on his own lips and remain a silent listener.

"Perhaps so and perhaps not," suggested Edwardes. "The open sea doesn't offer much prospect in a storm, but it may be better than a sinking ship."

Tom Burton's eyes lighted with the same stubborn glint that had given his Pilgrim forefathers kinship with the granite of their shores.

"My ancestors have lived here since they ran the Indians out," he said quietly. "They're buried here an' they fought for this country an' won it. I guess what they bled for is worth holdin'."

"Your forefathers fought for the whole land, not only this section of it," suggested Edwardes mildly. "Right here the acres are stony and unproductive. You can't hope to compete with the farmer whose crops grow near arteries of transportation."

"All we need is roads--an' aqueducts--an' some day they'll come."

"Perhaps," admitted the younger man. "The question is how many can hold out till then?"

Tom Burton looked up and for an instant his eyes blazed. "Well, for one, I can! By God, I don't mean to be run away from my home by a panicky notion of hard times. I can stay here an' fight to a finish--an' when I'm licked, my boys can go on fightin'."

His eldest son rose and paced the floor with the restlessness of a caged leopard. At the black window he halted to gaze out on the bitterness of the night. The ultimatum of his father's obstinacy galled him beyond endurance. He heard himself pledged to the emptiness and futility of a life-sentence which he loathed; from which he was seeking escape and his soul clamored to rise in its vehement repudiation. Yet he felt that just now his heart was in too hot a conflagration to make speech safe. If he spoke at this moment he must speak in violent passion and bitter denunciation, and so with his hands tautly clutched at his back he held his counsel and paced the floor. Old Tom Burton's unaccustomed hours in the confinement of convalescence had left him petulant. The courtesy of the stranger's argument was lost upon him. All he saw was that it was argument, and he was in a condition to be irritated by little things.

For a while he watched the restless wanderings of his son from window to stove and from stove back to window, then his voice broke out sharply in dictatorial peevishness.

"What ails you, boy?" he demanded. "Have you got St. Vitus' dance? Sit down an' quit frettin' people with your eternal trampin' about."

Even then, though his face was white with suppressed feeling, Ham held hard to the curb of silence and took a chair, apart, where he sat rigid.

"It's them that sticks to their guns that wins out," declared the bearded man, looking around as if challenging contradiction, and, when none came, frowning on in silence. Then suddenly his eyes fell on the figure of little Mary, who sat behind the table with her thin face resting in her hands and her eyes burning with thoughts of that great wonder-world which their visitor knew so well. His presence in the room seemed to the child to bring its marvels almost within touch. For the first time the father recognized the ludicrous massing of coils on the top of the little head instead of the simple braids that should be falling over her shoulders, and, in his mood of irritation, the affectation of grown-up adornment angered him inordinately.

"What damned foolishness is that?" he demanded. "What started you to putting on a lot of new airs all of a sudden? Do you think you're the Queen of Sheba?"

The girl shrank back into the shadows at the edge of the room, and, as young Edwardes glanced that way, he heard a muffled sob and knew that she had fled up the stairs in chagrin, a pitiful little would-be princess whose dream splendor had been shattered with a reprimand. His intuition told him that she already lay curled up on her bed, sobbing bitterly against the pillow where the coiled hair--now angrily torn down from its burnished coronal--lay heaped and tangled about her head.

"I'm afraid," volunteered the guest with deep embarrassment, "I'm to blame. I met Mary on the roadside once as I went down to the city, and she told me how the children had been teasing her because she wasn't pretty, I tried to comfort her with a prophecy that her wonderful eyes and hair would establish her claims to beauty."

"So it was you, was it?" demanded Tom Burton shortly, "that set her thoughts upon vanity--well, I don't thank you."

The boy, sitting with every nerve under painful control, felt his breath come quick and deep until his chest heaved, and words leaped to his lips which, with a supreme effort, he bit back. This whole intolerable fallacy of outgrown and hard-shelled narrow-mindedness was spurring him to outbreak, yet for a moment more he held himself in check.

But to the father the incident of Mary's offending was closed, his mind was already back with his problem and his next words were a stubborn reiteration: "Yes, sir, me an' my boys will fight it out here where we belong."

Suddenly spots of orange and red swam before Ham's eyes. Deep in his being something snapped, and, as a fuse spark reaches and ignites its charge, so something fired the eruption that broke volcanically in each nerve.

He rose suddenly and stood before his father, and his words came with the molten heat of overflowing lava.

"An' when you've fought yourself to death an' I've fought myself to death, an' we're both licked, what in hell have we been fightin' for?"

The passionate question fell with the sudden violence of a bursting bomb, and the father's jaw stiffened. For an instant, amazement stood out large-writ in every feature. Ham had thought much, but, in his home, he had never before voiced a syllable of his fevered restlessness.

"We're fightin' for our rights. We're fightin' for what the men that came in the *Mayflower* fought for," said Tom Burton gravely. "Our homes an' our rightful claim to live by the soil we till." Strangely enough, for the moment, the older man's voice held no excitement.

"That may suit you." Now the boy's vehemence was fully unleashed. "You may be willin' to die fightin' for a couple of cows and a few hundred rocks that you bump your knees on when you try to plow. As for me, I ain't! When I fight, I want it to be a fight that counts, for a reward that's worth winnin'."

The bearded face darkened with the hard intolerance of the patriarchal order; an order which brooks no insubordination. But the lad spoke before the words of discipline found utterance.

"Let me finish, father, before you say anything. What I've got to say is somethin' that ain't just come into my mind. It's somethin' that's kept me awake of nights an' I've got to say it. I've sat here an' listened, an' I ain't put in my oar, but I can't be muzzled, an' you might as well hear me out--because there ain't power enough in the world to stop me."

"An' supposin'--" Tom Burton spoke brusquely, yet with something more like amusement in his eyes than had previously shown there--"supposin' I ain't inclined to listen to you?"

"Then you'll just force me to leave you here--an' you can't hardly get on without me."

"You mean you'd run away?"

"I'd hate to, but once I was going to. I stayed because you needed me."

"I guess I could keep a watch on you, if I had to," announced the father shortly.

"You couldn't keep a ball an' chain on me," retorted the son. "I wouldn't be much use that way about the farm."

The elder Burton very deliberately lighted his pipe. Like many men who fly suddenly into passions at nothing, he had the surprising faculty of remaining calm when anger might be expected. Now he said only, "Let's hear your notion, son. What's been keepin' you awake of nights?"

"It hasn't been just thinkin' about myself that's done it," began Ham, steadying his voice, though it still held a throb of fervor which neither his father nor mother had ever heard before. "I've been thinkin' about all of you. You an' mother are workin' your fingers to the bone an' your hearts to the breakin' point--for what? Just now you sent Mary away cryin' to bed because she wanted to be pretty. Why shouldn't she want to be? Isn't it part of a woman's mission? You call a thing vanity that's just havin' some life an' ambition in her heart. What's life got in store here for Mary or for Paul or for me? We're startin'--not endin' up. We have our ambitions. If we stay here Mary will be drudgin' till she dies. Paul's got the soul of a great musician, an' he might as well be dead right now as to stay here, an' as for me I'd a heap rather be dead."

"Oh, I see," commented Tom Burton very drily. "You figure that it'll be pleasanter for us to move into a palace

somewhere, an' have a dozen or two servants waitin' on us. All right, where's the palace comin' from?"

Ham spoke in absolute confidence. "I'll get it for you--as many palaces as you want," he declared with steady-eyed effrontery; "if only you give me the chance. All I ask is this. For God's sake, take the chain off me--let me get into the fight."

Ham Burton was a tall and well-thewed lad for his age. His muscle fiber had drawn strength from the ax and the log-pole, but as yet it had not become heavy with decades of hard labor. He still stood slender and gracefully tapering from shoulders to waist and just now there was something trance-like in his earnestness which made wild prophecies seem almost inspired. The hard-headed father eyed him with good-humored irony.

"And how do you figure to get us all these things, son?" he inquired.

"I'll show you," came the quick and undoubting response. "All I want you to do is to leave this place and educate me. Every year you stay here you're spending part of what you've laid by, an' none of it ever comes back. Gamble it on me, an' I'll attend to all the rest."

At that the bearded farmer broke into a loud laugh.

"I reckon you're fixed to give me a written guarantee, ain't you?" he demanded. "But maybe just for the sake of makin' talk you'd better tell how you know you can swing such a man-sized contract."

"I know"--the lad's voice mounted into a positive crescendo of conviction--"I know by somethin' that tells me, an' it's somethin' that can't lie. The prophets knew that God had picked 'em out because He told 'em so in visions. I haven't just heard voices in dreams I've had the voice in me and I know--*know* I tell you--that, with a chance, I can be as great a man as any man ever was. I'm not guessin' or deludin' myself. I tell you, I *know*! I've always known."

"I reckon, Ham," said the father gravely, "I can tell you the name of this thing that's been informin' you how great a man you can get to be. It ain't nothin' under God's heaven but self-conceit."

But the boy swept on. "Napoleon's first friends were folks that ran a laundry, but afterward kings couldn't talk to him unless he gave 'em permission. John Hayes Hammond, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Frick, were all poor boys. None of those men had any better blood in their veins than I've got in mine, an' if you want to call it that, none of 'em had more self-conceit."

"I reckon you've got good enough blood to have better sense," observed the father shortly. Then with a very human inconsistency he added, "I don't often brag about it, but my middle name is Standish and Miles Standish was an ancestor of mine."

"And my name," retorted the boy, "is Hamilton, and Alexander Hamilton's family were ancestors of my mother's. I reckon neither of those men would feel very proud to see us settin' down here, wearin' our lives away in a country where the ends won't meet."

"This damned foolishness has gone far enough," ruled the elder in a voice of finality, his amusement suddenly giving way once more to sternness. "I've listened to you because you seemed to be full of talk an' I was willin' to let you get it off your chest, but I don't need counsel from any cub of a boy. I'm nigh onto fifty years old an' I've run my family all these years. I had enough brains to get on with before you was born an' if you've got all the sense you think you've got, you got it from me an' your mother. Until you get to be twenty-one, you'll do what I bid you. Heretofore you've done it willin'ly. I hope you'll go on doin' it that way--but if you don't, I guess I'm still man enough to make you. Now go to bed--an' go quick."

The lad flushed to his cheekbones and for a moment he made no move to obey. Under the tyrannizing manner of his father's voice his spirit rose in rebellion. Tom Burton strode over and his attitude was threatening. "Did you hear what I said to you?" he inquired. "Are you going by yourself, or have I got to take you upstairs?"

Slowly and with a strong self-mastery, Ham came to his feet. "I'll go to bed now," he replied quietly, "because it would be a pity for us to quarrel--but I've got a few more things to say, and, after awhile, I guess you'll have to listen to 'em. We'll talk about this thing some more."

"We'll talk about it some more--when I get good an' ready--if I ever do--an' if I don't we won't never talk about it any more. Go to bed!"

When the lad disappeared up the stairway, he left a long and constrained silence behind him. From the mother's chair came a sound that hinted at secret weeping, and at last Tom Burton straightened his hunched shoulders and gazed across at young Edwardes, whose eyes were no longer smiling, but very sober.

"I hope you're satisfied now," said the host bitterly. "You've played merry hell with this family. Yesterday my son did my bidding without question. My daughter was an obedient child an' a natural one without foolishness. You've been under my roof three hours an' my house rises rebellious against me in my old age. And you bear a name that's always stood for order an' wisdom--not for stirrin' up trouble. I reckon I ought to turn you out in the snow, but I won't--I only hope you're satisfied."

"Mr. Burton," answered the young millionaire quietly, "I should be sorry to have you think that. If I have kindled a spark in little Mary that you never saw before it is nothing of which either you or she need feel ashamed. As for the boy, it was not I who incited him. He has been suppressing thoughts until now that reached the point of eruption, that's all." He paused, then added very thoughtfully: "Even if I did influence them both, it was as the unconscious tool upon which the hand of Destiny chanced to fall. The boy only seeks fulfilment; fulfilment that will make life better for all of you--if he succeeds."

"Yes--if he succeeds. All he's got to do is to start out empty-handed and lick the world to a frazzle. All I've got to do is to gamble the little savings of twenty-five years of frugal living on his being able to do it."

"That," said Edwardes, "was hardly what I meant. If you'll let me make one suggestion, since you credit me with already having done so much, it is this. That boy may be, or may not be, the genius he thinks himself, but he's got a brain that drives and torments him. He *thinks!* If you will treat him as a counsellor and argue with him without sternness it will pay you. The final decision will rest with you, but let him argue. Don't choke him off and make a vassal of him instead of a son. His type of brain can't be leashed."

The father sat moody and did not at once reply. Finally he shook himself out of his reverie and repeated: "Argue with him? How can a man argue with a boy that thinks he's a genius and a miracle-worker? Besides, while he's gabbin' nonsense he can look at you with somethin' in his eyes that makes you feel like a fool."

"Let me remind you of one thing." The young man from the outer world spoke very quietly. "The chapters of history that stand out in boldest relief are chapters dealing with men who *were* miracle-workers, men who had something in their eyes that dominated other men. I have been reared close enough to the center of financial achievement to have seen something of that. Perhaps that boy of yours is born with the stamp of victory upon him--who knows? Given the chance, he may fulfill his own visions. Both of your sons are dreamers, but the elder may be a doer of dreams as well as a dreamer of dreams. He's an unquenchable flame. Don't force him to smolder until he bursts into blaze. Give him a chance to talk. Give him a safety-valve."

Tom Burton drew his brows close over perplexed and baffled eyes; eyes full of foreboding and anxiety. His voice was full of bewilderment. "What does it all mean?" he murmured half-aloud. "What's the cause of all these voices an' protests where everything's been quiet an' peaceable up to now? Why ain't we never heard nothin' about all this before if it's such a big thing an' a thing that the Lord intended?" He gazed about him helplessly and with the face of one who sees omens and cannot construe them, but who feels a nameless fear of their portent.

"At all events," reiterated the guest, "you will do well to hear what the boy wants to say, and now I will bid you good-night."

When he had gone, the older man sat in thought for awhile, and, when next his voice broke the silence, it was in a much softened timbre, a voice tinged with tenderness.

"Mother," he called in an undertone, and the woman who had borne his children and stood shoulder to shoulder with him through the years of fight, came over and knelt at his knee. He took her hand and held it for a while in silence, and then he said a little brokenly: "Mother, when we first came here from the little church down there, this house looked pretty good to us, didn't it?"

"To me, Tom," she said softly, "it has always looked good."

"Do you remember," he went on irrelevantly, "when we brought that slip of vine from the mountain and planted it by the porch? It's over the roof now."

The woman only pressed his hand; and after a moment he went on.

"There are a couple of graves out there in the churchyard that I'd hate mightily to leave."

"The two we lost," she whispered.

"An' yet maybe if we stay here we'll lose 'em all." Tom Burton was making a decided effort to hold his voice steady.

"Don't--don't, Tom," protested the woman.

"When you married me, Elizabeth," he went on with the air of one resolved to take full account, "I reckon you could have done a good deal better, it's been a long fight here an' a hard one."

"I've been happy," she told him.

"Your hand was right slim then, an' now it's hard from work. To me, there ain't no other hand as beautiful, mother, but there's no use denying that we can't hold out much longer, unless the children stand by an' help us."

"They will, Tom. They will. Ham may talk, but he won't desert."

"I know that, but the question is, have we got the right to hold them here? Is Ham raving, or is he right? That's the question you an' me have got to decide, mother."

"Do you think, Tom," she demanded, rising and anxiously looking at him, "do you think that even if we had all the things money could give us--we'd be any happier in the long run? Life's been hard with us, but it's always been wholesome."

"I'm contented, mother, but what does well enough for old blood may not satisfy the young. It ain't the first time I've thought about this thing. They're quittin' all round us, an' they're quittin' because they're beat. I've always thought this country could be redeemed. If boys like Ham thought so, too, it might be done, but it takes young blood, and if a feller's heart ain't in it, he can't do it."

Her only answer was a sigh, and he continued: "We've still got enough laid by in the bank to live somewhere for a few years an' give the children decent educations. If we stay here too long maybe we can't even do that. What shall we do?"

For a while they sat without talk, and then the mother brokenly suggested: "Let's hear what Ham says an' let's make up our minds slow."

Together they rose, and, blowing out the lamp, went up the stairs. As they passed Ham's door they paused, and the father whispered, "I don't want the boy to think I'm hard on him."

Inside, there was no light, but they could hear the eldest son thrashing restlessly about in his bed, and they knew that he was not sleeping.

Outside the snow was still falling with quiet relentlessness. It was wrapping deeper and deeper the white slopes of the mountains and piling feathery drifts against the windward sides of the sighing pines. Here and there a burdened branch creaked under its travail. Now and then the wind that drove the snow rose to a gusty whisper, and a stark limb scraped the eaves of the house with grating, lifeless fingers. But between the occasional stress-cries of the storm, there came the low, dirge-like monotony of the sifting snowfall. And as always in old houses there were the little voices and the minute nameless stirrings of the night. The ghost-moan of drafty chimneys and the creak of warped timbers became audible accentuators of the silence.

Ham heard them all and to him they were like the wretched echoes of a jail where the small clicking night-sounds creep into dreams and poison them with reminders of confinement. His brain was hot with a fever of restiveness and beyond his cell-like room he saw the world from which he was barred: the world which the tongueless voice in his heart kept heralding to him as his own world to conquer.

In another bed across the carpetless floor rose and fell the even breath of Edwardes, who was sleeping as a man sleeps after fighting a blizzard. Under the boy's own hot cheek was the roughness of a slipless pillow and his limbs thrashed between coarse sheets that covered a lumpy mattress.

Out beyond the barriers of the snow-stifled mountains stretched endless continents and seas inviting his soul. Men of alien races and alien thought trod lands where palm trees nodded along white beaches and where the sea was blue as sapphire. Thousands of miles away were deserts agleam with gold and caravans swinging between the burning arch of the sky and the scorching sands. Great cities rose before his eyes, beckoning him, calling to him: brooding cities of gray turrets and foggy streets; strange cities lit with sunset fires on domes and minarets; laughing cities gay with festivals. All these things he was hungry to see; to see as a master of the world walking its varied ways, achieving its affairs. Through his waking dreams marched a parade of great figures, Hannibal, Caesar the Corsican, Talleyrand, Disraeli, Montagu, Pitt, the men with whom this tongueless voice proclaimed his brotherhood; the men who had found life's granite as hard as that which lay heaped about him, who had conquered it and chiseled it into monuments of history. His hand slipped under his pillow and closed on the dollars he had made. His troubled face smoothed into a smile.

"Slivers Martin paid me ten dollars," he murmured to himself, "an' I bought the lot of 'em for seven."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN young Jefferson Edwardes set out the next morning for his winter's imprisonment in the shack where he must fight the white specter of slow death, amid the white isolation of the snow, he left behind him a household to all outward seeming as quiet as it had ever been. But all that morning and afternoon while Ham was away at school, Tom Burton sat deeply engrossed in calculations involving scraps of paper upon which he was laboriously figuring, and frequent consultation of a slender bank-book. And Ham, as he trudged back across the snow, came with a face set for combat. Hitherto he had obeyed and now the time had come when his inherent power of leadership must assert itself. If the world could not conquer him--and he was utterly certain it could not--he must not flinch from the task of riding down the first opposition he met--even though it be the opposition of his own blood. Afterward his family should know only tenderness and ease and luxury, but now they must acknowledge his mastery.

Of the possibility of failure he never dreamed. His star was in the heavens and Destiny had spoken. Just as the cork plunged to the bottom of the pail must inevitably rise to the top, so he must rise. He was of the oligarchy of the great, of the chosen of the gods, and now the voices of Destiny were calling him to the undertaking of his mission. Tonight the question must be thrashed out, yet when he arrived at the house he went quietly about the round of monotonous chores and after that sat through the evening meal with no mention of the things in his heart. It was his father who first broached the subject and he broached it bluntly while the family sat about him, in the spirit of the primitive family council.

"Ham," he said slowly, "I've been sittin' here all day turnin' your notions over in my mind. You want to go away from here and to abandon this place where you was born; where your mother and me started housekeepin'; where we've lived for twenty years. If we decided to do that--an' it wouldn't be no easy thing for either your mother or me--what plans would you aim to carry out?"

The boy shook his head. He did not shake it in the abashed fashion of one confronted with a question for which he has no answer, but with the frank manner of one brushing aside a trivial and irrelevant question.

"I don't know yet. First I've got to have an education, then I'll decide what I'm going to do, and when I decide I'll succeed."

The father's brows knitted themselves gravely and with displeasure. "Then, after all your talk and bragging, you haven't got no definite plan. All you argue for is cutting loose from the roof over us an' livin' up our little savin's."

"I know that I can give you big things in the place of little things." The lad's voice again mounted and into his face came the flush of assured inspiration. "The thing that tells me is something you wouldn't understand. I can't any more put it into words for you than I can tell you why the moon swings the tides, but it's just as dead sure as that an' I can feel it here." He clapped his hands over his heart and went on with quiet certainty: "I don't know no name to call it by except a feelin' of power. There's only one thing in God's whole world that can stop me, an' that's ignorance and lonesomeness. You call it all dreamin'--well, give me a chance and I'll make it all so real that you can't have any more doubts."

"I thought," said Tom Burton a bit wearily, "that maybe you might have some sensible argument, but all you've got is moonshine. I've been settin' here figurin' all day so that, if you could convince me, I'd know where I stood with the bank, but it don't hardly seem worth talkin' about."

"I can't make you understand," declared the boy unwaveringly, "because you're thinkin' in hundreds where I'm thinkin' in millions. You ask me about details. All I know is that I've got a destiny to be as great as any man can be an' that success is goin' to be my slave. I don't know what I'm going to do because I haven't seen yet what battle-field is best worth winnin'. When I see what's the biggest--I'll win it."

"So you want us to take what we've saved and gamble it all on your good opinion of yourself. Do you realize, my son, that we ain't got much and that we've saved what we have got by goin' without all our lives? When that's gone, we won't have nothin' left to gamble with a second time. Ain't it a good deal to pay for learnin' the folly of self-conceit?"

The boy's answer was direct and swift and confident. "One chance is all I need. It's only a coward that wants a guarantee of more chances, if he fails once. What sort of a farmer do you think Paul will ever make? He couldn't heft a second-growth log of timber. But out there in the world where a man's rated higher than a mule maybe Paul's got it in him to be great. Some day Mary's goin' to be a woman and a beautiful woman. She's got a right to life. Don't you ever see the difference between life an' just livin'? It's the difference between havin' a soul and havin' nothin' but a belly."

"Do you suppose"--the father spoke petulantly despite his resolution to hear his son to the end--"do you suppose

we've always been poor because we liked it?"

"If you stay poor," came the prompt retort, "it's because you won't let me change it. We're stayin' here an' slowly starvin' our hearts an' brains an' souls because Money's got us bluffed. I'm goin' to make money my slave an' not my master--an' if you'll trust me you can have it to play with."

"You tell me that you are one of the almightyest great men that was ever born, an' that somethin' keeps on tellin' you so. You tell me that I can't understand the voice you hear," said Tom Burton slowly. "Don't you know that all the lunatic asylums are full of Emperors of Germany and Kings of England--an' they all hear them same kind of voices? That's why they're there."

"But there's one Emperor of Germany and one King of England outside them places--an' they're on thrones. All the masters of the world have felt their power an' folks have laughed at 'em--at first." Ham spoke with desperate seriousness that made his eyes glow steadily and forcefully. "And yet the big things have been done by those men, and from the first *they* knew that they were different. You say I've been braggin'. Did you ever hear me say one word before yesterday about bein' different from any other boy? I'm sayin' it now because there isn't any use in lyin'. I *know* just as well as if I'd already done it, that I can look down on other successful men as far as a mountain-top looks down on a little hill. I've done my work here on this farm, an' I haven't ever shirked. Now I want my chance--an' I don't want my family to go to seed. I want the blood of the Standishes and the Hamiltons to climb up and not to run down hill and die out in a rotting puddle at the bottom. I want these things and I'm goin' to have 'em--This farm an' you have fought for a lifetime an' the farm's whipped you. I tell you there is just one thing in God Almighty's world that can whip me--just one thing that I'm afraid of--an' it's this farm. If you stay here I reckon I can't hardly desert you, but I'd rather you'd kill me outright. That's all I've got to say."

Tom Burton rose from his chair and took two or three turns across the frayed strips of carpet. His eyes were no longer the eyes of a father irritated by the insubordinate fret of a fledgling son begging permission to test his wings. His bearded face bore the seamed uncertainty of his deeply vexed spirit. Perhaps in that moment there came to him some sense of conversion to the prophet-like assurance of his son. Perhaps he felt the dread of transplanting and a vague wonder whether the gifts of wealth, if they came, might not bring disaster in their wake. At last he turned, cramming his hands into his trousers' pockets, and swept the little family circle with eyes in which flashed something of patriarchal fire.

"Mother," he demanded, "you have heard what the boy says. Does it sound like reason to you, or is it just a stripling's restlessness?"

Elizabeth Burton looked from her husband's face to that of her eldest child. It seemed to her that the father's eyes were wistful and sorely distressed, and that the son's face was tightly drawn with a feverish burning of the eyes. Suddenly she felt like an arbiter called to judge between them. Her boy with his Caesar's ambition was breaking his heart to go. Her husband, with much of life behind, could only yield with something like a break in his own. Her eyes moistened.

"If he feels called into the world, Tom--" she began, then halted. The husband waited, and she went on again. "If he feels it so strong, maybe it must mean something. It's mighty hard to say. But, Tom, I know Ham better than anybody else does. He's not the kind of boy to leave us alone. If we need him he'll stay."

"That's not the question, mother." The father who had yesterday been dictatorial and intolerant was now the just judge who refused to be beguiled by personal preferences. Only his pupils betrayed the pathos of his inward suffering. "It's a right hard question as I see it. This place means home to me, but I'm about played out. If we stay it's Ham that's got to wear the harness, an' I know just how heavy the harness is. It would gall him an' blister him even if he wasn't already chafin' with discontent. It seems like he can't do it willin'ly. Can we let him do it any other way? We're lookin' back, mother, but I reckon life runs forward."

"It ain't just my life I'm thinkin' about--" broke in Ham's voice, but his father stopped him with an uplifted hand.

"You've had your say, son, for the present," he reminded; and the boy fell silent.

Tom Burton turned to the maiden aunt who sat under the lamplight with her sewing on her lap. He saw that her lips were intolerantly compressed and that her needle came and went in protesting little jabs. "Hannah," he quietly inquired, "what do you think?"

The elderly woman whose sternness of view had been tempered by neither maternity nor breadth of experience shook her head.

"I don't know as I'm called on to express what I think, Tom," she replied with cold disapproval. "I've always held that

it's a sinful thing to be dissatisfied with what God wills. He put us here an' I reckon if He hadn't meant us to live here He'd have put us somewhere else."

"I guess, Hannah--" Tom Burton's eyes for just a moment lighted into a humorous smile--"we couldn't hardly expect God to move us bodily. But if we do go away from here you can have the comfort of figuring that if He hadn't wanted us to go there we wouldn't be there." He looked over at little Mary, who alone had not spoken.

"Daughter," he suggested, "you're too young to have to decide such things, but you might as well speak up, too. It looks like the day has come for children to lay down the law to their elders. What do you think about leavin' the old home, the only home we've ever known?"

The child, surprised at being called into the council, dropped her eyes, then, suddenly glancing up and meeting Ham's gaze, she felt a courage beyond her own, and stammered: "I'd like to see the world and--and--well, just to see all the wonderful things--and to know everything."

Tom Burton's lips stiffened. "A long time ago a couple of people lived in the Garden of Eden," he said shortly. "And I reckon what Eve said wasn't much different from that. Well, they moved away all right."

There was a long silence in the room, and the father at last broke it with his eyes fixed on his eldest son.

"Those great men you talk about, Ham--" he spoke with deliberate gravity--"them fellers you seem to think are sort of brothers of yours--most of them came to times when they saw things toppin' down all round 'em. They sent your Napoleon to St. Helena an' a lot of others didn't do much better in the long run. Julius Caesar was pretty great an' pretty ambitious. He fell. There's a heap to be said fer livin' straight an' simple. We're self-respectin' men an' women with clean blood in our veins that don't have to bow down to no man. We've lived honest an' worked hard, but sometimes when spring comes on an' I'm followin' the plow an' the blackbirds are followin' me along the furrow, I feel like God ain't so far away. When they buries me out there amongst those I've loved an' been true to, I reckon I'll rest."

"Your father," the son reminded him, "wasn't a young feller when Lincoln called for volunteers, but he didn't stay here because he wanted to rest. He went, an' now he's restin' down there at Shiloh. I want to answer my call. I'm willin' to take my chance of restin' where death finds me."

Outside, across the ice-locked lake and through the snow-burdened forest swept the wolf-like howl of the wind.

Inside, there was the silence of a deeply troubled indecision. At last, Tom Burton said:

"It's a right-hard thing to stake the welfare of a family on a boy's notion of his own greatness--a notion that ain't never been tried out. There's just one thing you've convinced me of, and it's this: You may not be able to do anything worth-while in the world outside. You may be a failure there, but I'm pretty sure, in your frame of mind, you'll be a failure here. The man that makes a fight here has got to have his heart in it an' he's got to love the soil. That don't fit your case! I ain't ready to admit yet that I ain't the head of my own family. I ain't made up my mind yet what we'll do. Maybe we'll stay right here an' maybe we'll go away." The father ran one hand wearily through the thick hair on his forehead and shook his head. "I've heard you out, an' we'll all think on it an' dream on it. I've found right often when a feller's perplexed an' can't reach a conclusion, he goes to sleep an' wakes up with a clearer judgment. Once a mistake is made, it can't be unmade; but I don't want you to think that I ain't ponderin' this question."

Ahead of him Ham saw Paul and Mary slip up the stairway and his aunt rise, with the stiff disapproval of silence, and leave the room. He himself remained only a few minutes longer and then with a low-voiced good-night he pressed his father's hand, and felt the grip of stern affection on his own. He took up and lighted the small lamp that was to light him to bed, and as he climbed the boxed-in stairway, the shadows wavered on the walls at each side, and he heard the wail of the wind around the eaves.

When he set the lamp down and began undressing he realized for the first time the gnawing weariness of muscles that the day had taxed with chores and tramping. Tomorrow morning he must rise while the windows still let in only the chilling gray of dawn. Yet he stopped with half his clothes removed, and, going to an improvised shelf in the corner, took down a battered volume. It was not until the lamp warned him of the spent hours with its dying sputter that he laid aside the resonant sentences in which Carlyle had been talking to him of heroes and their worship. In another room across the hall he had heard stirrings for an hour after the silence of sleep had fallen on the rest of the house.

There Mary, unable to compose herself at once, had been snipping at the pattern of a gown with which, in her fancy, she was to charm those men who did not wear lumbermen's socks and neglect their razors. But now even Mary was asleep. It was cold in the room, and outside the world was bitter, but Ham was far from sleep. In his mind still worked and seethed the unresting ferment which had become a torment. The annals of the great had fired him to passion. The littleness of his room and of his life stifled him. He wanted to breathe freer, and, drawing on his mackinaw, he tiptoed

noiselessly down the stairs and let himself out into the night.

There he found a frozen world, shut in by low-drifting clouds and swallowed in a smother of darkness. Even the snow was gray, but at least there he could look out across space.

As though his eyes followed a compass needle, he slowly swung them until his gaze set toward his desire, and because vaguely he thought of New York as the center of the great outer world, his face was to the south.

The wind moaned about him and somewhere far off he heard the ripping groan of an overladen tree giving way under its paralysis of sleet. In himself he felt something also breaking away from its old place. He felt forces rending their bonds and straining for freedom, and it almost seemed to his burning eyes that while he gazed toward that spot hundreds of miles away which he had never seen, there slowly kindled in the sky a pale and luminous aura, such as hangs over the spires and shafts of a giant city. His fancy pictured the unsainted halo that gleams above thronged and never-sleeping streets: streets that always beckon. Vague echoes of sounds came toward him, warring in the teeth of the wind; sounds of the many voices and the many clamors that merge into one dull, insistent roar: the voice of the city.

So he stood there shivering and not realizing that the frost was shrewdly biting him. His spirit was the spirit of a hatching eaglet impatiently rapping at the shell which too slowly opens to give it freedom.

"What I did to Slivers Martin," he told himself, "I can do to the rest of them. There ain't much difference between doin' big things an' little things, except that you've got to be where there are big things to do an' you've got to *know* you can do 'em."

PART II

THE BOOK OF LIFE
IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

CHAPTER V

IT was eight o'clock, and the year as well as the day was in its morning. The watch which young Carl Bristoll drew from his pocket was very thin and exquisite, and he did not look at its face. Instead he touched a delicate spring with his finger-nail and listened to the tinkle of its low, silvery chime. This watch might have spoken the hour to a blind man as well as to eyes as clear and engaging as those of its present possessor.

In some Swiss shop, where for generations an hereditary skill of adept fingers had come down from father to son, a master of his craft had toiled long and lovingly over this thin disc of gold which epitomized in its small circumference a perfection of accuracy and beauty. Because it was a prince's plaything and because the young Titan of finance who employed Carl Bristoll as his confidential secretary had brought it back by way of an affectionate gift from his last trip to the Continent, the lad prized it above other possessions. To young Bristoll, who was no unwilling wage-earner, but a hero-worshiper in all the intensity of strong youth, it had been as if an emperor had pinned on his breast the insignia of personal regard.

He put the trinket back into his waistcoat pocket, and strolled to the windows that gave off over the Drive and the Hudson. The softly arching sky found its color echo in the blue of broad waters and beyond them the Palisades were already beginning to show tenderly green and alluring in spring's resurrection. Out in midstream lay the crouching hulk of a battleship, and its somber gray was the one note that contradicted the softness of the morning.

Bristoll turned his face again to the interior, where a flood of sun from the broad window at the back filled the place with eastern light. He never tired of that room, the library where his chief dispatched those matters of more urgent business that pursued him even to his home. It was a room that might have served a potentate as a council-chamber with its treasury of almost priceless art, yet it reflected everywhere the quiet of faultless taste and the elegance born of a restrained and sure discernment.

"And all of it," Carl Bristoll murmured to himself, as he awaited the coming of its master, "he made for himself in a scant ten years, and he stands only at the threshold of his career!" That often repeated formula was a sort of daily tonic with which his ambition reminded itself that life holds no prize locked behind impossible barriers for him who has the courage and resolution to grasp it. Yet had he been older he would have added, "The impossible is only possible to the child of Destiny."

He heard a quiet movement behind him, and turned to find the butler standing at his elbow with a tray of early mail, into which the secretary plunged, separating the purely personal from those letters which the great man saw only through his subordinate's eyes.

"I'm not at all sure, Mr. Bristoll, that the master will rise early," volunteered the servant. "He was with his sister until midnight, and after that Mr. Paul came in and I heard him playing the piano, sir, as late as three o'clock."

Carl laughed. "I had a call from him on the 'phone an hour ago," he answered. "He spoke of a busy day ahead, and suggested an early start. There are some men, Harrow, who find rest simply in changing the brain's occupation."

"Yes, sir, quite so," admitted the butler dubiously. "Still, as the poet says, sir, it's sleep that 'knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,' sir. Sometimes I have apprehensions that the master will overtax his strength."

"I didn't know, Harrow," smiled the secretary, "that you were a disciple of the poets."

"Only, sir, in an unostentatious way," deprecated the man. "It has been my good fortune to serve in families where such niceties have been highly regarded, sir, and, I take it, advantageous associations reflect themselves in one's tastes, sir. But--" he dropped his voice, and came a step nearer--"but, sir, if you will pardon me, sir, I should like to ask a question. You know, of course, that the master's sister arrived last night from Europe?"

Bristoll nodded. He himself had not yet had the privilege of seeing the young woman, the fame of whose loveliness had preceded her: a loveliness which had enthralled men from the Irish Sea to Suez.

"Of course, sir, it's not for me to entertain opinions, but--" The butler paused in evident embarrassment, and the secretary's eyes narrowed a little.

"You are quite right, Harrow," he asserted shortly. "I can't see that you are required to express any opinion."

"Of course, sir, I was only going to say--"

"Well--don't say it."

But, for all his obsequiousness, the admirable Harrow was a persistent diplomat.

"No, sir, of course I sha'n't. I was only going to ask you--"

The secretary looked up with an impatient frown on a forehead shaped for resolution.

"All right. Ask me and have it over."

"I was going to inquire, sir, whether you regard it likely that the new mistress would--as I might say, sir--institute any sweeping changes of regime in our *milieu*? Things have gone on very well, sir, as they were." The interrogation carried a note of sharp anxiety: the apprehension of a petty monarch who might face the fate of being deposed.

"I don't know." The reply was curt, and Harrow with a bow said only, "Yes, sir, thank you. I was just speculating on the possibilities, sir."

For a while there was silence in the library as Bristoll ran through letter after letter; his hand racing over the stenographer's pad upon which he reduced their purport to succinct notes. He always enjoyed these responsible mornings with his chief because they were times of intimate association with a mind that directed colossal operations, and they savored almost of the importance of cabinet meetings.

Often, as he read the fluctuations of the ticker tape or glanced at financial scareheads in the evening papers, he smiled knowingly with the memory of a sentence spoken at the breakfast-table or an edict uttered in this library, which had been the motive power behind the news; and which to the world at large remained an unseen impulse.

Now Bristoll heard a quick step coming down the stairs with a schoolboy's buoyant lightness and the whistling of a popular air. It might have been a college sophomore arriving light-heartedly from his cold plunge, rather than the Titan whose word in the Street was already a thing which no one of the older money-kings could ignore.

Carl Bristoll rose, and Hamilton Burton broke off his whistling to smile gaily as he clapped the younger man on the shoulder and inquired with a voice remarkably soft and musical, "Well, how is our young Minister of Finance this morning?"

Hamilton Montagu Burton stood an even six feet, and from a generous breadth of shoulders, swung back in free erectness, he tapered to a trim slenderness of waist and thigh. In the immaculate elegance of his dress he justified his reputation as the best-clothed man in New York, even while he retained the grace of a seeming carelessness. His eyes, though he had slept a scant four hours, looked out clear-pupiled and tireless, but it was the shape and carriage of the head that proclaimed mastery. The pattern of brow and jaw and clean-cut lip and indomitable eye gave that head an alert power which made it the head of one born to command. The illuminating smile could give way to a sternness and a decision that became ruthless in its dominance, and the eyes could harden like diamonds as swiftly as they could melt.

Carl Bristoll laughed, and after the custom of badinage that had grown up between them he made a bow of mock ceremony as he replied.

"Quite fit, Sire, and your Majesty's appearance proclaims you equally so."

It was hardly the sort of greeting that the outsider might have expected, but neither financier nor secretary was an ordinary type and between them throve an excellent understanding.

As Bristoll read from his notes Hamilton Burton's face lost its smile and became instantly attentive while his questions snapped out clear-clipped and comprehensive.

It seemed that the brain was separated into many zones, each carrying forward its separate functions without interference or confusion. Through the channels of vision, hearing and quick independent thought, varied propositions were at one time being absorbed while the master instinct of coordination was weighing all and planning yet other affairs.

"And now," announced the financier, when the stenographic notes had been read and others written in swift adjudication of their problems, "the rest can wait till we get down-town. There's Harrow calling us to breakfast--and breakfast is an institution I particularly venerate." The master of the establishment turned to the butler and inquired, "Hasn't Miss Burton come down?"

"Miss Burton, sir," replied the man with a shade of uneasiness in his voice, "sent word by her maid that she would breakfast in her room."

The naive smile faded from Hamilton Burton's face and for an instant it took on something of that aggressive set which men in the Stock-Exchange had come to recognize as precursor of a frenzied day.

"Send word to my sister," he directed quietly, "that I insistently request her to join us at breakfast. I must see her before I leave the house." He strode with a resilient step about the room, pausing idly before a favorite landscape here and prized bronze there. Patience was one quality which Hamilton Burton had not spent great effort in acquiring. It was his custom to let others adapt themselves to his convenience, yet his eyes were unruffled as he smilingly turned to his secretary. "Serene I wait--with folded hands," he murmured.

But when Harrow returned it was as bearer of a message which marred the serenity of this waiting.

"Miss Burton sends word, sir, that she will receive you in her boudoir in a half-hour. She does not find it convenient to come down to breakfast."

For a moment, Hamilton Burton remained standing and his gray eyes flashed forebodingly, though the line of his lips was not deflected. Then he led the way to the breakfast-room.

"Tell Miss Burton," he ordered shortly, "that we are awaiting her in the breakfast-room. Say to her that I trust she will make the delay short." Then as the butler turned, the master halted him again. "No," he amended, "I'll send a note--give me a sheet of paper."

As the embarrassed servant laid a note-card by his plate, he hastily scribbled:

"Dear Mary, While you are mistress of my house I shall expect you to appear at the breakfast-table. The rest of the day is yours. This is final. Mr. Bristoll and I are waiting and my time is not to be valued lightly. Please do not tax my patience longer."

When Harrow had gone, Burton turned again to Bristoll, and with that systematic quality which made his brain so versatile he dismissed the annoyance for another matter.

"I want your opinion on the coffee," he said lightly. "It came from the Jungus valley in Bolivia. Men who have drunk it there are not satisfied with any other. In the local market it is costly and as an export it is unattainable."

"Yet you have obtained it," smiled the secretary. "How?"

Burton laughed. "I wanted it," he announced briefly. "So I got it."

"Mr. Burton," the younger man spoke hesitantly, "you look very fit and seem absolutely on edge, but I'm afraid you're rather overdoing things. I don't mean any impertinence of suggestion, but the trout are jumping in the mountain brooks just now. Can't you drop things for a few days and climb into a flannel shirt--and rest? You could go somewhere where the leaves are rustling in the woods and things are as God made them, close to His immortal granite. I don't want to see you break yourself down."

Hamilton Burton was looking at the percolator in which the Bolivian coffee was bubbling as restively as the fires of the volcano at whose base it grew from berry to lush plant and came again to berry. He was balancing a spoon on his forefinger, and smiling with quiet amusement.

"Now that's very thoughtful of our young Minister of Finance." He spoke softly as the fugitive smile played around the corners of his lips. "Very thoughtful indeed, but the suggestion is, after all, unavailable." He paused, and the smile died. "I don't think I've ever become autobiographical with you, have I, Carl?"

The secretary shook his head. "But, of course, you know I should feel honored at any time you did," he declared with whole-hearted and boyish enthusiasm.

"Very well. Until I was sixteen years old I lived very close to mountains built of God's immortal granite. Whenever I went out to do my chores I barked my shins on God's immortal granite. Whenever I plowed I had to do acrobatics to save as much of the plowshare as possible from God's immortal granite. It's all very pastoral to talk about milk fresh from the sweet-breathed cow, but for ten years I was lady's maid to two singularly repulsive cows--and in time they cloyed upon me. Whenever those Juno-eyed kine lowed for a drink of water, it was up to me to hustle out and serve them--and I never got a tip for my service. To this good day, Carl, the sight of a cow gives me cramps in the fingers and melancholy in the soul. Henceforth I'll take my milk in hermetically sealed jars from one of my own model dairies--and I'll try to forget that its origin is--cows. That cream in the pitcher there came from a farm of mine up in Westchester. Bulk for bulk, it costs me about the same as old champagne, but it's mighty cheap compared to what that other milk came to." He paused and gazed at the spoon balanced on a steady forefinger.

"As for the whisper of the breeze through the silver birches, I've heard it with chilblains on my feet and bruises on my heart and henceforth when I want to see the shadows fall, I'll go and stand under Cheops' pyramid or the Coliseum at Rome or some other edifice reared with human hands as the monument to human achievement that helped to build the world. When I die they'll once more lay me close to Nature's breast, and, being dead, I sha'n't object--but until that time I'll stay away--as far away as possible."

The financier ended his good-humored tirade and glanced up to meet the frankly alarmed gaze of Harrow, who at that moment reappeared in the door.

"Miss Burton says," announced the butler, his usual suavity shaken beyond control, "that there is no answer to your note. She says you already have her reply."

The coffee in the percolator was bubbling furiously, and the ice about the grape-fruit was beginning to melt. Hamilton Burton rose abruptly from his chair. "Please excuse me for a moment, Carl," he said in a low voice. "I will go up and bring my sister down to breakfast."

The furnishing and decorating of Mary Burton's apartments had engrossed her brother's interest for some weeks prior to her arrival and when in answer to his rap a silvery voice said, "Come in," he stood on the threshold of a boudoir as richly and tastefully detailed as a princess of the blood royal could have asked.

But the girl, who sat indolently before her mirror, clad in a morning negligee of exquisite delicacy, was so like a colorful and lustrous pearl that one forgot her surroundings. Hamilton's eyes, the eyes that could change so swiftly from implacability to disarming softness, flashed into pride as he looked at her.

"Mary," he amiably began, "I think there must be some misunderstanding. I asked you to come down."

The girl looked up with a serene smile. "Did they not then give you my message?" she inquired softly. "I told them to say that I would breakfast here."

The man's eyes narrowed and darkened. Something in his domineering spirit bristled, as it always bristled under questioning or opposition.

"Why? You are fully dressed, are you not?"

"Assuredly."

"Then what reason can you have for refusing to come when I ask it? Is it simply that you wish to defy me? I am not accustomed to being disobeyed."

"Are you then so sure of obedience, *mon cher*?" She raised her gorgeous eyes and laughed up at him with indulgent amusement. Her manner was that of a young empress who regards any criticism of herself as an audacious jest, so unprecedented as to be diverting. "Are you sure that you have nothing yet to learn? I said I should not come down to the breakfast-room--because I did not wish to come."

"You mean that you still refuse?"

"If you desire to call it that. I would not seem ungracious.... I should prefer the word 'decline.'"

"Then that is reason enough why you *are* coming."

Mary lifted her brows in incredulous amusement, but Hamilton Burton did not smile in response. He came a step nearer her chair and said very quietly: "While you are in my house I wish you to appear at the breakfast-table. This morning is a good time to begin. Will you accompany me on your own feet, or will you make your initial appearance kicking those same feet, while I carry you down like a child in a tantrum? There are about five seconds available for you to give the question mature deliberation."

"Thank you, *cheri*." Her mirthful pupils were not flecked with annoyance. "Five seconds are four seconds more than I need. I shall not go either way."

Hamilton made no further comment. With the apparent ease of one taking up a child from its cradle, he bent down and gathered her slender figure in his arms, then, lifting her bodily from her chair, he turned toward the door.

For an instant, she lay against his shoulder, too astounded for protest. Then her satin slippers began beating a furious tattoo and her small fists pummeling him as her cheeks flamed and her mismatched eyes burst into indignant fire. These demonstrations her brother ignored as he carried her in effortless fashion out into the broad hall and half-way down the stairs. She had ceased to struggle by that time and was gasping in wordless wrath. But at the turn of the

stairway into the lower hall he paused and stood still, while their eyes met and locked in a brief, hot duel of wills.

"Now," he inquired calmly, "shall this be the manner of your first appearance before my secretary and butler, or will you make the rest of the journey on your own power?"

For the first time she recovered her voice. It was a wild mingling of frustrated wrath and outraged dignity, and for once she found that her fluency had forsaken her. She had been taught--Hamilton had seen to that--that when she spoke others should obey. She had not yet learned to bow to even his autocracy.

"*Ham!*" she exclaimed tensely, though even now she spoke in a cautious voice so that no echo might reach other ears. "Put me down! How dare you?"

He did not answer the question; instead he asked another.

"Will you enter as mistress of the house or will you go in kicking?"

During a long defiant pause, their eyes held, both pairs unwavering; then the girl said quietly: "I'll go in myself."



CHAPTER VI

HARROW had not overstated the facts when he said that it had been his privilege to serve in families "where niceties were highly regarded." He was the accomplished servant, seeing and hearing only such things as his betters intended for his eyes and ears. If he had human emotions he ordinarily revealed them only when his livery was doffed. Yet even the impeccably correct serving man has his moments of weakness, and, as Hamilton Burton left the room, he muttered low, but quite audibly, "My God!" Then, feeling Carl Bristoll's chilling glance upon him, he sought to cover his indiscretion in an apologetic cough.

But the secretary himself felt the disturbing uneasiness that had prompted that exclamation. Hamilton Burton had been defied, and when that occurred peace fled and punishment fell.

Evidently the girl upstairs, the girl just returned from years of study and travel in Europe, had something of that same spirit which made her brother's will a thing of adamant, but she had not done well to begin her new life by measuring lances with the autocratic Hamilton. Probably at the moment she was being reprimanded, perhaps rebuked into tears which, since she was young and beautiful, became a disquieting thought. Carl Bristoll felt the discomfort of the outsider in the shadow of a family scene.

He would now have to meet Mary Burton under the most inauspicious circumstances, and she would always remember that he had first seen her with tear-stained eyes at a moment of humiliation and defeat. It was too much to expect that a woman could forget this, and the young secretary had the wish that it should be otherwise. So he sat rather moodily contemplating his plate and when he heard steps on the stairs he was surprised at the brevity of the interval. Hamilton Burton had evidently subdued this insurrection in his household with the same whirlwind swiftness that he employed toward enemies beyond his walls.

Bristoll saw the young financier draw back the portieres and he himself rose hastily and came forward, but he halted half-way and stood transfixed. He had been told that he was to expect beauty, and he had expected it, yet now for the moment he found himself standing astonished, and as devoid as a raw schoolboy of his usually imperturbable poise. From this trance-like condition he was recalled by the quizzical amusement of his employer and, bowing from the hips, he found himself murmuring some well-bred inanity.

The girl standing there in the door was a sight to make men gasp and lose their tongues, and because this was not the first who had done so, her own perfect lips curved into a smile of purest graciousness, and in her voice as she spoke was a quality of zylophone music made the more charming by that slight French accent which years abroad had given her. Beauty is so variant of type, so often vaunted and so rarely found in true perfectness, that Carl Bristoll had accepted the newspaper reports of this girl's loveliness with a discounted credence. Now he was convinced. The quality of her coloring and expression would have made her face beautiful even had it lacked its allurements of line and delicacy of proportion; even had the chin tilted less regally and the eyes looked out under their long lashes with less serene queenliness, though ready to twinkle at the instant into the merriment of a mischief-loving child.

She was tall, but not too tall, lithe and slim and sinuous as a mermaid, yet well enough rounded to make each delicate curve a charm, not merely of promise but of fulfilment. She wore a flowing morning-gown that made negligee seem to the suddenly intoxicated secretary the glorified costume for a woman. It was a richly embroidered thing from China and on her head was a crown of lace. Bristoll knew that its material name would be a boudoir cap, but on her head it became a crown--no, it was too filmy and ethereal for that: rather it was a sort of halo. Beneath it, and imprisoning pale fire in its amber softness, escaped a truant mass of curls. From the cap to the foamy whiteness of a lacy petticoat that peeped out just above the silk-clad ankles, she was exquisite. And all these things stamped themselves on young Carl Bristoll's brain as he bowed. Then he realized the delicate white-and-pink glow of her complexion and a marvelous pair of mismatched eyes.

Later when trying to defend to his own sophisticated mind his unaccountable loss of poise, he assured himself that it was these eyes. They should have spoiled her beauty, just as any other thing that destroyed symmetry of balance in form or color would have marred the effect. Yet, on the contrary, they were gorgeous and wonderful, and when he looked at them he felt as if he had plunged into some icy pool and come out glowing.

"It is a pleasure indeed, Mr. Bristoll," she smiled when he had been presented. "You see we must be good and informal friends since the--" she shrugged her slim shoulders and quite unconsciously fell into French idiom as she continued--"since the so great impatience of my big brother compels me to meet you like this--all untidy and unprepared." She made a little gesture with both hands and her rippling laugh seemed to envelop the young secretary with a deep sense of obligation for her graciousness. "I have been so long from America, and I have not yet come back to the American ways. In France they do not so rush from their beds to their business. In France they take the time to

live."

In Hamilton Burton's face there remained no echo of the impatience of a few minutes past. In his serene eyes was no hint of remembered annoyance. As he drew back his sister's chair, one saw in his masterful face only the satisfied pride of a man fastidious of taste in all things from neck-scarfs to women.

"I'm truly sorry, Mary," he declared, "to have inconvenienced you, but you must let me be a little selfish. The only time I can be sure of seeing you will be across the breakfast-table, and that privilege you must grant--because you are too delectable a sister to do without."

"Ah," she laughed, "but I did not know that here in America the men knew how to say the pretty things--and to their own sisters, too! But it is for me to apologize. It is I who let the coffee grow cold. I have been spoiled abroad where people are very lazy." Under her smiling eyes the two men sat content while she made of serving the Bolivian coffee a ceremonial as pretty as a fete.

Young Bristoll, usually loquacious enough, was not talkative this morning. What had happened to more hardened philanderers abroad was happening to him, and the shield which he had always succeeded in holding safely before his heart was being lowered under the bright archery of Mary Burton's eyes.

At last he rose, and his chief said quietly, "Carl, I shall be an hour late. Will you run down to the office and sit on the lid until I get there?"

The secretary's brows went up. "You were to meet several of the directors of the Inter-Ocean Coal and Ore at ten-fifteen," he reminded.

"Let them wait," retorted Burton placidly. "I'm usually punctual enough."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mary with an adorable show of penitence, "and it is I who am causing Monsieur Coal and Monsieur Ore to wait--I am so sorry!"

But, when Bristoll had gone and Hamilton had led the way into the library, safe from the overhearing of the servants, the girl's manner abruptly changed. She stood by the broad desk, resting her slender fingers lightly on the mahogany top, and turned to her brother. Her attitude was very straight and regal, and her voice, though still soft and musical, had in it the quiet ring of defiance.

"So!" she said. "So, in my brother's house I come and go under orders? So, I rise when he commands it and go to bed at his direction."

Hamilton Burton paused with his fingers on the knob of a wall-safe from which he had meant to take a package that he had placed there as a gift in celebration of her home-coming. It had pleased him, as he was shown that rope of splendidly matched pearls in the establishment of the continent's premier jeweller, that he was able to buy such gifts. Of the twenty millions of families in America, nineteen million would have regarded their cost as a large fortune upon whose income they could live at ease while life lasted. But Hamilton Burton had been even prouder that on his sister's throat their beauty would after all be the secondary beauty, and with the eye of the connoisseur he had rejected several of the graduated gems and demanded that in their place more perfect ones be substituted. Agents of the great house, skilled in the nuances of selection, had sought far to better them until the result was satisfactory to the exacting taste of the purchaser.

Hamilton Burton was spoken of as a woman-hater. Society saw him rarely. Power was his mistress and success his passion. His egotism, centering on no deep love of his own and too fastidious for mere "affairs," left him opportunity for an exaggerated family pride.

Now he halted with his fingers on the combination knob of the safe and straightened up. The sun fell upon a face very attractive and winning, and a figure very strong and graceful, but at the same moment the features hardened and the eyes wore their fighting glint.

"Mary," he said very slowly, "I thought that you understood. I thought from the way you spoke in there that you realized it was you who had acted like a very lovely and a very selfish little pig."

"Did you suppose then," she queried as her chin went a shade higher and the long lashes dropped a little over the vivid eyes, "that I should make a scene before your servants?"

"If you include Mr. Bristoll in that category, I must ask you to correct your impression. Carl is my closest friend. A man who happens to stand on an eminence has few such friends and he values those he has."

"Mr. Bristoll seemed to me"--she shrugged her shoulders and spread her palms--"what shall I say--a nice boy? Yet I should hardly have discussed in his presence such matters as we have now to discuss. It seems, *mon cher*, that we do not yet quite understand each other. Is it not so?"

She seated herself and glanced up at him with a half-challenge in her eyes, even though her lips smiled charmingly.

"Mary"--the voice was now hard and the face was very fixed--"there is very little to understand and I have very little time for discussion. You have been abroad, enjoying every human advantage that money could buy you. When you were a little kid washing dishes in the White Mountains you cried to be pretty. If you had cried for the moon I'd have tried to get it for you. If I'd failed it would have been my first failure. The beauty I didn't give you. God had already done that, but everything that can enhance beauty, I did give you--education, culture, social standing of the highest. You have come back home with every exquisite accomplishment that a woman can have. I'm willing to admit that from my point of view you've been a good investment. You have instinctively the perfection that most women only strive after. I'm so proud of you that I've chosen to make you the mistress of my house. What you want you have only to ask for, but you will please remember that I am head of my family. I shall make few demands--and those must be complied with. That is all there is to understand."

"I had understood," she answered very quietly, "that I was to regard this house as my own and that I was to be mistress here. That, you pointed out in your letters, was why I should find it preferable to going to my mother's. Was it not so?"

"If you had gone to mother's, would you have expected to upset the entire schedule of family affairs?" he demanded.

In reply she rose and stood drumming lightly with her fingers on the table-top.

"Daughter am I in my mother's house, but Mistress in mine own," she quoted.

Hamilton Burton took several turns back and forth across the floor. The whole situation was surprising and intolerable. Never had son or brother been more lavish in waving the magician's wand for the pleasure of his family, but never had any other member forgotten for an instant the obedience they owed to his paramount genius. Men who fought him, he could crush, and did crush ruthlessly and with no afterthought, but his own sister, crossing his will, became a problem of more difficult solution.

"It is a trifle whether you breakfast in bed or not," he said suddenly, halting in his walk and standing before her. "It is vital that you remember that you are a girl and that I am the head of this family, whose right and duty it is to direct you. It was I who brought this family out of obscurity and drudgery. But for me you would now be mending some lumberjack's socks and washing his dishes and living in the gray monotony of unvaried days. There has been only one productive member in our household and that is myself. There has been just one who could, with no outside aid, meet the world and conquer it, and the family which I have brought up with me from an abandoned farm to the high places of success must regard my wishes."

"You have summarized with the modesty of a tyrant and a czar," she replied as her eyes suddenly broke into an unexpected fire and her uptilted chin set itself defiantly, "the many favors that your hand of self-made royalty has conferred upon your suppliant family." Her musical voice took on a deeper thrill. "You have reminded me that my father and mother, my brother and myself, are all but parasites that feed upon your so-great powers of achievement. *Eh bien*, you have made a mistake. My mother is a saint--"

"If any one dared to contradict that--" interrupted Hamilton hotly, but she halted him with an imperious wave of her hand.

"If my czar-like brother will permit his sister to address his throne," she said with quiet sarcasm, "I shall esteem it a gracious favor. Let us be frank with each other. My mother is a saint and my father a good man. My brother, Paul, is a genius in music--and a weakling--but, as you say, each of them is without power. Each of them is a parasite and you are the oak upon which they grow and bloom. But as for me--" She stopped and laughed, and suddenly Hamilton Burton realized that his sister Mary was not the child he had always regarded her: not the slip of a girl that had been sent away in the infancy of his fortune to be educated abroad, but a woman of twenty-five, and an unusual woman.

"As for me," she continued slowly, "I think you have made a mistake. Whence, *mon cher*, came this fire in your soul which told you back there in the barren hills that you were not like little men? May it not be that this genius came to you from some remote ancestor? May it not be that also into my veins crept some of that fire? *Alors!* Whether that be true or no, this I do of a certainty believe. The spirit of fight that is in you, is likewise in me. You will not find in me the *jeune fille* who shall obey without knowing why. My feet are small--for which I thank *le bon Dieu*--but I can stand quite stanchly upon them. You boast of the princely gifts that you have bestowed upon me. For those I am not unthankful,

but I shall not regard them as the price of blind obedience. If they have been given in that spirit, you have done for me nothing more than other men have done for--for their mistresses."

She ended and stood very calm in her anger while the brother who had never before been successfully defied gazed into her face with an expression of amazement. Then slowly there came over his own a glow of keen admiration.

He came over and bowed with almost courtly ceremony, then he laughed.

"Mary," he exclaimed, "we shall fight, you and I, but we shall reign together. By God, you are my sister! Not just by coincidence of birth, but by the deeper kinship of our two souls. Great heavens, girl, since I came here to fight and to win, I've been lonely. It's not egotism but truth that makes me say this. I have been a conqueror--and all conquerors are lonely. You are mistress here. Do as you wish." He went back to the safe, but he looked up and laughed in a naive and winning fashion that was quite irresistible.

"By the way," he suggested, "are you going to do me the honor to breakfast with me hereafter?"

The girl laughed, too, and her eyes were as serenely gracious as a queen's may afford to be when, of her own will, she makes a royal concession.

"Yes, I shall breakfast with you, *mon cher* brother," she replied. Then she added with perfect mimicry of his own overbearing voice, "It's a trifle whether I breakfast in bed or not. It is vital that you remember who is mistress of this house. *C'est moi!*"

A moment later, the man whose frown carried punishment for his adversaries and whose smile was so frank and winning for his friends, stood before his sister, watching her eyes as eagerly as a schoolboy while he opened the satin case and held out to her the string of pearls.

"Mary," he said simply, "I'm not a man that curries favor with women. Paul looks after that gentle art for this family. You are the only girl I care about. When I give presents to a woman, it will be to you. There is no other woman in New York who could wear that rope of pearls and not look as if the pearls were wearing her. On your throat they are what jewels should always be--a subordinate decoration; partly eclipsed stars. I thought you might like them."

She took the gift and raised it to the light, while her eyes kindled and her lips parted in delight, and as she looked at the pearls, her brother looked at her.

"They are beautiful, aren't they?" she exclaimed and as she gazed at their well-matched perfection a glow kindled in her cheeks.

"With such gifts," she murmured softly, "you could buy the souls of many women, *mon cher*. If you insist on being a master, at least, you are a generous one."

Possibly at that moment, back of her delight, there rose a little ghost-like doubt. He had said, "We shall fight--but we shall reign together." She wondered vaguely how complete would be her participation in that reign. So far as they had fought, each had won a victory and he had paid a handsome indemnity--in future how would it be? Then he took the thing from her and fastened it around her neck and led her very gently to one of the great mirrors, standing at her shoulder and gazing at her through the glass.

"So," she exclaimed, turning and laying her hands on his shoulders while her eyes twinkled with merriment, "they tell me that you compel men to wear your collar. Already, I, too, am wearing it."

"At least," he laughed back at her, "you will always find it as light and pleasant to wear as pearls."

At the door he paused and spoke, with no trace of his former dictatorial authority. His tone was very pleasant and unassuming. "May I make another suggestion?" he asked, and the girl nodded with smiling eyes.

"You are too fine a woman to need theatric affectations, Mary. I am proudest of all that we are unalloyed American in blood. Be American. Cut out the pidgin English and the interlarding of French idiom and phrases, won't you?"

She raised her brows, and after a moment's pause said, "Certainly. I have no wish to appear affected. It seemed natural. The habit had grown on me, but I shall accept that advice, my dear brother."

CHAPTER VII

EVEN in the days of his first, forced marches toward fortune, when besides his unshakable plunger's nerve he stood almost without an asset, Hamilton Burton's policy had been that the limelight paid, and as he had mounted from moderate success into the millionaire class, and thence into the division rated in a plurality of millions, he had always adhered to the plan of letting nothing which reflected his personality fall below the standards of superlative worth and cost.

At first, he thought of the conspicuousness of wealth as a credential tending to enlarge the scope and standing of its possessor. In a city whose public is surfeited with a show of splendor, the man who would find himself underscored must pitch such conspicuousness to a scale of rajah-like magnificence.

With a thoroughness born of gigantic gambling instinct Hamilton Burton directed his policy of the outward show and trappings of wealth through every artery of his life and the lives of his family. Yet, because his taste was discriminating and sound, he was able to combine the maximum effect of expenditure with the simplicity of the artistic and to shun the pitfall of the offensive.

In those earlier days when the family was fresh from the frugality of the hills, its elder members had constantly been appalled by the youth's extravagance. Yet, even then, he had overruled them with an autocratic assurance, which knew no doubt. It had not at first been easy for the gentle mother, whose hands were red from decades of tub and dishpan, and the father whose fingers had gripped the plow, to adapt themselves to the idle and effortless regime of this new order.

It had for a long while been impossible for them to escape the fear of a crash in which all this iridescent and artificial seeming must collapse. But his attitude remained unaltered. "I do not mean to let money be my master," he had obstinately reiterated. "To me it shall be a slave. Money conquers the man who fears it. It is an insolent, inanimate underling, which, if not treated with contempt, becomes a tyrant. Scorn it and it serves you blindly. I must *seem* a rich man before I can become one. It is my wish that my family appear the family of a rich man. Economies that are apparent are confessions of failure."

In the first chapters they protested, but Ham swept their protests intolerantly aside, and as the years went on he piled miracle upon miracle until every promise of his unsupported egotism had become an accomplished and undeniable reality. Then they ceased to fear and trusted implicitly in the star that led him. Gradually they yielded to the blandishments of the new life and drifted pleasantly before the breezes of luxury. The man who had been a bearded and Calvinistic countryman for almost a half-century became in less than a decade an ease-loving and slothful old gentleman, dapper of appearance, rosy of face and inclining toward *embonpoint*.

Now it is fundamentally written in the edicts of Truth that a man must go forward or back, and if his hands hang idle at his sides, he will not advance. Thomas Standish Burton was born to buffet the storms of his mountains, and as long as he followed his destiny he could look his fellow-man in the face with the level eyes of independence. Within his limitations, he could think wholesomely and soundly. But here he was a different man, a Samson shorn, and the things which he had first contemptuously waved aside or accepted with a growl in his throat, he now welcomed. The hard brown face was rounded and pink and where there had been rawhide muscles on his torso there was now soft and fatty flesh; for Tom Burton whom men had accounted a giant of immovable resolution back there among the forests was, in these days, a gentleman and wore a gardenia or a carnation in his lapel. It was not originally his fault. The process of becoming a gentleman had pained and irked him, but he had a masterful son who could not afford that his father should wear a shaggy bark, and that masterful son had been suffocating him with opulence until his powers of resistance had become atrophied.

And the mother, too, had altered, though, in her, the change had been a sweeter thing. The making of a lady of this remote descendant of Alexander Hamilton's blood had not been difficult.

Some strains of heredity can awaken from the submerged sleep of relapse as quickly and keenly as a woodsman throws off the mists of slumber.

Ham had never feared that his mother would reveal the taint of the parvenue when she faced the batteries of criticism which guard the outposts of the social world to which his own prominence gave the entree. And Paul, with his gentle love of comfort and his thoughts that strayed into dreams and music, found the perfumed atmosphere of a drawing-room very congenial. He breathed the incense of praise from women who were enraptured as his long fingers stole over the piano keys. Had his road to artistic recognition lain along the broken trail of struggle, Paul would have fainted, undiscovered, by the wayside, but with every difficulty made smooth before his feet and every puddle carpeted by

Hamilton's cloth of gold, he found himself the lionized pet of inner circles and the favorite of the elect.

Of these things Hamilton Burton was thinking as he left his door for the car that awaited him. From the start he had never deviated from his well-laid course of determination. Power was his goal and by power he meant no mean modicum, but limitless strength. He had picked finance as his field of endeavor because in this day the scepter that sways affairs must be the scepter of gold. But Hamilton Burton knew that he was only starting and his plans ran to the future. As he looked ahead he never forgot that the fighter must be well conditioned. With the discipline of the boxer in training, he regulated his habits of personal life and held his splendid nerves steady and above par. No man had ever seen the dimming cloud of dissipation in his eye nor any gossip-monger whispered of unwise indulgence. He was spoken of as fastidiously clean of life, and yet it is doubtful whether any shadow of self-illusion found harbor in his own mind. In morals as a code inspired of conscience he had no interest; in rigid self-restraint from all that might impair the highest efficiency of nerve and brain he was as unyielding as a Trappist. To the mandate of his single deity, Ambition, he clove with unswerving sternness. His lavish generosity to his family was a strong and clannish passion--yet even that was a sort of greater selfishness and all the world outside he held in ruthless disregard--a realm to conquer. That one may conquer, many must fall--and to conquer was his one resolve.

Even now, awaited by several men who were not accustomed to cooling their heels in anterooms, he halted at the curb, when he saw another automobile draw up and recognized his brother Paul.

The younger Burton was not so greatly changed. On his cameo features still lingered the delicate hall-mark of the over-sensitive and about his lips played the petulant expression of one who could not cope with the material. His eyes were still pools of brooding darkness, and as he glanced up and met his brother's smile his expression of pleasure was boyish and spontaneous.

"I came in for a moment to see Mary," he explained as he took his older brother's hand. "How is she this morning?"

"Have your car follow, and drive down-town with me. I want a word with you and I'm more than an hour late now. You can see Mary afterward." Ham's suggestions were always couched in mandatory terms, and Paul with a nod gave the necessary instructions to his own driver. When he was seated his elder brother inquired with a keen glance of appraisal, "What's the matter with you, Paul? You look tired."

"I am a bit fagged." The answer was almost plaintive. "After I went to bed last night, or this morning, the scheme of an aria began running through my head and I couldn't sleep. I had to get up and work it out on the piano. Listen--it goes like this." Forgetful of time and place, the musician began whistling the opening bars of his latest composition.

Hamilton Burton gazed at the dreamy and fatigued eyes of the other for a moment before he broke out bluntly: "For heaven's sake, spare me! At least save it for some more suitable time. Can't you fix it to do some of your dreaming while you sleep? It seems to me that for a man who has nothing to do you keep yourself unnecessarily exhausted. Why the devil aren't you in bed now if you haven't slept during the night?"

"I had an appointment for breakfast at twelve."

"With some woman, I suppose: some woman who wants to break it to you gently that when she hears your music a realization steals over her that she has a soul; that, listening to you, she knows that life holds higher and nobler things. That sort of appointment, eh?"

The younger man flushed deeply. "In point of fact, it is with a lady," he admitted.

Hamilton Burton frowned. The car was turning into the avenue and the traffic officer saluted in recognition of the familiar figure, while the financier with a smile waved one gloved hand. Then the smile disappeared and the frown returned.

"You say you are tired, Paul, and sometimes--I might as well confess--you make me tired. Your trouble is that you are stifled with boudoir perfume and suffocated by over-petting. Why don't you try breathing outdoors sometime? You might like it if you ever made the experiment."

Paul only shook his head. He could never argue with Hamilton and yet on one or two subjects he was gently and immovably stubborn. So the older brother shrugged his shoulders and changed the subject.

"What progress with the new organ?" he inquired.

The responsive face lighted and weariness gave place to the glow of enthusiasm. Hamilton was installing at the younger man's quarters a splendid music-room with such an organ as might have graced a cathedral. There the ardent composer might shut himself off with the swelling strains of his own music and fare out on the far tide of his dreams.

At Madison square the car swung to the left of the Flatiron's sharp prow and took its course down Broadway, and when it reached Union square the spring sunlight was shining softly on the spot which has often served as the people's forum. At the north end a crowd had gathered and from a drygoods box a speaker was haranguing them. From the violence of the gestures and the truculence of the voice whose words did not reach him, Hamilton Burton knew that it was an agitator whose burden was the hardness of the times and the inequality of living conditions. His lips shaped themselves for an instant into a smile of satirical amusement. One who held his fingers so constantly on the pulse of finance was not in ignorance of the feverish heat that burned through the nation's arteries. He knew that a rumble of protest was rising from the Battery to the Golden Gate and that this rumble might be the warning thunder that runs ahead of a panic's hurricane.

But, as his car was passing the crowd, he found himself looking out across the near heads of the listeners, and upon all the faces he read a sullen discontent. Some of those men, he surmised, had waited their turns in the bread line. Some of them came from lodgings where larders were empty.

The chauffeur had swung east to take the more open way and even here he had to throttle down his gas because of the scattered loungers who had overflowed the curb. One man of tramp-like appearance stepped directly in front of the radiator and at the warning of the horn made no effort to seek safety. He swaggered along with insolent manner at snail's pace, so that the driver, with a muttered imprecation, brought the car to a jerking halt, and even then almost grazed with his fender the frayed sleeve of the trouble-maker.

In Union square, as on Riverside Drive, the foliage was tenderly green and the sunlight was a golden smile. Pushcarts freighted with potted plants and fruit gave scraps of festal color, and a stand canopied with a yellow-and-blue umbrella offered pies and sandwiches for sale.

But the crowd itself was colorless and somber of mood, and as the car stopped the speaker pointed to it with a passion-shaken hand, so that its principal occupant knew that he was recognized and being made the target of a verbal onslaught. Those men standing nearest turned and gazed at him with an idle curiosity. They were seeing a multi-millionaire at close range. But from a few near the center of the throng came jeers and shouts of insult for the man whom they chose to regard as a representative of Capital's tyranny. A black-visaged malcontent of humorless eyes made his way to the margin of the gathering and, with a pie for which he neglected to pay, opened a fusillade upon the rich man's car. After that came an orange or two contributed by some one whose position was strategically close to the fruit-vender's cart and at last a sounder missile struck and shivered the wind-shield.

For just a moment the situation had a precarious seeming for the reviled young master of finance, and Paul's delicate face blanched a little. Hamilton Burton regarded himself as the brother of monarchs and it devolves upon the Crown to face the envious animosity of groundlings.

He leaned forward and said quietly to the chauffeur, "Swing around into the open and drive on."

But recognition of the often-photographed face was not confined to the assailants and instantly the focused humanity was being broken into scattering factors by police officers who had not hitherto been visible. The capitalist saw two struggling offenders being roughly hustled away in the custody of uniformed captors and a patrolman swung to the running board of the car and remained there as it rounded the square, with his loosened club swinging ready for service in his right hand.

"You weren't struck, were you, Mr. Burton?" he asked in the tone of solicitude to which Hamilton had grown accustomed, and which he accepted as a part of his right.

He smiled. "No harm done but a broken glass--and the less noise made about the incident the better I'll be pleased."

The car had now reached the south end of the area, where the bronze Washington stands with his hand raised as if in dignified rebuke for the noisy demonstrations he so often looks down upon, and where the Marquis de Lafayette turns his back on the square and gazes at the moving-picture posters of Fourteenth street.

For a minute or two the younger brother sat in nervous silence, and, when he spoke, he put his question in a voice of anxious concern. "Aren't you alarmed, Hamilton?"

"Alarmed?" The other raised his brows and smiled. His face was placid. "Don't you remember, Paul, what Charles Fox once had to say on the subject? At least he got the credit for saying it, which comes to the same thing. 'A man of power has no other such luxury as being mobbed in his carriage.'"

"I wasn't thinking of just that. I know you aren't afraid of any physical attack. I was wondering what it all prophesies. We musicians can feel the crescendo coming from the first mounting bars. Everywhere there is a spirit of unrest; of revolution. Doesn't it mean a crash--a panic?"

Again the man whose brain had turned the base metal of poverty into the gold of Croesus smiled.

"I'm not a betting man, Paul, but I'd be willing to lay a moderate wager that within the next year or two we shall see a panic that will leave many scars and not a few wrecks."

"And that conviction doesn't alarm you?" The musician let his features mirror his nervous surprise. If the principal had no fear, at least the dependent was in terror.

The amusement left Hamilton Burton's eyes and into them came the harder gleam. "Paul, you know as little about finance as I know about music. I've done what I've done by following one law: the leashing of forces. Electricity is force, but electricity unharnessed is lightning which devastates. Fire, uncontrolled, ravages, but, held in check, makes power. Every force in a man's nature that is not curbed becomes a weakness. The only difference between success and failure is the twist given to the initial impulse. Every danger and peril, if foreseen and met, becomes opportunity."

Paul shook his head. "As you say," he admitted, "I don't understand these things. I thought panics were hurricanes that swept fortunes away."

The elder brother laid an immaculately gloved hand on the coat-sleeve of the younger.

"It's a thing I wouldn't confide to any one else, but I trust you even if I don't give a damn for your judgment. As you say, hurricanes mean ruin--for the unprepared, but there are also men to whom hurricanes mean--salvage."

For an instant, the hard fire of ruthless conquest burned so fiercely in Hamilton Burton's eyes that Paul drew back and shuddered, then he heard the quiet voice continuing. "I am now rated among the first few in the world of American finance. There are others above me. I am one of twelve or fifteen. When this storm has taken its toll and spent its rage--then I shall be one of one, and above me there will be--no other man."

At the same time, though the twenty-four figured dials of Italian clocks recorded a later hour, a young man of more than ordinarily likable appearance sat alone at a terrace table of a Capri inn. Near by a company of sashed and spangled peasants danced to the accompaniment of guitars and mandolins, but he did not seem to see them and when they presented their tambourines for largesse, he roused himself almost with a start to search his pockets for *lire*.

Behind him were the colorful and steep vistas that lay along the zig-zag roads where ramshackle victorias clattered at crazy speed. Below him was the world's most vivid spread of sun-kissed color; the Bay of Naples curving nobly from his point of view to Ischia's misty bulwark, in a glistening spread of sapphire. Standing guard over the picture was the great cone of Vesuvius. But of these things also the solitary young man seemed oblivious.

Against his wicker-bound carafe of pale Capri wine stood propped an old Paris edition of the *New York Herald*. It was folded so that a portrait of a woman could be seen to the best advantage, and to the exclusion of flagstoned courtyards and trellised, overhanging vines; to the exclusion of the bay's great jewel of beauty, this picture held the eyes of the man who lunched alone. They were good eyes, of the sort that look life straight in the face, and their pupils were such as impress the beholder with a conviction of fearless integrity. Now they were preoccupied, and a little annoyed. Even in the lifelessness of black and white the face he studied was one of remarkable beauty, and it pleased him to imagine the wonderful difference and illumination which color and swift play of expression would bring to its features.

For several reasons, the face was of more than commonplace interest to him. Years ago he had seen it by a roadside in the White Mountains, and often since he had thought of it until the thought had taken deep root in his mind and become one of the pleasant dreams of his life. But Fate had further spurred his curiosity by a series of mischances which had prevented his meeting this girl, though often in his travels his arrivals had followed close enough on her departures to permit his hearing talk of her great charm and her many conquests.

For several years Jefferson Edwardes had been in control of that branch of his firm's business which operated from St. Petersburg. Now he was returning to New York to take up larger affairs. An uncle's death had necessitated his personal supervision of the home office.

He had heard that Mary Burton was in Naples and had decided to break his own journey there in the hope of meeting her--and perhaps returning on the same steamer. Now he learned that once more he was too late.

But what annoyed the young millionaire more poignantly was the thinly veiled hint that the Duke de Metuan had also sailed for America as one of her fellow-passengers.

The whimsical little laughter wrinkles about Edwardes' eyes radiated from twinkling pupils as he calmly asked himself what concern this was of his; this news of a woman he had never known except once long ago in a world of abandoned farms. But the laughter died quickly, because, absurd as it was by all practical standards, he knew that he had let his dream become too important for abandonment without the test of renewed acquaintanceship. He resented the Duke de Metuan. He was not unfamiliar with Continental affairs and some of the nobleman's financial troubles had sought solution through his banking house. Of course, the Mary Burton of his dreams might have no existence in reality. This woman had had ample opportunity to be spoiled--but if she had not been--There he broke off and took a long breath. If the girl's heart had worthy kinship with her beauty, she would be a miracle worth following over seas. At all events, he was sailing tomorrow and her world would also be his. It would not be difficult to learn the truth.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN he had stepped from the car to the sidewalk, Hamilton Burton stood there for a while in apparent abstraction. A private policeman in cadet gray waited deferentially with his hand on the knob of the grilled bronze door which gave entrance to the office building. Burton's eyes were resting on Paul's face, but the pupils were focused for no such circumscribed range. Their vistas were of the future and empire-wide. The fire that had wakened in them with the pronunciamento, "Above me there shall be no one," lingered and the smile which hovered on the lips held a certain grimness in its curve. It was not a reassuring smile for such interests as ran counter to his own. A passing reporter who fancied himself wise in the lore of the Street, halted to observe, and muttered to himself, "Ursus Major wearing his fighting face! This may prove a day worth watching."

A floor representative of a brokerage office caught the expression, too, and into his memory came flooding the events of another day when this same man, wearing the same smile, hurled himself upon the Stock-Exchange, in a bear raid which had cost bull millions.

"The Great Bear, damn him!" he exclaimed with savage vehemence. "The buccaneer's got some fresh piracy on foot if I know that sardonic grin." Within the half-hour a mysteriously fathered rumor passed from mouth to mouth on the floor of the Exchange, that Hamilton Burton was drawing his battle-lines and that somewhere his bolt would fall. Because the report was untraceable it was the more disquieting, and the Stock-Exchange is ever ready to rock to an alarm. Yet just now, the man whose silent smile could give birth to such sweeping potentialities did nothing more significant than gaze absently at the tide of life which eddied through Broadway's canon and at the disintegrating tombstones which spoke of death in the shadow of Trinity.

There was something of tawny and tigerish splendor about this young man who had sprung with mushroom swiftness from nowhere into the fierce eminence of a financial conqueror. The supple grace of his movements attested ready power. The immaculate elegance of his apparel challenged notice by a flawlessness which went beyond the art of the tailor who clothed him and assumed a distinction as though it had been the belted uniform of a field marshal. Though pronounced the best-dressed man in New York, he escaped all seeming of foppishness. Each small detail, from the flower in his lapel to his gloves and shoes, seemed a significant touch.

Hamilton Burton lent qualities from himself to everything that marked him--and these qualities seemed to go like heralds at his front, proclaiming, "This man is led by a star--his head overlooks the crowd!"

Men and women staring out from a sight-seeing car turned their heads with a common accord, their attention arrested by something intangible.

Then as the megaphone operator lowered his voice it became pregnant with importance. To visitors from Paris, Kentucky, Berlin, Iowa, and Cairo, Illinois, he confided, "The gentleman by the car with the broken wind-shield is Hamilton Burton." It was enough. It conjured up to memory newspaper stories of a genie to whose wand fabulous tides of gold responded. These sight-seers were beholding a man credited with the power to cause or avert panics; one of the most lauded, the most hated and the most feared men in finance, and, for some inexplicable reason, after they looked at him it was no longer difficult to believe the stories of his wizardry.

He nodded to Paul and turned toward the door. Once more he repeated, "Then above me there shall be--no other man," and though he said it with all the arrogant and ruthless spirit of a tyrant who would take no count of razed cities as he rode to his victory, yet he said it in a low and pleasant voice; a voice even tinged with musical gentleness.

At the twentieth floor where the elevator stopped to let him alight, Hamilton's eyes were aglow with the reflected light of his thoughts. He was still young and before him lay conquests that should dwarf those of the past. Posterity should link his name with achievements so titanic that history would be beggared for a precedent. Kingdoms would be his clients and kings his vassals.

Of late, a persistent idea had been creeping into his thoughts. The world was to know him as one of its mightiest rulers--so mighty that for him a crown would be too tawdry a toy--but some day he must die. Who then, demanded his sublimely arrogant self-appraisal, would carry on the work that had called him on to conquest from hills where the burned stumps stood up stark and black in the forest? It is the hallucination of superlative egotism to imagine that the world demands of her great sons--a succession.

Whatever gods looked on must have laughed as they read the vast audacity of this man's conceit. Never had it occurred to him that such an ambition as his own meant a mere greed for power--that no great cause or motive impelled him forward. Never had a whisper come to his soul that power is a trust which should make its recipient a crusader. The world thought of him as a man of great potentiality. He thought of himself grown to the proportions and stature of his

dreams--the financial Titan expanded to the n^{th} power. There must be an heir to this empire of his building.

"I suppose I could marry any woman in the world I wanted," he reflected as he strode along the hall to the door of his office suite, "but the devil of it is I don't want any of them." A fresh thought brought to his face an expression a shade saner and less self-centered. "Mary is as beautiful and as charming as I am efficient, moreover she has brains," he soliloquized. "Mary must marry brilliantly and her son shall be my successor."

In a sort of audience hall waited the Coal and Ore directors who had been burning up valuable time and burning up as well a patience unschooled to such delays, but as the door opened and the young field marshal of great business appeared on the threshold, they masked their irritation in smiles. These men were neither sycophants nor fawning suppliants. Each of them held high prominence in the aristocracy of wealth, but Hamilton Burton topped them--and the singular power upon which he had risen was one-half pure charm and hypnotism of personality. Men might swear at the Hamilton Burton who kept them twiddling their thumbs until he came, yet *when* he came it seemed that the sunlight came with him and the mists of impatience were dissipated. A half-hour later he bowed them out, and they went smiling and telling one another as they left, "Remarkable fellow, Burton! Absolutely surmounts ordinary rules and ordinary difficulties. Most remarkable and able man!"

He next passed through the outer offices to the door marked "private," and there, near the window of his sanctum, sat a stout and elderly gentleman. In the unsparing revelation of the morning sunshine the visitor's face declared all its wrinkles. The whitening hair, growing sparse, was carefully combed across an arid patch of scalp. Hamilton Burton's smile died and his face grew for a moment solicitous as he read his father's troubled eyes. Old Thomas Burton was shaven and manicured and betailored into a model of well-nourished--possibly over-nourished--senectitude. His mustaches and beard were waxed and pointed. Once he had deplored the necessity and trouble of the Sabbath shave--and his hair had known no law of shears or shampoo. In his lapel a gardenia was carefully placed so that it should not obscure the button which proclaimed him a Son of the American Revolution. He restlessly tapped his gaitered boots with a stick upon whose gold head was carven the Burton crest.

As Hamilton came forward the elder man rose and turned with some embarrassment. In his movements the son read with a pang of sudden realization the approaching atrophy of age. "I'm sorry to intrude on your office hours, Hamilton," began the father, "but the fact is--I--er--I--" he broke off confusedly.

Tom Burton was mightily changed, but now and again an echo of the old self harassed his reincarnation. He had never learned to beg for money with the unabashed ease of an aristocratic parasite. While it was in his pocket he could top the extravagance of a drunken sailor, but when its lack drove him again to his bountiful son he came haltingly--covered with confusion.

"What is it, father?" Hamilton clapped the old gentleman on the shoulder and declared, "When you come others can wait."

Tom Burton flushed deeply. "I--er--well, I've had a notice of over-draft from my bank."

Hamilton Burton's brows contracted.

"Did they keep you sitting here, cooling your heels like a book-agent until I arrived? Why didn't you go direct to Corbin? He has *carte blanche* to accommodate you in every demand you choose to make."

Again Tom Burton spoke hesitantly.

"I did--er--mention it to Mr. Corbin. He was very polite, but he suggested that, unless I was in urgent haste, I'd better wait until you came in.... He reminded me that--er--that I'd made rather heavy demands of late, and I'm bound to say it's true."

The young financier threw back his head and his eyes burst into a blaze of white-hot anger.

"Hell-fire and damnation!" he stormed. "Is my money my own or is it to be doled out by parsimonious hirelings? Must I beg my servants' consent to supply my family with funds?"

"Mr. Corbin was very courteous," placated the old man in a mild voice.

"Courteous!" The word crackled like a mule whip. "Who is Corbin to be patronizingly courteous to my father? Are you to approach me only through a cordon of lackeys?" He broke off and started to slam his palm down on a table-bell that should bring the too-careful subordinate face to face with his anger, but he stayed his hand half-way, and began talking again.

"Back there in those damned hills, when I begged you to gamble on me, didn't I tell you that I meant to give you

more than you could ever want? Didn't I tell you that it would be my pride to anticipate and outdo your whims--to dwarf them with bigger things? You *did* gamble on me, when a little money was a frail barrier between you and the wolf--you gambled to go stark-broke." He was pacing the room now as he talked, and his voice mounted. "To me money is a passionless slave, the eunuch that serves my bidding, and serves blindly. Cash has been my watchword. There is not outside the United States Treasury another sum of unencumbered cash equal to that which I command. Any part of it is yours at any time; how much do you want?"

"Why--er--a few thousand for the present."

"Just state your figure and I'll triple it. You don't have to make explanations--or apologies." Then with a rather grim smile Ham added: "That's for Corbin to do."

Tom Burton carefully drew down his waistcoat over his rotund middle and settled his hat on his head at an exact angle. His son accompanied him to the elevator with an arm about his shoulder and as he returned to the outer office he directed curtly, "Carl, come into my room. I want to see you."

Inside he pointed to the bell. "I had my hand three inches from that button a few minutes back to call Corbin in here and fire him. I think I meant to sack everybody in this damned office--except yourself, Carl. I'm sick of these economists that hedge me round with unsolicited safeguards and try to defend me against myself and my family."

"If Mr. Burton had come to me--" began the secretary, but Hamilton Burton interrupted him.

"Have I failed to make myself entirely clear to my employees?" he inquired. "Do I have to tell them every day that they need not be so damned economical with my money? Haven't I ordered that my father and my brother shall always be accommodated without question?" Bristoll nodded, but made no comment.

"Carl, please try once more to make Corbin understand that one of the things I pay him for is to obey orders. Please make it plain beyond cavil that one of my most explicit orders is this: When the Governor comes for money, his job is to begin digging. Find out how much the Governor wants and give him some more."

The secretary was valuable in part because he was frank and because in his sincere loyalty dwelt no taint of sycophant fawning.

"To be entirely just, sir, I think Corbin does understand you, but a cashier who gives out money with no check on disbursements feels the burden of his responsibility. Any item that your father forgot would leave Corbin unpleasantly close to seeming a thief. Of late, your father's demands have been heavy."

"Yes, yes, I know about all that." A sudden change of mood brought a twinkle to the financier's eyes. "My father has been under very heavy expenses of late, Carl. If you had known him as I knew him--back there close to 'God's immortal granite,' as you so aptly phrased it, you would agree with me that the humor of the situation is worth whatever it costs. He had to count the pennies, Carl, and when one threatened to get away he had to chase around it and head it off. He led the simple life and though his middle name was Standish, he regarded it as a sinful vanity to think of his ancestors."

Hamilton's smile was one of whimsical and naive humor as he fished from a desk drawer a thick sheaf of papers and laid them before the other.

"Times have changed. Cast your eye on those. They represent some of the Governor's expenses. They are bills from the Anglo-Saxon Bureau of Genealogy."

"What is this bureau?" inquired Carl, and Burton raised his brows.

"Don't you know? Why, it's a concern that outfits one with a full line of ancestors. My father is now prominent in many orders predicated on ancestors. His mail runs over with epistles beginning, 'Dear Sir and Compatriot.' Such excavating of tombs and catacombs is costly." The young money baron paused and grinned.

"Once the old gentleman got warmed up, he went the full route and took all the jumps, Carl. He started out modestly enough to establish his descent from Miles Standish, but when they had run the Plymouth captain to earth, the trail was hot and their appetites were whetted. They had tasted blue blood. Now they've worked back to a king or two, and the Governor spoke recently of going to England to consult cathedral records. I believe he secretly covets William the Conqueror."

Hamilton shook his head and added sadly, "I hate to think how Corbin will grieve when he learns what William the Conqueror costs. Also, father has a beautiful family crest--you may have noticed it on his walking stick. I haven't yet mastered the niceties of heraldry so I can't properly describe it, but, to me, it looks like a rabbit leaping over an Edam cheese with sprigs of lettuce on either side. A delicatessen shop will steal it some day and father's heart will break."

Carl Bristoll filled and lighted a pipe and Hamilton Burton seated himself on the edge of the desk with his eyes fixed on a swinging foot.

"We all have our vanities," he mused. "I named myself Montagu--arbitrarily and of my own unbiased will. I nominated and elected myself a Montagu, Carl, and I had an equal right to be a Capulet."

"I call that a moderately innocent offense," admitted the secretary. There were moments when these two came near forgetting the relationship of chief and lieutenant, meeting on the level of a joint affection.

"But that is not all. My father has other even more burdensome expenses at the present time," continued the elder young man. "He is deeply interested in charity."

"Really?" The inquiry was courteously vague, and Ham's nod of response was solemn.

"Yes, sir. There are various sorts of charities, Carl. Some folks send silk hats and neckties to the heathen in their blindness, and some found hospitals for three-legged dogs. My father does none of these impractical things. He has dedicated himself to establishing a fund for supplying Havana cigars and motor cars to the Idle Rich. Each day finds him waiting for a quorum up at the National Union Club. When enough are gathered together for a rubber he makes it royal and doubles until everyone save his partner feels a warm glow of wealth stealing gratefully through his arteries." Hamilton broke off and smiled, shaking his head. "Far be it from me to criticize my father," he declared with mock plaintiveness, "but I sometimes wonder why the devil he doesn't learn to play bridge or stop trying."

Then the April change of mood came once more and his eyes darkened into seriousness. "Well, if it amuses him, why not?" he demanded, almost as fiercely as though someone had contradicted old Tom Burton's right to mellow into a self-indulgent decay.

"All his hard life until ten years ago he sweated and toiled for those he loved. I thought recently it might amuse him to take charge of one of my country places--to try farming with no hardships. He was as much good there as an armless man in a billiard tournament. All his farming had been done with calloused hands on the plowshare. All he knew of dairies was nestling his head against the flank of a flea-bitten cow. Let him take his pleasure as he fancies. Thank God he can."



CHAPTER IX

AN imagination verging toward the figurative finds on entering the New York Stock-Exchange a strong suggestion of having penetrated a die with which Giants have been casting lots. The first impression is one of cubical dimensions--and unless the curb be drawn, a fancy so spurred will plunge to yet other conceits that bring home the cynical parallel.

On the particular morning when Hamilton Burton's car had been pelted by agitators in Union square the opening gong sounded from the president's gallery on every promise of a quiet day. Here in Money's cardinal nerve-center there had been inevitable rumblings of future eruptions from pent-up apprehensions of panic, but this morning the spring sun came laughing through the great windows at the east and the idle brokers laughed back.

The psychology of this mart where the world trades with neither counter nor show-case nor tangible wares is fitful. It responds nervously and swiftly to the gloom of fog or the smile of sun, as well as to the pulse-beat of the telegraph. Around the sixteen "posts" where the little army of operators drifted as idly as though they met there by chance, no urgency of business manifested itself. But back of this tricky calm hung a cloud of anxiety. A sense of delicate balance, which a gust might capsize, lay at the back of each mind, troubling it with vague forebodings. Conditions were ripe for sudden hysteria. Meanwhile well-groomed young men in pongee office coats and their equally sleek elders killed time with newspapers or resumed threads of conversation broken off at parting last night in drawing-room or theater-foyer. The circular benches around the posts blossomed with magazines and a group formed about two brokers who gravely fought out chess problems on a pocket board. Noise of a sort there was, for on the floor of the Exchange a "quiet" day is not as a quiet day elsewhere. Unimportant bids and sales elicited sporadic shouts and clamor, but for the most part these demonstrations were tinged with laughter and badinage. Seemingly the membership of Finance's College of Cardinals was skylarking with indecorous levity. Activity of a sort there was, too, as the litter of torn-up slips and memoranda on the floor attested. Yet the silent goings and comings of the floor attendants in their cadet-gray livery were placid, and for that environment unhurried. Around none of the posts surged the pandemonium of real activity and the two great blackboards that break the marble whiteness of the walls at the north and south twinkled no feverish signals from brokerage offices to floor operators.

But within two hours the smile of the spring sun died behind a cloud and a rumor insinuatingly whispered itself about the floor. Magnet-wise it drew men from scattered points into focal groups and panic-wise it stamped a growing apprehension on faces that had been expressionless.

"Where did this ridiculous canard originate?" demanded a pompous and elderly gentleman as he tugged at his closely cropped mustache with a nervousness belying his scepticism. His vis-a-vis shook a dubious head.

"All I get is that Hamilton Burton is out in war paint for a bear raid--damn him!"

"And why not?" a third broker truculently demanded. "He brought on the 'little panic' of two years ago and mopped up enough to double his fortune. House after house went to the wall that day, but it was a glorious victory for him. History repeats, gentlemen."

"Where will he be most likely to hit?" The question came nervously from a thin man who chewed at a pencil. About his inquiring eyes were the harassed little crow-feet of anxiety.

"When he smashes us, we'll know all right. There's nothing ambiguous about his wallops. I hoped the damned pirate was satisfied. He ought to be."

"Vat you mean, sadisfied?" A passing figure with a strong Teutonic countenance halted at the edge of the crowd and glared--but his hatred was for Hamilton Burton. "Sadisfied--not till der American toller and der sovereign and der louis d'or vear his portrait vill he pe sadisfied."

"There's one comfort," hazarded a lone optimist, "Hamilton Burton recognizes no conventions of finance; he heeds no laws. He's the most brilliant brigand in the Street--and every hand is against him. He's always just one jump behind a billion dollars--but also he may find himself just one jump ahead of the wolf."

But for one optimist there were scores of pessimists and disquiet mounted like a fever. The floor was nervous.

Across from the president's gallery is another balcony like it, for in all but its processes of business this is a temple of justly balanced symmetry and proportion.

There sits an operator, controlling an electric switchboard provided with one button for each floor member. When one of these buttons is pressed a flap swings down on the great wall blackboards and a white number flashes into

sight. It stands for a while, then twinkles again into blackness, but in the meantime it has summoned its man to telephone communication with his office. In periods of stress these imperative signals register the rise and fall of anxiety's barometer.

Now the quiet boards began to break into a sudden epidemic of appearing and vanishing numerals and men hurried to the booths where wires linked the central floor with outlying offices. Each line buzzed to the same portent.

"Rumor credits Burton with plans for a bear raid. Watch him. Send word of his first move. The time is ripe for an avalanche."

Suddenly around one post voices rose. They went from calm to shouts, from shouts to yells, then broke in a crescendo of turmoil. Collars came loose and voices grew hoarse. The restrained anxiety had swept into an open furore of fear. It looked as if the bottom were dropping out of Coal Tar Products. At once a dozen operators raced for their telephones. Hamilton Burton had struck, and his first blow was on Coal Tars! That was the whispered word that ran like wild fire.

While this turbulence was going forward, Hamilton Burton sat in his twentieth-floor office, gazing fixedly up at a portrait of Napoleon. About the walls were several other portraits of the emperor. Busts in bronze and marble gazed down with those same inscrutable eyes. One important likeness was missing. It was that which shows the face of a man broken in defeat--the wistful St. Helena eyes that seem always brooding out over the ruins of mighty dreams.

Carl Bristoll opened the door, and the musing face turned with the impatient frown of a broken reverie.

"Mr. Malone's secretary on the 'phone," announced the young man. "Mr. Malone wants to know if you can come at once to his office."

"Tell Mr. Malone"--Burton snapped his words out irritably--"that if he wants to find me I will be here in my own office for just thirty minutes."

The employee hesitated in momentary embarrassment, then he added:

"Of course, you know that I mean J. J. Malone himself, sir?"

Burton laughed. "In the world of finance, Carl, I didn't know there *was* more than one Malone."

Also, reflected the secretary as he closed the door behind him, there was in the world of finance only one who would care to ignore a summons from that source.

A few minutes afterward the door opened again, opened to frame the bulky figure of a man who had swept by those who sought to announce his coming. The heavy brows of J. J. Malone were contracted over smoldering gray eyes which many men feared and all but a few obeyed. At his elbow followed the slight wiry figure of a companion with nervous eyes, and a cigar which was always chewed and never lighted. This man had come, as Ham had come, from the hardness of some barren farm and had obdurately hammered his path by the sheer insistence of his brain into the inner circle of an oligarchy. These two greatest of America's money barons ignored the gesture with which the younger Warwick invited them to be seated. In the brief silence that followed upon their entrance was the portent of a brewing tempest. At last Malone said crisply:

"I sent for you, Mr. Burton. Most men come to me when I send for them."

"In several respects I differ from most men." The reply was too quiet to ring flippant. It was merely the assurance of invincible self-faith, and for an instant the man who had not in years been compelled to soften the iron grip of his mastery gazed his astonishment.

Then Malone burst into an oriflamme of anger. He was a whirlwind of fury before whose raging any small or timid man must have shriveled. The eyes that shone out under the heavy lashes as he paced the place, with clenched hands, were batteries raining shrapnel of wrath.

From their gray depths they blackened into ink, across which shot the red and yellow flocks of a fiery and passionate autocracy. The iron jaw, inherited from seafaring forefathers, snapped on words of threat, rebuke, and invective. He wore his sixty-five years as lightly as foliage, standing straight and strong like a poplar tree, save as he bent to the gusts of his own passion. Where his clenched fist fell upon desk or table the furniture trembled. Through the frosted glass of the door Hamilton Burton saw the shadows of hurrying figures and knew that the secretaries and stenographers out there were in a flutter of uneasy excitement. Wall street knew what it meant when the "old man" was on the rampage.

While this tempest endured the nervous-looking man took a chair and sat silent. His attitude was hunched up and he chewed on his unlighted cigar, while his restless gaze traveled here, there, everywhere. On casual glance one might have overlooked him as negligible, thereby falling gravely into error. The giant and the slight man had this kinship, that in the workings of great finance they were mainspring and balance wheel, and at their prompting many divisions of the world's industrial armies marched or marked time.

Suddenly J. J. Malone fell silent, and then Hamilton Burton spoke. He spoke with a surprising calm for one of his uncompromising arrogance. Perhaps it accorded with his whim to chill his words with icy insolence that they might cut the more and point the greater contrast when he chose to unleash his own hot wrath.

"You sent for me, Malone. I declined to come to you. Then you came to me. As yet you have shown no reason for the visit except to swear around my office like a drunken and abusive pirate. If you have nothing for temperate discussion, I will now say good-day to you. Take with you the honors of war, sir. You have outcussed me. I acknowledge your superiority in billingsgate--" he paused and for an instant his voice mounted, as he added--"and in nothing else!"

"Have you reached so secure a stage, then, that you can defy and insult Harrison and myself? Are you prepared to declare war on the entire world of finance?" Now Malone spoke with regained composure, but an ominous undernote of threat. "Let's have done with pretense. In so far as any individuals can make or break--we can. When you came, an unlicked cub, into the world of large affairs it was through us you made the alliances upon which your success is built. However great you conceive yourself to be, 'Consolidated' still recognizes in us its active heads."

Hamilton Burton replied with a smile of unruffled calm. "You say I came to you. Many men have come to you, only to go away again with empty hands."

"You did not."

"No. You took me to your hearts--but why? Was it because you pitied me? Has pity or gentle courtesy ever yet prevented 'Consolidated' from crucifying a victim? You conceded me my seat at your directorates only because you were compelled to recognize my value there. You lifted me from the ranks to the general staff of finance because of unescapable conviction that I inherently belonged among you; that I should take my place there as an ally or an enemy. You had a suspicion then of what I *knew* before I ever saw a city--that I could not be stopped."

"Grant for the sake of brevity that Genius and Destiny are your handmaidens." Malone leaned across the table, resting his weight on his planted knuckles. Under his shaggy brows his eyes burned deeply and satirically. Across from him Hamilton Burton stood, younger, slenderer and more pliant of pose; his eyes meeting those of his protagonist, level and unwavering. "Grant that all your self-adulation is warrantable. Now that you have attained this place in the councils of the few, do you mean to become only a wrecker and a spoiler? Do you recognize no rules of war? Do you adhere to no principles of loyalty? Are you merely a breeder of storms and a maker of panics? Because if you are, by the Eternal God, I think we are yet strong enough to stamp you out--to utterly obliterate you!"

"So"--the younger man's lips twisted in a smile of cool irony--"you have come as the guardians of conservatism to admonish me, the fractious child of the Dollar family. It is delightful, gentlemen, to encounter in actual life so humorous a situation." Then the mouth line grew set again and the voice hardened. "Well, I make you no pledges. I say to you, to hell with the laws you draw for your own advantage and break when it suits your profit. I acknowledge no vested right in you to assail me as a wrecker--you who have risen on wreckage. You will not obliterate me. You will not even try."

Harrison from his chair gazed thoughtfully and silently out of the window. He watched a gull dip over the East River. He shifted the cigar to the other side of his mouth and across his gray eyes flickered a ghost of amusement. After a long pause he inquired in an impassive voice:

"Why?"

"Because just as you at first accepted me for my usefulness, so you will again come to me when you need me, and you know you will need me. We are playing the same game and it's no child's kissing game. When you have both the wish and power to crush me, I shall expect no kindly warning at your hands. When you need me, you will let no dislike bar my door to your coming. By the way, why did you come?"

"Your ticker isn't silent out there. It's not your custom to be uninformed." It was Malone who spoke. "You know that the floor is seething--and why!"

"I know that the market opened quiet and that later Coal Tars broke and there is a flurry--a panicky feeling perhaps. It doesn't surprise me."

For an instant Malone regarded his former protege across the table. Hamilton Burton's fingers had fallen on a small bronze paper-weight. It was an eagle with spread wings, not the bird of freedom, but the eagle of the emperor's standards.

"You perplex me," admitted the elder financier shortly. "You make great pretense of open frankness; brazen defiance even, and yet you choose to cloak every attack and to move by stealth. You know that just now such a flurry may precipitate a general panic that will shake and waste the nation like a fever in its marrow. Apparently you are deliberately breaking the market, yet you speak innocently of the matter as of something with which you have no concern."

For an instant it was Burton who laughed.

"And even yet, gentlemen, you have for active business men, bent on stemming a tide of disaster, spent much time in generalities and little on any concrete suggestion."

"We acted before we began to talk," said J. J. Malone; "we have taken steps to support Coal Tars, but the times are parlous. The tidal wave of a panic mounts rapidly. If you insist on forcing us into a duel on the floor of the Stock-Exchange today, the pillars of public confidence may be seriously shaken. By two o'clock this afternoon the president's gavel will be falling to announce failures. The disaster that we have feared will come. In the end we shall beat you, but all of us will have wasted ourselves in an exhausting struggle. There will be wreckage strewn from ocean to ocean. We have come to remonstrate. We have come to urge peace among ourselves and to warn you that a war between us is hardly a thing for you to court."

"In short," Burton's words came with a snap that his eyes, too, reflected, "you charge this flurry to my authorship. You come urging peace with threats. Almost, gentlemen, you tempt me to do what you charge me with doing. Threats have never seemed to me a persuasive argument for peace." He paused and then laughed. "Go hack to your respective sanctums of righteousness and plunder and you will see that this tide will soon turn. It is not in my plans that this day shall go down in Exchange history as a bear day. When I resolve on that, your threats will hardly alter me. This is not that day. The rumor of my attack is absurd. My brokers will be found bracing the market. The next time that you feel an itch to coerce me, regard my answer as given in advance. It is that you may go to hell. Good-day."

When they had gone Burton sent for Carl Bristoll and smilingly nodded toward the outer door.

"The folks out there seemed excited," he commented drily. "Kindly suggest to them that it's unnecessary for them to advertise their lack of confidence in their chief by scurrying about during my interviews like chickens when a hawk hovers overhead." Then he recounted what had occurred--for this was one of the matters in which the secretary might be admitted to his confidence. At the end of the recital Carl shook his head. "I think you were magnanimous, sir. Though you didn't start it you might have taken toll of the downward movement and lived up to your name of the Great Bear. They were playing into your hands, I should say."

Hamilton Burton laughed.

"Carl, you are young. A man can fork Hades up from its bottom-most clinkers only once in so often. I don't butcher my swine until I have fattened them. When the day comes, be assured they won't call me off, but until I am ready I don't strike." He took a turn or two across the floor and halted at the center of the room. His eyes were burning now with an intense fire of egotism.

"Their anger--their threats: it's all incense they burn to my power, but, good God, Carl, how they hate me!"

As the ship which was bringing Jefferson Edwardes back to his native shores drew near enough for the Navesink light to wink its welcome, the banker found himself in a pensive mood. The last evening of the voyage was being celebrated with a dance on deck, but Edwardes, who had remained somewhat of a recluse during the passage over, was content to play the part of the onlooker.

The expectant spirit of home-coming lent a cheery animation to the rhythmic swaying of the dancing figures and brought a light to their eyes. Jefferson Edwardes realized that his own mood was difficult to analyze. His childhood had been spent in world-wandering and his youth in the exile of a battle for life in the mountains. His later young manhood had found its setting in such capitals as St. Petersburg and Berlin. It had been a life full of activity, yet strangely solitary and dominated by dreams and imagination. Now he realized that the most tangible thing to which he looked forward at home was a meeting with Mary Burton, and with the thought that tomorrow morning would bring the skyline of Manhattan into view, a decided misgiving possessed him. He had heretofore treated the thing half-humorously--

as a pleasant, but vague, dream. It could no longer remain so. He realized that it had been a definite enough dream to keep the door of his heart closed upon other women. He must see her and if, after seeing her, his dream could no longer exist he knew that it would be to him and his life a serious matter. A chance acquaintance of the voyage had known her and spoken of her. He was an Englishman of title and a thoroughly likable fellow. Somehow Edwardes fancied that this man's own heart carried a scar and that he had sought to be more than a casual friend to Mary Burton--and had failed. So the American felt a delicacy in asking those questions which might have enlightened him. Yet the talk that had passed between them had heightened his already keen impatience to see the girl with whom he had so strangely and intangibly fallen into an attitude which, in his own thoughts, was not unlike that of a lover.

For a time he would be very busy. His duties as head of the banking house which had for generations borne a high and honorable name in large affairs would occupy him with strenuous activities. The house of Edwardes and Edwardes stood as a pillar of conservatism in finance. He meant that its splendid record should under his guidance suffer no loss of prestige or confidence.

Unlike the tigerish methods of the more modern school, from which sprang such spectacular figures as Hamilton Burton, there was in the older days a different conception of business--and of that conception the firm of Edwardes and Edwardes was a worthy example.

The men who had founded it had recognized ideals and grave responsibilities beyond the importance of mere profits. A deep pride in the honor upon which they had based their upbuilding had actuated them, and in none of the line was that pride stronger than in this new head who feared nothing save dishonor and prized nothing above integrity.



CHAPTER X

MARY Burton had not long been back from Europe when sealed windows and boarded entrances began to give a sepulchral blankness to the houses of the rich. Society was leaving town, and for Mary Burton to remain when her set had gone would have been like reigning in an empty court, for already she had entered upon her dominion and her triumph was secure. New York society had at first received the over-seas report of her great charm and loveliness with such sceptical indulgence as New York accords to any excellence alien to the purlieu of her own boroughs.

Now New York had seen her, claimed her as its own--and capitulated.

Judged by every ordinary standard, Mary Burton should have been a very happy young woman, sitting crowned and in state, while before her Life passed in review. This afternoon, however, certain reflections brought the harassment of unrest to her eyes and a droop of wistfulness to the curve of her lips.

Self-analysis, that rude guest who comes sometimes, as unbidden and unwelcome as a constable, to set all one's favorite vanities out of doors and evict one's self-complacency, had intruded upon her thoughts. Though she had the amelioration of a pier glass which gave her a view of all her beauty, from the coronal of burnished hair to the satin points of small slippers, she did not seem quite happy. Mary was discovering that nature had endowed her with a brain which refused to accept longer its heretofore placid function of augmenting her physical allurements with its cleverness and its power of charm. Now it was in insurrection. Vassal no longer to the sense-thrilling appeal of eyes and lips and color and delicate curves, it was turning its batteries inward and preying upon itself.

Self-accusation had come to dispossess self-adulation.

Perhaps the silent voices of the mountains were in part responsible. Haverly Lodge lay in acres not only smooth, but elaborately beautified, yet the margins of the estate met and merged with nature's ragged fringe. Metaled roads ran out in lumber trails where the Adirondacks reared turrets of granite and primal forests. In summer, ease-loving guests took their pleasure here, but when winter held the hills, wild deer came down and gingerly picked their way close to the sundials and marble basins of the sunken gardens. Foxes, too, stole on cushioned feet across the terraces at the end of the pergola.

The master of Haverly Lodge was the great little man who chewed always at an unlighted cigar and built industries as a child rears houses of blocks. This Adirondack "camp" was one of H. A. Harrison's favorite playthings. Here alone the nervous restlessness that drove him gave place to something like peace. Among the guests now gathered there was Mary Burton. Hamilton Burton was absent, as he was always absent from the purely social side of the world into whose center he had forced his way. For such diversions he had neither time nor taste, but like a general who, under the dim light of his tent lantern, sticks pins into a war map, it pleased him to have his sister take her triumphant place among the court idlers whom he scorned.

Now she sat in her room overlooking the terraces and gardens at the side of the mansion. Just outside her window was a small gallery over whose wide coping clambered a profusion of flowering vines. Through half-drawn curtains as she lay in a long reclining chair she could see the purple veil of the young summer draped along the distance where rosy fires burned in the wake of day--or she could turn her eyes inward and have the other picture which the mirror offered. Her slender hands lay inertly quiet in her lap, holding an envelope.

Suddenly she turned her head and spoke to the only other occupant of the room--her maid.

"Julie," she said, almost sharply, "you may go. Come back in half an hour."

"But, mademoiselle," exclaimed the little French woman who had put by dreams of a small millinery shop in Paris to come with her mistress to America, "dinner is not far off, and you are not yet dressed."

Mary Burton did not answer. Her thoughts were elsewhere and after a moment's hesitation Julie went out and closed the door quietly behind her. The pearls lying near the mirror caught the light and echoed it in their soft shimmer.

"Hamilton Burton's collar," she murmured.

Then she slowly drew from the envelope in her lap a letter.

Its writer subscribed himself with many adoring superlatives, "Thy Carlos," but that was an abbreviated signature. In Andalusia, where his estates lay, his prerogative was to sign himself Juan Carlos Matisto y Carolla, Duke de Metuan.

She read the letter and let it fall from her listless fingers. Her eyes went again to the portrait in the glass. Very slowly she rose and studied herself standing. The lacy softness of her negligee fell away from her slenderly rounded throat.

The creamy whiteness of arms and shoulders and bosom was touched with the rosiness of blossom petals.

"I suppose," she said with a short laugh, "I suppose--as men's ideas of women go--I'm worth possessing." Then she turned impatiently to the window and stood with one arm high above her head, resting on the white woodwork of its frame. While her eyes went off to the sunset, they became hungry for something she did not have, she who had so much.

In a few days, unless she forbade it, the duke would arrive, this note from his New York hotel announced. There had been also a brief communication from Hamilton, which she had angrily torn into small bits. The duke had called on him, said her brother, and craved permission to pay his addresses to Mary. Hamilton Burton had granted the boon with the manner of a king contemplating a noble alliance in his family. Mary Burton did not care for the manner.

It complicated matters, she admitted, that she herself had not precisely discouraged the duke over there in Cairo and in Nice. He had fitted rather comfortably into the artificial life she had been living, which she had not then begun to question with analysis. As she looked back she could not recall that she had definitely discouraged any of those titled suitors. Now that her brain had turned on her, forcing her to take stock of her life, many shapes and colors changed, as the light of day alters the aspect of gas and bares its deceit. The idea of meeting Carlos de Metuan brought a shiver of personal distaste.

"I never knew but one real man," she told herself bitterly. "I don't even know that he was a real man. I wonder if he is still alive." Once more she was in fancy a little girl, shyly twisting the toe of a rough shoe in the dust of the mountain roadside. Once more she saw a pair of eyes that won the heart with their honesty and seemed willing to have other eyes look through them into a soul concealing nothing. Though Jefferson Edwardes had been her first flatterer, he had flattered without ulterior motive. She was a ragged child and he a rich young man who might have to die. Suddenly she felt that the little girl who was once herself had been more admirable in every way than this polished woman who had succeeded her: the woman who was everything that little girl had yearned to be and who stood self-revealed as brilliant and hard as one of her own purely decorative diamonds.

A small clock chimed, and, with a somewhat weary step, Mary Burton crossed the room and rang for her maid.

At dinner and later when the moon had risen and the guests danced on the smooth mosaic floor of an outdoor pavilion cunningly fashioned in the semblance of a Greek theater, her eyes were pools of laughter and her repartee was like wine sparkle--for at least she had learned to act with the empty bravery of her world.

In the constant attendance of men who chattered compliments she felt a haunting sense of pursuit and a secret impulse for flight, so that at the first opportunity she slipped away for the relief of solitude.

There were many vine-embowered retreats about the place where those who did not wish to dance might talk softly in the blue shadows of Grecian urns with star-shine and moon-mist for their tete-a-tetes. In such a place sat Mary Burton, alone--looking about her for a means of more secure escape. Her imagination kept disturbing her with the figure of a small girl whose home was a soon-to-be-abandoned farm. A yearning possessed her for the one thing which she could not command, the sort of romance that sweeps one away like a torrent. That little girl had yearned for the gifts of the world, for experience, wealth and adulation, because she fancied that out of these things came romance and its prize of happiness. The woman had them all--except the end of them all for which she had wanted them. They were dulled and tarnished by satiety and she still craved the coming of a lover whose forceful wooing should frighten and dominate her. Never in her life had she known any man upon whom she could not, with her trained self-reliance, set her own metes and bounds. Surely somewhere in the world there must be the sort of love-making that wrenches a woman out of her perfect self-composure and bears her away on its flood tide of power and passion. Perhaps she had been schooled and "finished" until humanity and its wonderful reality had, for her, ceased to exist. Suddenly she felt an upflaming of resentment against the generosity of her Napoleonic brother. In exchange for life's golden chance of romance she had been given a wonderful veneer of hard brilliancy--and she hated it! After a few moments of rebellious introspection she shook her head and rose from her seat, slipping behind the tall marble urn that rose from the end of the bench into the enveloping shadows. She was seeking a refuge where she might hide and hear the music softened by the distance and she kept walking, lured on by the wildness of the surrounding hills which just now better suited her mood than the clipped hedges.

She found a place at last from which, as one apart, she could look up at the stars and down at the dancers.

There was a larger crowd dancing now than there had been. Evidently new guests had arrived since dinner. She was beginning to feel the solace of her escape from other human beings when she became conscious of a white-clad figure approaching her, and gave a low exclamation of annoyance. Yet something in the manner of the man's movement indicated that he was, like herself, finding greater pleasure in solitude than in the dance. It was only when he was almost upon her that she stood out visible in the depth of the shadow. He halted then and bowed his apology.

"I beg your pardon," said a voice which struck a vaguely familiar chord of memory. "I didn't mean to intrude. I was just hunting for a spot where I could watch things without having to talk to anyone."

Mary Burton laughed.

"You don't have to talk to me," she assured him, "because, as it happens, that's why I'm here myself."

It was too dark for recognition of features, but there was a silvery quality in the girl's voice which piqued the interest of the newcomer and caused him to deviate from his avowed purpose of self-withdrawal. It seemed to him that music sounded across a space of years--music remembered and longed for.

"The dismissal is unmistakable in its terms," he answered. "Yet, since I have come a long way, may I not sit here for a moment of rest--provided I am very silent?"

Mary smiled and then quite unpremeditatedly she found herself inquiring, "A long way? Where do you come from then?"

"From St. Petersburg," he enlightened in a casual fashion, and after a moment he added, "to see you!"

"You just said you were seeking a place to be alone and why should you look for me whom you never saw before and whom you can't see now, for the dark? You don't even know what I'm like."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Burton.--There, you see I know your name."

The tantalizingly familiar note in his voice puzzled and interested her with a cumulative force. "I have a very definite idea what you are like. Not being a poet, I'm afraid I can't put it into words."

"But you haven't seen me!" Her speech became for an instant mischievously whimsical. "Of course, if you have a burglar's lantern about you--or a match I suppose you might."

The man drew a small case from his pocket and struck a waxmatch, holding it close.

She met his gaze, and he stood motionless until the tiny blaze traveled down the length of the shaft and burned his fingers. His eyes never left her face. In those eyes she felt a strange power of magnetism, for they did not burn as other eyes had burned. They did not shift or waver. When the match fell he spoke quietly. "You are as beautiful as starlight on water and I am a true prophet."

In the brief and limited illumination she had recognized him, too, and she bent impulsively toward him. In his coming just now as though in answer to her thoughts there seemed something almost occult.

"Then you didn't die? You won your fight with your even chance? Oh, I am so glad!"

"Thank you," answered Jefferson Edwardes gravely. "That's worth refusing to die for."

"It's strange, Mr. Edwardes," she spoke almost dreamily. "Perhaps it's because I've been listening to the voice of the hills, but I have been sitting here alone--hiding--and while I've been here I've been thinking of you--wondering where you were."

"For that, too, I thank 'whatever gods there be,'" he assured her. "It has been a long time since we met and I was afraid you had forgotten. Of course, I've read of you and I knew that my prophecy was being fulfilled. Twice I planned to leave St. Petersburg and pursue you to London or Paris, but each time business matters intervened with their relentless demands."

"What made you think of me?" An eager sincerity sounded through the question. She was weary of compliments, but Jefferson Edwardes had a manner of simple speech which gave worth to his utterances.

"Once upon a time," he began with a low laugh, "there lived a singularly sickening little prig of a kid, pampered and spoiled to his selfish marrow. Though I hate to roast a small boy, I am bound to say that this one was pretty nearly a total loss--and he was I. He threatened to grow into a more odious man, but Providence intervened in his behalf--with disguised kindness. Providence threw him out by the scruff of his arrogant neck to fight for his life or to die--which was what he needed. He went to your mountains to scrap with microbes--and he had leisure to discover what a microbe he was himself."

The girl's laugh was a peal of silvery music in the dark. "Were you a microbe?" she demanded. "All these years I've thought you a fairy prince." With a sudden gravity she added, "To one small girl, you opened a gate of dreams, and brought her contentment--" she broke off and the final words were almost whispered--"so long as they remained dreams."

"And now--" he took her up with grave and earnest interest--"now that they have become realities, what of them?"

"That comes later," she reminded him. "We aren't through yet with the little boy who won out with his fighting chance."

"When you knew him your hills had done something for him. They had humanized him. He went as one goes to exile, full of bitterness. Your hills were a miracle of wholesomeness. They cleansed and restored him with the song of their high-riding winds and the whispers of their pines. They confided to him those things that God only says to man in His own out-of-doors. Your mountains were good to me. I became something of a dreamer there, and in those dreams you have always stood as the personal incarnation of those hills. That is why I have thought of you unendingly ever since."

Mary Burton's answer was to shake her head and declare wistfully:

"I almost wish you hadn't seen me again. It would have been better if the illusion could have lasted."

"Since then," he went on, "the little girl has grown up and been crowned, but I shall prefer to think of her as she was before she knew she was to wear Cinderella's slipper."

"I wonder," she murmured, "if you can."

For a time they were silent while the dance music reached them softened by the distance, and then he inquired in a low voice:

"Do you by any miracle of chance remember an injunction I laid upon you one afternoon by the roadside?"

Mary Burton looked up and answered with a nod of her head. "Does any woman ever forget her first compliment?"

"What was it?"

"Wield leniently the dangerous gift of your witchcraft--the--" She abruptly broke off in the quotation and found herself coloring like a schoolgirl, so Jefferson Edwardes took up the injunction where she had left it incomplete. "The freakish beauty of your perfect, unmatched eyes," he prompted.

The girl felt a strange flutter in her breast. Just now she had blushed. What had happened to the poise of her usual self-command? Some influence was abroad tonight or some hypnotism in those steady eyes that gave her a sense of vague apprehension. It was an apprehension though that thrilled her strangely with a welcome fear--and a promise. Tides were stirring that were all new tides. It was as though marvels were possible. She heard him saying again as he had said once before, "You are as beautiful as starlight on water."

"So was Cleopatra, my friend. So was Helen of Troy. So were ... Circe and Faustina."

"But they," he laughed, "did not wield kindly the power of their eyes."

Mary Burton winced, then she turned and faced him. Her voice trembled.

"Why did I have to meet you tonight? It isn't fair! They have schooled my brain into every useless vanity. They have fed my selfishness until it has strangled my heart. Never until today did I face the truth. All afternoon I've been sitting alone--hating myself. I am nothing but an artificial little flirt, and I have not obeyed your injunction." She paused, then hurried on with the forced manner of one resolved upon full confession! "Perhaps so far I've hurt only myself--but I've done that--mortally. Then you come and I learn that you've woven an illusion about me--and I destroy it."

Jefferson Edwardes smiled in the dark, but spoke gravely.

"You call yourself an artificial little flirt. You haven't flirted with me. Why?"

"With you I have talked ten minutes." She laughed suddenly as though at some absurd thought. "Besides, did any woman ever flirt with you? Can one lie to eyes that see through one?"

"My eyes do see something," he said. "They see that you have never had a chance to be your real self. You have been surrounded by flatterers and sycophants, when you needed sincere and truthful friends."

"Truthful friends!" She repeated the words after him incredulously. "I wonder if such things exist."

"I am one," he announced bluntly. "I am going to give back to you the message your hills gave me--without flattery and without adjectives."

He came a step nearer and an unaccountable wave of attraction and fear thrilled her--flooded her heart until her temples burned. She had been wishing for the coming of a man who would not be clay in her hands. To Circe all men must have been swine, from the start, save the man who could pass by. Now, of a sudden, every wile of coquetry became a lost art to Mary Burton. She felt like an accomplished and intriguing diplomat, facing an adversary who has no secrets to conceal and no interest in the evasions of others. He roused a new eagerness because she knew intuitively that to mere fascination he would surrender no principle. With the realization came a sense of surprise and exaltation and timidity, and she spoke slowly with an interval between her words.

"Why--will--you--assume this role?"

"Because--" his voice was confident and inspired a responsive confidence--"there is such a thing as a chemistry of souls. Life is a laboratory where Destiny experiments with test-tubes and reagents. Powerful ingredients may be mixed without result because they hold in common no element of reaction. Other ingredients at the instant of mingling turn violet or crimson or explode or burst into flame--because they were meant to mingle to that end. Nature says so. Does the reason matter?"

She asked another question, rather faintly, because she felt herself startlingly lifted on a tide against which it was a useless thing to struggle. Something in her wanted to sing, and something else wanted to cry.

"I'm afraid chemistry is one of the things they didn't teach me much about. Probably because it was useful. Can you put it in words of one syllable?"

"Yes." He was standing close, but he bent nearer and his voice filled and amplified the brevity of his monosyllables. "In three. I love you."

Mary Burton started back, and a low exclamation broke incoherently from her lips.

The man caught both her hands and spoke with tense eagerness.

"You say I have met you in the dark for a few minutes. True. I have looked on your face while one match burned out ... but I have dreamed of you ever since I shined you in my heart--back there--long ago by the roadside. If you are not the woman of my visions, you can be, and I mean that you shall be. You are a woman trained in the ways of your world. If you could help it, you would not let a man take your hands in his, like this, at a first meeting--would you?"

She shook her head, but her hands lay as motionless as though their nerves were dead. She could feel the throbbing pulses of his fingers and suddenly he bent forward and pressed his lips to hers, while she stood amazed and unresisting. "Or kiss your lips--like this--would you? With women I am timid, because I have never before been a lover. I could not do what I am doing unless something stronger than myself were acting through me. It is the chemistry of souls. It is written." He let his arms fall at his sides.

Mary Burton pressed her temples with her fingers. Her knees felt weak and she stood unsteadily on her feet. The man passed a supporting arm about her waist. Finally, she drew herself up and laughed with a nervousness that bordered on the hysterical.

"I wonder," she said brokenly; and paused only to repeat again: "I wonder whether it's the great adventure I've dreamed of--or just moon-madness? Ought I to be very angry?"

"You will have time to decide," he told her. "What I have said and done I shall say and do again--often."

"It's strange," she murmured as though talking to herself. "I thought I understood men. I'm not a schoolgirl any more. Yet I'm as bewildered as though you were the first man who ever said, 'I love you.'"

"Thank God for that."

She turned and laid a hand on his arm. Her voice came with a musical vehemence.

"If I do come to love you, I think it will be heaven or hell to me. I'm not going to be angry until I've thought about it--and thought hard, and I'm not going to love you unless you make me. Come, let's go back."

As they turned into the path toward the house, she broke irrelevantly into laughter.

"When you lighted your match--and burned your fingers--what did you think of my pearls?"

"I didn't see them," he promptly replied. "Were you wearing pearls?"

Confused by the sudden and marvelous consciousness of all life being changed at a stroke, of doors that had swung wide between all the old and all the new, Mary Burton walked as in a daze, her fingers toying with the gems about her

neck. But before she had taken many steps the man laid a hand on her arm and halted her. When she turned he caught her by her shoulders and his words came tumultuously and with an impassioned earnestness.

"You must not deny me the chance to say something more," he declared. "What I have said is either too much or too little. You ask me whether I saw your pearls. When I first spoke to you--a child with all autumn's glory blazing at your back, did I have eyes for trees and skies and landscapes; though they were splendid and profligate in their beauty? No. I saw you--only you! If you had stood against a drab curtain it would have been the same. You were a child, too young to stir an adult heart to love or passion.... What was it then that fixed you from that moment in my heart?"

She looked back at him and asked faintly, "What was it?"

"That same chemistry of souls," he declared. "That same writing of our futures in one horoscope; a voice that decreed: 'You shall wait for her,' though I did not understand its message--until now. And now that I have seen you, how can I think of pearls?"

To hear words of love spoken in a wild onrush of feeling was no new experience to Mary Burton, yet it was as though she had never heard them before. In the past her ears had heard, but now her heart was listening, and her heart pounded in her breast as it drank in what the man said. He talked fast, with his eyes on her eyes, and his hands grasping her white shoulders. His heart, too, rather than his tongue, was speaking.

"You will read in every book," he declared, "that such things as this are impossible. Give our lives the chance to write their own pages and you will know that they are true and inevitable. To me you have been a dream--I have told myself over and over again that it was only a dream, the whimsical imagination of a man who has lived too much to himself--who was abnormal. Now I have seen you. Had I seen you every day since that first day it could mean no more to me. At the first syllable of your voice--I *knew*. I need no further test."

"But I--?" she faltered.

"You shall take all the time you need. I told you that you had stood in my mind as the spirit of the hills that gave me back my life. I told you what I have been telling myself. Now I know better. From that first instant my life has been molded--for this. Though I did not then know it, I lived because I *had* to live. I had to live because it was written that my life should complete itself by loving you. It was not your hills that gave me health again--it was yourself. You do not personify the hills, but the hills personify you. My dream is no longer a dream, it is a reality. I love you."

"But I have told you," she persisted, "that I am not what you think."

"You are what I know. I love you."

She stood tremblingly before him, and her words came with a whispered wonderment.

"Things like this don't happen," she said. Then she added, "All the things you tell me are such things as life laughs at, and yet there is another side--my side. I have yearned to feel something that had the power to lift me out of myself and make me gloriously helpless, something big enough to set my heart beating beyond control--and I never have felt it--till now. I--I am not the same girl. I don't know myself.... You have come and I am suddenly different."

"Love's chemistry," he assured her. "The Mary Burton of this moment is to be the Mary Burton of always, until she becomes Mary Edwardes."

"At all events, I must be alone--to think," she told him. "You can go and dance, if you like. I've been here two days and I know all the secret passages. I'm going to slip into my room by a back stairway and think hard about how angry I am to be with you tomorrow."

"And I," he answered, "shall not dance. I am going to sequester myself in the woods and pray the gods of fair auspices that you won't be too angry."



CHAPTER XI

MARY Burton made her way between tall hedgerows of box where an alley of shade ran to a side terrace, and when she had gained her own room her eyes were aglow with a new and rather radiant sort of smile, that also crept to the corners of her lips and hovered happily. It was a vague smile, but if the man who had enticed it there had seen it, he would have felt reassured. The threat of tomorrow's wrath would not have troubled him.

When Mary Burton, changed into bedroom attire, had dismissed her maid for the night, she still moved about with a restlessness which did not at once yield to the composure needed for the rigid self-analysis upon which she was resolved. She stood before the mirror and looked gravely into the glass.

With the lustrous masses of hair falling braided over her shoulders and the new glow of discovery in her eyes she might have been a girl just budding into womanhood. She seemed in the last hour to have slipped back into the blossom time of her beauty--and though it was a beauty which she had always realized she now felt a new happiness in its possession. Heretofore her pride had been such as one feels for a means of conquest.

Now it was different. Her breast rose suddenly and fell to the excitement of a subtly powerful emotion. This beauty had a new value. It might be a prize worth surrendering proudly and as a gift to a man of her choosing. If this rainbow of promised love proved real she would wish herself even lovelier--for his pleasure. It was of course too soon to feel sure--and at that thought a sudden gasp of fear rose in her throat. At all events it was not too early to hope that the night had brought her the thing for which she had yearned--brought the commencement. She gave to the face in the mirror a friendly smile. "This afternoon I rather hated you," she announced gravely. "I gazed at you and a soulless little pig stared back ... but who knows? Maybe down under your vanity and selfishness you have after all the cobwebbed little germ of a soul. If so we must dig it out and brush it off and put it to work."

Then she turned out the lights and sank down dreamily in the broad window seat. The moon rode high and bathed the hills in its limpid yet elusive wash of silver and blue and dove grays. Far off like a brush-stroke from a dream palette ran the horizon's margin of hills and nearer at hand tapering poplars stood up like dark sentinels. The lights and music told of the dance still in progress and strolling figures occasionally crossed the silver patches between the shadows.

In her own mind she was reviewing all the men who with her had sought to throw off the mantle of the Platonic and invest themselves in the more romantic habiliments of courtship. One lesson had been taught her from the first, and she had learned it thoroughly--too thoroughly! She was no ordinary girl to give way to unwise throbbing of the pulses. Her future must run side by side with brilliant things and brilliant men.

It takes experience to teach distrust to those frolicsome playmates, Youth and Buoyancy. She had met with that experience and had learned that fortune-hunters are by no means mythical or extinct. When to the honey-pot of wealth is added the lure of beauty, how can one be sure that any proffered love is free from the taint of greed? Her brother was one of America's most brilliant money-getters. He gathered in and disbursed with a lavish magnificence. She had been called the most beautiful woman in Europe and her gem-like brilliancy had been set in Life's gold and platinum of environment. When Cupid came to her what bill of health could he produce to prove that he was not a sneak-thief in disguise? She had accepted the cynical conclusion that she might never be sure of any man's love and the tenderer little heart-nerve which govern impulse were growing numb. Under a naive freshness and girlish fragrance of personality, lay masked batteries of distrust and hardness. The Duke de Metuan fancied himself genuinely in love with her. Of that she was sure, but should the Duke de Metuan learn tomorrow morning that she had overnight become penniless--she broke off and laughed.

And tonight had come the unwarmed tumult of feeling against which she possessed no argument. Jefferson Edwardes had looked at her and his eyes were a guarantee of honesty beyond question. She did not even ask to see the Love God's passport. This man was a member of a great family of bankers; a family that had stood for generations among the richest in the country. Ham's magic control of the money tides could not even subconsciously influence his decisions.

It was wonderful to sit there in the window, adrift on a tide of elation, and to know that the numbness of her heart was not a permanent paralysis--that she had a soul. It was absurdly delightful, too, to reflect upon the illogical swiftness with which it had all happened.

"Tomorrow," she announced to herself, nodding her head very decisively, "I shall be furious with him. I shall refuse to speak to him. I shall let him realize that such lordly assumption brings swift retribution." Then, low and gaily, she laughed. "After I've punished him I'll be very nice to him, unless--" her lips tightened as she added--"unless he says he's sorry he did it and apologizes. If he does that I'll never speak to him again."

While Mary was spending so comfortable and pleasing an hour with her reflections and while Jefferson Edwardes was tramping the hills several miles away, a small number of unattached men lingered near the punch-bowl and cigars in the huge living-room of the lodge.

One of these refugees from the zone of dancing activities was of more than ordinarily striking appearance. When he stood he towered and even when he sat, as now, morosely lounging and taciturn, he bulked large and wore a countenance of such strength and determination as suited his giant body. In spite of his great physique he carried no superfluous flesh, but tapered to the waist and, notwithstanding his present detachment and a seriousness that verged on sullenness, the face seemed more patterned by nature for the broad grin of good fellowship and clean mirthfulness.

Quite obviously Len Haswell, whose laugh ordinarily rang like a fog-horn over the chorus of conversation, would just now have preferred being elsewhere. When their customary joviality left those gray eyes, the man's immensity took on something of an ogre's power. He tinkled the ice in his high-ball glass--a process to which he had devoted himself with unaccustomed repetition this evening and, instead of mellowing into conviviality under his libations, his eyes narrowed a little and the small frowning line between his brows deepened.

"The Big Fellow's having a grouch, eh, what? He's getting a bit squiffy, if you ask me," suggested Norvil Thayre to the group centered where the punch-bowl was being administered. Norvil Thayre was not having a grouch. If he had ever had a grouch he had kept his secret well. An American by adoption, he was still aggressively British in speech, dress and eccentricity.

Norvil Thayre's chest was always thrust out as cheerily and confidently as a cock-robin's, and his step was as elastic as though he had just come, freshly galvanized, from some electric source of exuberant energy. His clothing escaped the extremes of fashion by the narrowest margin of good taste, and his mustache ends bristled up toward the laughing wrinkles about his wide-awake eyes like exclamation points of alertness.

"And," went on Mr. Thayre amiably, "if he hungers for solitude I'm the last chap in the world to intrude on his meditations. I jolly well know myself what it means to hang precariously on the fringe of plutocracy with only a beastly whisper of an income--and by the Lord Harry I'm a bachelor." Several auditors nodded their sympathetic understanding, but a tall youth with viking blond hair and vacant eyes which seemed to proclaim, "I am looking, but I see not," was less judicious. He lounged over and dropped into a chair at Haswell's side.

"That singularly frightful little ass, Larry Kirk, is going to cheer him up now," smiled Thayre. "Trust him to make himself a nuisance."

"Not dancing much this evening, Len?" suggested Kirk by way of opening the conversation with the silent one.

"No." The reply was curt.

"I've been wanting to dance with your wife," persisted the other, "but she's as illusive as a wraith."

This time Haswell did not vouchsafe even a monosyllable in reply, and the tactless Kirk assumed the double burden of the conversation.

"I call it rough treatment when the two truly beautiful women in society come to a dance and proceed, to all intents and purposes, to evaporate. Miss Burton, too, seems to have been converted into thin air. What's the use of struggling to keep up with new steps?"

Len Haswell rose stiffly from his chair, and, tossing his cigar through the open window, stalked silently from the room.

The blond young man glanced uncomprehendingly after him, and Thayre's laugh broke in a booming peal.

"Rather gratuitous, son, wasn't it?" he suggested.

"What do you mean?" Larry Kirk put his question blankly.

"Nothing, except that you know Len or ought to. He's the present-day Othello, sulking because he can't get a dance with his wife. It's barely conceivable that he's not aching to have it rubbed in."

"Can't get a dance?" repeated the empty-eyed youth perplexedly. "Why?"

Thayre snorted. "What chance has he--or any one else when Ham Burton's gifted pomeranian sequesters her in some shaded nook and whispers musical nonsense into her coral ear?"

"You mean Paul Burton? Gifted pomeranian fits him nicely ... but why should any man be jealous of--him?"

"A man may be jealous of any creature that all women pet. Paul Burton can play to them until their golden souls come soaring out to be playmates with his golden soul. You and I, having no wives, may be able to laugh at such things--but Len Haswell has a devilish pretty one--and a devilish foolish one."

To young Mr. Kirk the situation seemed simple.

"Why doesn't Len just take this pleasing minstrel by the scruff of his neck and say to him, 'Nice little doggy, run away?'"

"For two reasons. First, behind the pleasing minstrel stands the Emperor--damn his magnificently audacious soul! Secondly, when you chase a man who has access to the treasure of the Incas ... you take a fairish chance of chasing the lady along with him."

"I'm sorry I made Len sore." The blond man spoke contritely. Then his voice snapped into animosity. "He's worth a dozen Paul Burtons, the vapid little piano-player."

"Right-o!" Thayre stood with his feet well apart and his baldish head thrown back. "Even that profound gift for reading human nature, which it pleased a Divine Providence to bestow upon me, could hardly have hit more jolly well on the peg." He paused, then added, "But be that as it may--in the habit which has become so prevalent among us money-changers in the temple, of damning the soul of Hamilton Burton--when he is absent--I think we overlook a few patent truths. We hate the man and all his breed simply because he outclasses us at our own game."

"You mean he outplunders us," contradicted Kirk.

"It comes to much the same thing, young son, though High Finance is a prettier name for the pastime. He gathers in millions to our thousands not only because he is a naughty, wicked man, but because of his greater caliber and range. Brother Paul shines by some of this reflected glory--so it has become the fashion to damn Brother Paul, too."

It began to dawn on the fair-haired young man that he was being chaffed. His reply came sulkily.

"To my mind Paul Burton is nothing but a hanger-on."

"Quite true. So am I. So are you. So are all of us who produce nothing tangible. Paul is a hanger-on by better right than many others who depend directly or indirectly on the energies of this great producing pirate."

Kirk had exhausted his line of argument and fell silent, but Jack Staples stepped into the breach. Staples himself was no mean type of financier, holding as he did a commission as one of Malone's chief lieutenants. He was a striking man with a lower jaw which thrust itself aggressively forward and a single white lock over his forehead, though except for that the blackness of his hair bore no touch of gray even at the temples.

"I hate the lot of them!" he announced vehemently. "I hate this upstart Cyclops and his conscienceless power. I hate the pampered brother--but Thayre is right. Great God in heaven, gentlemen, it is a family of geniuses. Stop and reflect. Fifteen years ago they were bare-footed--ragged--half-starved, the whole brood. Now consider them. Hamilton is magnificent, ruthless, but almost omnipotent. He is one of the world's few blazing and dazzling figures. As for Paul, in spite of his weakness, he's inspirational. His genius is no less intrinsic. I'm not emotional, but I've heard them all play and that boy can carry me out of myself as can no other artist, professional or amateur, to whom I've ever listened. He is a gifted troubadour. His fingers control the magic of harmony as his brother's control the magic of money. For my part I'd rather be Paul than Hamilton. Hamilton will be hated to death--by men, but Paul will be loved to death--by women."

"Well," suggested another member of the group drily, "when one New York family can move as stolid an old cynic as Staples to eulogy, it must be some family."

"I tell you," protested Staples hotly, "I hate them, but we gain nothing by belittling our enemies. It sets a man's imagination afire to see a strain of remarkable blood proclaiming itself in so diverse a fashion through members of one household; a household that has come from the pinch of want. Take the girl. Leave her beauty out of the question, because beauty is not genius. But her mind is as trenchant as her brother's. She could reign on any throne in Europe and stand out as conspicuous in brilliant contrast to that colorless royalty as a torch flaming among candles. I'll wager that her courage is as unflinching as his and her gifts as varied and remarkable. Why, even old Tom, the father, is, for all his seeming of pompous emptiness, the craftiest and cagiest old chap in the National Union Club. He plays rotten bridge, but he still has a brain in his old head."

"I suppose as far as that goes," commented Mr. Kirk, fortified by the entry of a new disputant into the argument, "that even Nero had his attractive angles of personality."

Thayre laughed and lighted a cigarette. Then as he inhaled deeply he nodded and replied.

"I hold no brief for Nero, but I dare say he was a bit misunderstood."

"Since you've undertaken the modern Nero's defense, suppose you catalogue *his* good points--aside from a conceded brilliancy in finance," suggested another member of the group.

The Englishman nodded, and began his summary.

"An unswerving loyalty to his friends--until they are guilty of *lese majeste*; a personal integrity which no man questions; a wit that makes him in his lighter moments a rare companion; a generosity as broad as his fighting ruthlessness is deep; and, finally, a lion-like courage. To me, my lads, those assets seem worth a moment's consideration."

The gardens and grounds of Haverly Lodge were that night such a terrain as best suits the ambuscading warfare of the small god with the bow and darts.

Loraine Haswell was thinking something of the sort as she strolled with Paul Burton away from the dancers, leaving their destination to chance. Kirk had hardly exaggerated when he bracketed the name of this slender and graceful wife of the gigantic broker with that of Mary Burton as the two most beautiful women in society.

They were opposite types, for while Mary was a glowing incarnation of color, rich as a golden morning in blossom-time, Loraine, with heavy masses of softly spun jet coiled above her brow, looking out from eyes that were pools of liquid darkness, might have been the queen of night. But her mouth was a carmine blossom. This evening she wore a gown almost barbaric in its richness of color and pattern, and when she walked ahead of Paul Burton where the path narrowed, it seemed to him that some slim and lithe Cleopatra was preceding him. The waltz music came across the short distance, and Loraine Haswell went with a step that captured the rhythm of the measure. When they had come to a corner of the garden where a fountain tinkled in shadow and only a lacey strand or two of moonlight fell on the grass, she halted with her outstretched arms resting lightly on the tall basin, and let her fingers dip into the clear water while she turned to smile on him.

"Do you know, Mrs. Haswell," Paul spoke low and with a musical thrill in his voice, "you are the loveliest creature in captivity tonight? Your loveliness is to a man's imagination what Wilde said white hyacinths are to the soul--worth going without bread for."

She laughed, but into her mirth there crept, or was injected as the case may be, a note of wistfulness.

"In captivity," she repeated, slowly. "I am always in captivity."

With most men Paul was diffident and prone to silence, but something in his effete nature gave him confidence with women. He had been flattered into a sort of assurance that they found him irresistible. They thought him clairvoyantly sympathetic--and he was by the very over-refinement of his music and dream-fed temperament.

"The other evening when I left you, I went home and closed my eyes and sat alone--thinking of you," he told her. "To me all that is fine beyond words I try to translate into music. Where words--even poetry--fail, notes begin. So at the piano I tried to express something like a portrayal of you--to myself."

She seated herself on a stone bench while he stood looking down at her. Her head was for a moment bent and something in the droop of her shoulders intimated unhappiness.

"Does my improvising music about you offend?" He put the question very gently. "You know that I go to the piano as another man might go to his prayers."

She looked up and shook her head. Then she said softly. "Offend me? No, it makes me very proud.... I was just thinking of something else--that troubled me."

"Of what?" Into the two short words Paul Burton put such a sympathy as only voices of women and partly feminine men can express.

"Of the word you used just now ... captivity."

He seated himself at her side and his hand fell to the edge of the stone bench--where her own fingers lightly rested. The cool satiny touch of the hand his own encountered, which she made no effort to withdraw, affected him as though

a clear and silvery note had sounded near him.

Paul was one whose senses were exquisitely attuned.

"Mrs. Haswell--Lorraine," he said, and his voice was seductively tender, "you are unhappy."

Slowly she nodded her dark head and her voice was a whisper. "Yes.... Paul, I'm afraid I am just that."

It was the first time they had called each other by their first names. It was the first time that the gradually ripening intimacy between them had had a more propitious setting than a table at Sherry's. Paul Burton had awaited this moment patiently, knowing that it must sometime come. Now he bent toward her until her hair brushed his face.

"It is your right to find life a thing of joy," he whispered. "Your soul is a flower. It should have the fulness and radiance of sunshine."

"Our rights," she said slowly, "are not always the things we get."

"But just why are you unhappy?" he insisted.

"I guess you summed it up in that one word, Paul ... captivity."

Paul Burton, the easily swayed, the facilely led, rose and paced up and down, and after a few moments he halted before her.

"Doesn't he--your jailer--appreciate you, Lorraine?"

She shrugged her lovely shoulders and looked up at him, smiling through lashes that glistened a little.

"As much, I suppose, as a man can appreciate a woman whom he fails to understand. It's not his fault."

"Of course he--cares for you?"

Lorraine Haswell shot him a quick inquiring glance. "Yes," she smiled, "he cares enough to persecute me with little jealousies. He cares enough to want me to make love to him when--" she halted and put both hands over her face; through her slight figure ran a faint shudder--"when I can't."

The man pressed his tapering fingers to his temples. He must seem agitated and his emotions lay so ready to call that seeming so was almost being so. Yet in the back of his mind was the thought: "She will be in my arms in five minutes."

Suddenly she rose from her seat. "I oughtn't to say such things to you," she declared in a voice freighted with self-accusation. "Please forget it, Paul. But it's a thing you can understand. You know the emptiness of a life that deals only with material things."

He leaned forward with one knee on the bench and one hand on the fountain basin. She was beautiful and his heart responded to her beauty's challenge.

"To me you can say anything. In me you will always find one who has no interest above your interests." He stopped and took her hands, but she shook her head in gentle negation, and, as he obeyed the unuttered mandate and let his own arms fall at his sides, she rewarded him with a smile that thrilled him like an embrace.

"Len is fine and big and everybody likes him," went on the wife as though bent on being fair at all costs. "Sometimes I think that's the trouble. It's like being married to a standing army. In times of peace one doesn't need a standing army and in times of war it's me that he makes war on."

Lorraine rose and started toward the house. Paul followed, her, appraising her beauty with eyes into which a new interest had come. In a moment she turned and halted so suddenly that the man found her face close to his as she spoke. "I don't know what's the matter with me tonight. I feel faint and giddy--and full of undefined longings. I sha'n't sleep--unless--" she looked questioningly up at him--"unless you will play for me, Paul. Will you?"

Then she put out both hands and swayed unsteadily. Paul caught her in his arms and pressed her to him. The fragrance of her breath and the velvet coolness of the cheek he found himself kissing were details that brought an exquisite responsiveness to his senses. He did not know whether she had fainted or was still conscious, for she rested there in his embrace limp and unresisting and wordless.

"What is the matter, dearest?" he whispered, when the first flush of exultation had passed. "What is the matter?"

Slowly the dark fringe of lashes flickered up and the jet eyes gazed languorously into his own. The blossom lips parted over the flashing whiteness of a smile. Still she did not move except to close both her hands tightly on the arms

that circled her.

"Paul," she told him, "I ought to be unconscious or--or break away, but I'm just--just forgetting my captivity." Her eyes held his, drawing them hypnotically nearer and he lowered his face till his lips met hers and received from them the answer to his kiss.

Then Loraine Haswell drew away and straightened up. She was a very lovely picture of contrite confusion as she put up both gleaming arms and rearranged the dark hair he had rumped. All the way to the house she was silent.



CHAPTER XII

AN hour later Mrs. Haswell sat before the cheval glass of her dressing-table. Her dark hair, loosened now from its coils, cascaded abundantly over her white shoulders. She was thinking, and the charmingly chiseled lips and brow here in the privacy of her own room wore a rather calculating and somewhat satisfied smile. No note of contrition or self-accusation marred their serenity. A knock on the door interrupted her reverie and with a smothered exclamation of annoyance she glanced at the clock and rose.

"May I come in a moment?" Her husband's voice was a shade thicker than usual and his face still wore the somber expression which seemed so out of place there.

"It's almost two o'clock, Len." There was an uninviting coolness in the quality of Loraine's tone--almost a protest. "Won't tomorrow do?" She stood still, holding the door only a few inches ajar.

"I won't keep you up long," he assured her.

"I'm very tired."

Len Haswell laid his hand on the knob and opened the door in spite of her unwelcome. "If you please," he said quietly. He came in and lighted a cigarette, then he inquired with an unaccustomed irony: "What tired you, Loraine? You didn't seem to be dancing much."

His wife shrugged her shoulders. Beyond that she failed to reply.

The big man came over and took both her hands in his own with a half-savage affection. "Loraine," he said pleadingly, "I wanted to dance with you tonight. I searched high and low, but I couldn't find you. For my part I have spent a very dreary evening."

"You know, Len," she casually reminded him, "you and I can't dance together. I'm a fair dancer and you are a very good one, but together we can't manage it. There were plenty of other girls, weren't there?"

The man's face for an instant worked spasmodically and in pain, then it grew dark. "For me, Loraine, there is never any other girl. You know that. Why do you avoid me as if I were a pestilence? Why can't you sometimes be the girl you used to be? Presumably you married me because you wanted to. You had better offers, richer lovers. Have I changed so much in five years--and if not, what in God's name has changed you?"

She withdrew her hands from his and sat again in the chair before the mirror. "Len," she said with a touch of petulance in her voice, "you get into grouches and spur your imagination to all sorts of absurdities. I'm very sleepy. Why can't you reserve your fault-finding until tomorrow?"

Len Haswell answered quietly, but obdurately. "For two reasons. In the first place I sha'n't be able to sleep unless you answer me. In the second place I shall probably see as much of you tomorrow as I have today--which is nothing." His tone hardened. "You are too tired to give me a few minutes, but you found it both possible and agreeable to give Paul Burton the entire evening."

"Oh," she laughed easily and with well-simulated amusement, "I should fancy from the contemptuous things I have heard you men say about Paul, you would regard him as quite harmless."

"Paul!" repeated the man accusingly. "When did you begin calling him by his first name? Does he call you Loraine, too?"

"Why not? We are friends." She looked up at her husband's face with an air of injured innocence and he paced a turn or two across the floor before he halted before her.

"I wish you would see less of him. I don't talk business to you often. It bores you, but you know that we are always strained to hold the pace that richer members of our set cut out. We have to pay very high for a privilege which has no value to me except that you like it."

Loraine Haswell sighed--and masked a yawn behind a small uplifted hand. "I wonder," she mused as though to herself, yet quite loud enough to be heard, "why some men find it so hard to make money, and to others it seems so easy."

Len Haswell flushed brick red to his cheekbones. He bit his lip and forced himself to remain silent for a moment, then he spoke gently. "I'm sorry I am not as brilliant a financier as some others. Nature doesn't endow us all alike. A good

many people would regard me as fairly successful, I dare say. For myself a small house on the Sound would be good enough, if you were there--"

"Thank you," she answered with deliberate cruelty, "I don't think I'd care for that."

The man's scowl became ominously black. The hands at his side twitched, and the temper with which few credited him because of his perpetual control, flared out.

"No, by the Almighty, you would rather prefer to be where the gods of life are pleasure and extravagance and selfish indulgence! Where the loyal love of a husband means less than the flatteries of a tame cat...." As suddenly as the eruption had come it subsided. He raised both hands. "Forgive me," he implored, "I didn't mean that. But I am distraught and financial affairs are very precarious, Loraine. We may stand on the brink of a disastrous panic. It lies in Hamilton Burton's power to make me or break me--absolutely. Don't you see what that means?"

His wife shook her head, "I'm afraid I don't understand the intricacies of finance." Her tone added that neither was she extravagantly interested in them.

"It means this," Haswell spoke gravely. "You have been seen with Paul Burton more perhaps than is advisable. Paul Burton is Hamilton Burton's brother ... he is the one man with whom I can't afford to quarrel."

"I haven't suggested your quarreling with him."

"Then please don't drive me to it."

"Again I say that you are letting your imagination make you the victim of absurdities. Of just what are you accusing me?"

He came over and took her hand. "I am not accusing you of anything. I am willing to let my honor rest in your hands, but I am warning you against innocent mistakes."

He sought to put an arm about her, but she slipped from his grasp, and after a moment he said "Good-night" with a sort of sullen resignation, and went out, closing the door noiselessly after him.

Jefferson Edwardes had tramped far. When Mary Burton had gone to her own room, he had plunged into the thicketed slopes of the hills and walked for hours. Since his long exile in the White Mountains he had always held to the idea that a man can think more clearly close to the rocks and under open skies. Just now he wanted an untinged clarity to attend his thoughts.

Although the occurrences of the evening had possessed an Arabian Night's quality of unreality, he felt no misgivings for the love he had announced and pledged. It was not as though he looked back on a record of broken promises. He had no troubling memories to sweep from his conscience before his heart should be clear for a new entry. He had come away from the mountains with something hermit-like in his nature and much of the idealistic. It had been a pleasanter thing to him to keep unsullied the more important dreams of life than to endanger them with the transitory pleasures of the philanderer. The Mary Burton he had known in the dilapidated farm-house had of course been nothing more than a picturesque little waif of the country-side. Yet she had been a memory that remained distinct through years in New York and Russia; a memory which his imagination had quickened into life. Of Hamilton's spectacular successes his world of banking and finance had given him cognizance, but only such interest as one accedes to matters of impersonal news.

So a curiosity had arisen in his mind to see this young woman to whom he had once played the fairy prince, and since he was a whimsical man, that curiosity had woven and twisted itself into a dream. A dream long entertained may become something more than a dream. Perhaps it may be a menace. About their meeting tonight had been so much of the fortuitous that he might regard the whole affair as one operated from the knees of the gods--and disclaim responsibility.

The house windows had darkened one by one by the time his tramp ended again at Haverly Lodge. The moon was near the western timber fringe of the mountains, but Mary Burton, still wide-eyed and wakeful, had slipped out of her room to the balcony by her window.

The stone coping where she sat was partly black with shadow and partly platinum gray with the last of the moonlight. Her hair, falling in two heavy braids, caught the glistening light and her lips were parted in a smile. "It is strange," she told herself, "that once before he came along--and waked me into a new self. His second coming is

stranger still. It would almost seem that there is no chance about it. It would almost seem that it has been definitely planned." Then she laughed low to herself. "And if that's true I have no responsibility in the matter at all. Nothing I do about it is my fault--and I needn't be very angry about his kissing me before he was introduced to me."

Then she saw a figure leave the shadow of the hedges and cross the moonlit lawn with a confident stride. Mary Burton leaned a little forward, resting on her hands, and her lips remained parted.

"He seems just about as shameless about the whole affair as I am," she reflected, and when he was directly below she accosted him in a careful voice: "Halt, Restless Stranger. Does a disturbed conscience send you out to wander in the night mists?"

Jefferson Edwardes obeyed the command and raised his eyes to the commanding voice. "Perhaps," he announced in a guarded tone, "it is, in a fashion, dread of the wrath to come--though my conscience is clear. But you"--in his half-whisper she caught an eager note of hope--"why aren't you asleep?" She shook her head and in the moon-bath her face flashed into a luminous smile. "I am working up that wrath," she assured him. "I am preparing to be terribly angry with you tomorrow."

"And until tomorrow?"

"Until tomorrow I am very happy. Good-night."

"Tomorrow is always--tomorrow, dearest--" he said, "Good-night."

A many-sided man was J. J. Malone, with a nature as brilliant and as capable of flashing varying lights from its facets as a diamond--and when need be as hard as a diamond. Had he lived in feudal times other barons would have said, "Where Malone sits there is the head of the table," and the monarch himself would have taken thought before provoking his wrath. In these days of alleged intolerance for tyrants he dispensed with the fanfare of trumpets and the tossing of flambeaux. The door of his office in a gray shaft-like building down-town bore the simple inscription, "American Transportation Co., President's Office."

Many men to whom the mighty money leverage of "Consolidated" was a familiar story had heard of J. J. Malone only in the casual sense. Yet the oligarchy had been built and rendered, supposedly, impregnable from the conceptions of his constructive brain. Concentration of power into one vast unit had been "Consolidated's" triumph--and his realized dream. Always the master tactician had been he who unobtrusively wore the title of president of "American Transportation." To others he had relinquished title roles, but, unseen, he had set and managed the stage. Hamilton Burton had been taught at Malone's knee, but Hamilton Burton was young and hot with vitality, aflame with ambition. From Malone himself he had absorbed the principle, "Never forget that today's ally may be tomorrow's enemy. Be prepared to use him--or crush him." In secret Burton had been building to that end, and only he himself knew the full reserve force of his resources.

"You are about the only man in the Street, sir," declared young Bristoll one morning, in a burst of admiration, as he and his chief sat together over their coffee, "to whom J. J. Malone seems willing to grant an equality of status."

Hamilton Burton smiled.

"That is true just now, Carl," he replied. "It can not always remain true."

"Why?"

"Our young Minister of Finance sees the present in just proportions," laughed Burton. "But his vision has not yet mastered the horizons of the future."

Carl flushed. He knew that for all the flattering confidence to which he was admitted, many broadly conceived pictures moved across the screen of his employer's mind of which he was vouchsafed no intimation.

"I'll elucidate, Carl, though it's scarcely a matter for advertisement," went on the other. "Hasn't it occurred to you that Malone and I started life in very similar fashion? Each of us came raw and uninitiated from the country. Each of us brought rugged physiques and fairly alert minds to our tasks. Each of us has, I think, been fairly successful." Hamilton Burton paused to laugh frankly at his own modesty of expression.

"Each of us has been a little swifter than the generality in reading signs; a little bolder in conception and execution. If you read the papers you will gather that each of us is, in private life, impeccable, and each of us is, in business, as

merciless as an epidemic."

"That is the voice of envy," protested the younger man with heat.

"Thank you. I am grateful for the acquittal. There is room for only one absolute master. Only one side of a coin can lie face up at the same time. Heads or tails must be turned down."

To the front of Malone's mind a train of dispassionate logic had forced a similar conviction. As between himself and this rising sun of finance it was a matter of heads or tails. In consequence, on a certain June afternoon his yacht, *Albatross*, cleared from its slip in the Hudson and stood out toward midstream with her prow pointed toward the bay and the narrows.

It was a sparkling day, warm enough to make the breeze agreeable as it fanned the faces of the loungers on the white deck. J. J. Malone himself was seemingly nothing more formidable than the unexcelled host. As he leaned, bareheaded, on the rail of the forward deck the river breath stirred his iron-gray hair and his changeful eyes were kindly and atwinkle. Yet the party had not been wholly devised for purposes of pleasuring. There were no ladies on board and only four men exclusive of the crew. These four could swing directorates controlling the major interests of Consolidated. For this twenty-four hours of cruising, one had come down from Newport, one had delayed his sailing date to Europe and the third, H. A. Harrison, had left the entertainment of his guests at Haverly Lodge in the hands of others.

Dinner passed with no reference to business. Anecdote and repartee held the right of way, but later when the myriad lights of lower Manhattan glowed out like the fire-spray of a thousand arrested rockets, cigars were lighted and the flanneled quartette settled back into their four deck-chairs. Then it was that Harrison gave the cue with a terse question: "Well, why are we here?" Instantly Malone's face altered.

"To consider a method for clipping Burton's claws," he announced with decisive brevity.

"Why not let sleeping dogs lie?" The inquiry came thoughtfully from Meegan of the Cosmopolitan Bank.

Malone's voice rang like steel on flint. "Gentlemen, this man is a charlatan. As his power grows his menace increases. Consolidated has never brooked disobedience nor insolence. It has been our policy to reward the faithful servant and punish the unfaithful." He glanced around the group, then continued in the manner of one issuing an edict. "Heretofore we have not waited until the refractory child grew too big to punish. We should not do so now."

"For my part," suggested Harrison with a quiet twinkle in his eyes, "I'm just as willing to let someone else take this child out to the woodshed now."

"Hamilton Burton is outgrowing restraint." Malone was snapping out his words with categorical crispness. "Do you realize the perilous scope of his dream? His overvaulting ambition looks to a one-man power of finance; a power vested solely in himself. We are rearing a Frankenstein, gentlemen. To overlook it means our ultimate ruin--and, what is more, a national cataclysm."

"And yet," interposed Harrison quietly, "his power is largely of our making. We took him to our hearts."

J. J. Malone admitted the statement with a grave nod.

"Up to the point where arrogance became a mania, he was a most valuable lieutenant. I select men for efficiency. When they seek to become usurpers, I endeavor to halt them."

The Honorable S. T. Browne, as general counsel for many Consolidated interests, had evolved the theorem that from every statute there is an escape. Now he inquired, "How did he gain his seat in the saddle? Sudden, wasn't it?"

"He came into my office one day only a few years ago," answered the chief baron. "Twice I refused to see him, but he meant to see me--and he did. More than that, he fascinated me. I knew that I was talking with a genius and a man of dauntless mind. Such minds I can use. I used his."

Meegan knocked the ash from his cigar and laughed. "Burton has a certain hypnotic quality of address," he conceded.

"It is not address--it is genius. This man held me with his eye and forced me to listen. He came with no apology and no misgiving. He knew himself for a child of Destiny, and within ten minutes I knew it, too. What is the biggest accomplishment, gentlemen, that stands to the credit of Consolidated in the past ten years?"

"The merging of Inter-ocean Coal and Ore." Meegan gave the response without hesitation, and no one contradicted him.

"That," asserted Malone, "was the wild scheme which Hamilton Burton brought to me as his letter of introduction. I found no flaw in his plan--aside from its stupendous audacity. You ask me why I put him in a position of power. He rode in on his own usefulness--led by his intrinsic self-faith."

"So far as you have gone," suggested Harrison drily, "you have summarized several fairly solid reasons for keeping him with us."

"Quite true. I concede him a Napoleonic caliber and I recognize his Napoleonic effrontery. His conscienceless lust for power has unbalanced him. He seeks to sack the world. He must be stopped."

"So you suggest--?" Browne left his question unfinished save for the interrogation of his lifted brows.

"He sits in seven of our directorates. You know how Consolidated has sought to avoid the appearance of too narrow a domination. You know, too, that we have avoided directors who were obviously pure dummies. For several weeks I have been tracing out the holdings in Coal and Ore stock. Hamilton Burton with his following looms too large. Left to his own devices, he may outgrow control."

Meegan studied his cigar with attentively knit brows before he inquired: "Does Burton assume such proportions in Coal and Ore as to suggest turning the balance of control? Is that what you mean?"

"Not yet." Malone drew from his pocket a small note-book and consulted its pages. "We hold a safe balance in our own hands, barring treachery, but we have let him gain a stronger nucleus than now seems advisable. You gentlemen know that we have always held out the impression that only a small amount of Consolidated stock is offered the general public."

"As we also know," amended Harrison bluntly, "that in fact a large proportion of it is in the hands of the casual investor. Still another fact is sure. Burton's sobriquet of the Great Bear was not gratuitously bestowed. If we read him out of meeting he will bring a panic about our cars."

Malone puffed for a space at his cigar in silence. The quiet drone of the engines came up from below, and the moonlight fell in a broad band of radiance on the foaming ribbon of the wake.

"I have also considered that point," he said at last. "Burton has two cardinal maxims of finance. One is that Securities are usually sold above their intrinsic worth. The other is that Cash alone is an absolutely stable form of property. Acting on these two principles, he is doubtless building to the logical end. Some day he will make another raid--and, if he is allowed to select the day and the conditions, it will be a panic-making raid. If an enemy's attack is inevitable the best defense is offense. There is no wisdom in giving him time to prepare. Every day we stand idle his power grows. We must show enough strength at the next meeting of our stock-holders to reorganize the Coal and Ore directorate."

Harrison rose and walked to the rail. He stood for a moment looking out, then came back and spoke quickly.

"If this is to be done we should let no more time slip by. It's a safe bet that he isn't wasting days."

Malone's fist crashed down on the arm of his chair. He rose, too, and paced backward and forward, talking as he walked.

"Waste time! By heaven, we must waste no minute. We must go after him and bring in his pelt. We must treat him like a wolf prowling around our sheep-folds. There can be no peace for any of us until he is destroyed ... and, damn him, I mean to see that it's done!"

The others watched the broad shoulders of the head baron and the resolute carriage of the head, thrown back as if in challenge. He paused once to relight the cigar which in his vehemence he had let die, and as the match flared they saw that his eyes blazed and his features were set in that wrath which the Street feared.

"By heaven," exclaimed Malone fiercely, "we've got to smash him--damn him!"

CHAPTER XIII

MARY Burton was discovering some things about June. She had often watched lovers leaning silently on a deck-rail, with eyes fixed on a moonlit wake and hands that crept surreptitiously together. She had envied the credulity of these people and turned away with an ache and emptiness in her own heart.

Now at twenty-five she awoke each morning with a smile for the sunlight and a proprietary joy in the blue of the skies and a delight for the roses whose hearts were no younger than her own had become. Bridge-tables and tennis courts saw little of her, because the woods were waiting and Jefferson Edwardes was there to tramp and ride and fish and be companion and guide.

It was most beautiful far back from the oiled roads and trimmed hedges, for here were only woodland voices and languorous forest fragrances. Here, too, hid all those wild flowers that in childhood she had known and fancifully christened--and since forgotten, and here two people with the lilt of this abundant June song in their hearts could leave a few of their years by the roadside and forget them. To Mary Burton it was all a rediscovery and a miracle. He had promised to give her back the message of her hills. He was giving her back the joy of life.

One afternoon she and Jefferson Edwardes were tramping toward a brook where the trout would be flashing like phantom darts, and as he led the way along a narrow trail she followed him with a smile on her lips.

At a sheer twist around the hill's shoulder he stopped and pointed his hand. The view from there was almost county-wide, billowing away across heights and depths to a blue merging of hill and sky.

As she stood by his side her eyes and parted lips spoke her unworded appreciation and the man's gaze came back from the broad picture and dwelt upon her.

"It's strange," she said finally with a vaguely puzzled expression, "that I who was born in just such hills as these should now be realizing their wonder for the first time."

But her companion laughed at her seriousness. "When you knew them first," he reminded her, "you had nothing else with which to compare them. It is one who comes from the north who finds a marvel in the bigness and softness of southern stars. Now you have been away--and have come home, dearest."

She was standing very lancelike and straight by the slender bole of a silver birch. A golden sun flooded richly through the greenery. Overhead was a tunefully unflecked sky and into the shadows crept a richness of furtively underlying color and echoes of color. It was all vivid and beautiful and the girl standing there seemed to dominate its vividness and its beauty. But her eyes were grave, even when a shaft of the radiance struck her delicately blossoming cheeks and played upon the escaping locks with which the breeze played, too.

"Do you know, I suppose in a way I ought to hate you?" she told the man, and he swiftly demanded:

"Hate me? In heaven's name, why?"

"When a woman has been deluded into believing herself a bird of paradise ... and has been content with her feathers, it doesn't precisely help to discover that--" her voice grew self-contemptuous--"that after all she has only lived the life of a Strassburg goose and has been fed to death until she is no earthly good for anything except to be some glutton's delicacy--"

"Strassburg geese don't search their consciences," he smiled. "They are too busy being fed to death. If you had lost your soul I should help you find it--thank God, you don't need my guidance."

"Yet your coming crystallized all the self-accusations that had begun to stir in me. It made me feel my utter emptiness."

"Which only means realizing--that you might have become empty and have not." He came close and bent upon her the eyes whose honesty was so convincing and whose fealty was so clearly writ. In a voice that lost a little of its steadiness he demanded tensely, "Do you hate me?"

Mary Burton stood motionless, almost rigid, but some heart-wave welled up until she felt physically weak yet spiritually stronger than she had ever felt. Her two hands clutched tautly at his shoulders and her eyes gazed into his. Slowly they widened until they had unmasked all their depths and shown what was in her heart. Then as the man's pulses leaped to the elation of what he read there, he heard her shaken whisper inviting him very softly, "Look at me--and answer for yourself. Do I hate you?"

With sudden self-recovery, as he sought to take her in his arms, she slipped aside and after a short space the same voice that had just now been tense rippled into whimsical laughter. "No," she commanded. "It mustn't become a habit." The laugh died and her words and pupils were grave once more. "Why should I lie to you, dear? It's no use trying. I'm absurdly mad about you--but I've doubted my power of really loving so long that we must both be content to put it to the test of time. It's too new to trust. I can't tell how much of it is my own heart and how much is your hypnotism."

"I have come a long way," he said quietly. "I have waited a long while. I can wait longer, if that's the edict, but not as he waits who fears the issue. You are going to love me and marry me."

"I hope so. I pray so." Her answer was vibrantly eager. "I have longed vainly for a day that should make my heart leap beyond control. You brought the day--and if, between us, we can keep it--"

She broke off, and he took both her hands in both of his.

"You are going to marry me," he repeated. "Don't make me wait too long, my sweetheart and comrade. Life is all too short to waste when it can be happy."

"Are we wasting it?" she demanded; then she smiled at him and added: "Thank you, for introducing me to the wonderful originality of being natural. On the whole I don't think I hate you--much."

All that afternoon her eyes held a starry happiness and sometimes they twinkled with a mischievous ripple.

Once she demanded, "Suppose Hamilton were to go broke tomorrow. Stony, flat, hopelessly broke. Would you still want me?" And before he could answer she broke into a merry peal of laughter. "Don't trouble to answer that question," she commanded. "I already know--and I'm fairly contented."

The Duke de Metuan had come and gone back--with his answer, and Paul, too, had left Haverly Lodge. For Paul's return there were two reasons. The music-room which Hamilton had built as a gift to his brother was nearing completion, and the finishing touches demanded personal supervision. As the heart of a high priest turns to his temple, so turned Paul Burton's heart to this spot at this time. It was a temple, but decidedly a pagan temple. Porphyry columns went up from a mosaic floor to a richly encrusted ceiling, and in conception and detail it was lavishly beautiful and perfect. Hamilton had conceived and planned the structure with a very ferocity of tense interest: though to Hamilton a music-room was in itself about as absorbing as a steam laundry.

In the undertaking he saw a monument to a dream and the fulfilment of a promise that one ragged boy had made to another ragged boy standing by a panel of broken fence. Hamilton had never forgotten that moment when first his pent-up ambitions had broken into fiery utterance while his little brother listened with eyes wide and wondering--yet full of faith. Then he had promised Paul an organ in a cathedral of dreams, where the imaginary self which was his greater self might find expression.

This was to be the worthy realization of that boast.

The second reason for the younger Burton's withdrawal from the house party was the departure of Loraine Haswell.

Now, finding himself in town, he had accepted one of those invitations which meant the acknowledgment of his lionizing in Fashion's world of music. Paul had little in common with those struggling men whose passion for violin or piano leads them through poverty and hunger in pursuit of their bays. But to face and stir with his art's hypnosis an audience of the smartest men and women in town, was meat and drink to his soul--was his soul's vanity. Of all his vanities it was the least weak--because the most sincere.

To see faces awaken from ennui and kindle into attentiveness, then soulfulness as he swayed them with the touch of his fingers on the keys was no mean triumph. To draw men out of lolling ease into tense and unconsidered attitudes; to cause women's lips to part and their pupils to grow misty as he carried them with him,

"Through the meadows of the sunset, through the poppies and the wheat,
To the land where the dead dreams go"

--these were his delights. There are meaner pleasures.

But when he had played a little while, the composite pattern of faces always faded and darkened into a blur and he forgot them: forgot himself, forgot everything except the instrument that had become the mouthpiece of his soul. Then he, like his audience, was swept away into an impalpable world where nothing remained save the marvelous cascading

and crushing tides which were the tides of golden sound. At such moments Paul Burton was almost a master.

This evening it was a benefit recital at the Plaza. He did not recall precisely to what worthy cause he was dedicating his gifted services, but that did not matter. He was bowing with a winning and boyish smile on his cameo features. Such fashionables as lingered in town so late as June were there to do homage; and other anonymous human units drawn from the millions followed where the fashionables led.

As Paul Burton looked out over the seated humanity, secretly searching for Loraine Haswell, he became conscious of another face near the front. It was that of a woman, who seemed quite alone and who was simply dressed. Paul wondered why the features held his interest. It was not precisely a beautiful face, but in its gray-green eyes dwelt a distinctive quality and as some thought parted the lips in a smile there came a sudden flooding of light which was better than ordinary beauty. This girl was frankly looking forward to the evening, for her expression mirrored that rapt anticipation which comes only to the eyes of the true music-lover. The small head under its brown hair was modeled as though a sculptor had spent loving care upon it, and Paul Burton thought that she was inwardly purring with the expectation of pleasure. A responsive glow at once awakened in him. He was subtly flattered because he recognized in that attitude of mind a tribute to his art for its own sake.

Then he began, and as the tide of his emotion swelled and lifted him out of himself, individual countenances grew misty--yet, for some reason this face stood out clear and single for a moment or two after the rest had faded.

Afterward he was told that even he had not played so well before.

As he turned from a congratulatory group when the recital was ended, one of the women whom he knew only by reason of her activity in arranging the entertainment, stopped him. "Mr. Burton," she said, "I want you to meet Miss Terroll." It was a general form of introduction and the man turned to bow--and recognized the face that had been the last to fade. The girl gave him a small and well-gloved hand. She smiled, but said nothing, and her sponsor talked on rapidly.

"I was in the midst of a heated suffrage discussion when you began," she declared. "But of course it was forgotten--at once."

"I'm sorry," laughed Paul Burton, "if I broke up a good argument."

"Oh," she assured him with a prepared quotation, "I can always leave off talking, when I hear a master play."

When Paul Burton reached the street most of the private motors had been summoned and dispatched by the starter. He stood for a little while looking up at the stars and breathing deeply the grateful night air. The moon-mist made a shadowy lacework of the trees in the park, and the dark contours of the avenue's mansions were silhouetted beyond the lights of the Savoy and Netherland. The expenditure of so much of his emotional self always left him strangely restless, and made him crave a brief aftermath of solitude. So he sent his car away and turned down the avenue.

But at Fifty-eighth street, under one of the light-clusters, he encountered a slender and solitary figure, and as he approached, he recognized the girl to whom he had so recently been introduced. The pianist had just been thinking of her, pondering why her face had stood out in the mist, when other faces had been swallowed, and why, although her eyes had confessed the delight of anticipation, she had later vouchsafed no word of commendation. Surely he had not played badly tonight and he was accustomed to ready praise. When the older woman who had presented him had spoken of him as a master he had laughed deprecatingly, but his eyes had gone half-questioningly to the girl, as if seeking corroboration there, and the girl had met them with only an impersonal and non-committal smile.

Paul had drunk enough of flattery to feel piqued at its withholding. Now to see the figure of her who had withheld appear there quite unaccompanied, as though rising in response to his meditations, almost startled him. She did not see him until he reached her side and lifted his hat; not even then, for she was looking across the avenue with something of absorption in her manner, until he spoke her name.

Even as he murmured, "Miss Terroll," the inflection of surprise remained in his voice. It was well after ten o'clock and in those circles of society where he was received the system of chaperonage was rigid enough to fail of understanding for the women who dared the streets at night unescorted. He knew ladies who went to their several rostrums to sound the clarion of sex equality and who went at night, but they did not go uncavaliered. And under the lights this slim figure, with its easy, almost boyish independence, seemed very young, almost childish.

She turned, at his greeting, and her eyes must have read his thoughts, for once more they smiled and in the smile was an amused twinkle. This time, though, it was also a smile of the lips, revealing a row of teeth so small and white that they accentuated her seeming of childishness. She must be about twenty-two or twenty-three he thought.

"Mr. Burton," she laughed, "you spoke my name then almost as though I had astonished or startled you. I was scrutinizing the house across the way rather intently, but honestly there was no burglary in my thoughts."

"I'm rather sorry to hear that," he countered with a simulation of disappointment. "I've never burgled--and I had begun to hope you'd initiate me and let me share the adventure." She said nothing for a moment, and he bluntly demanded, "I was wondering what was in your thoughts just then."

Miss Terroll bent forward to look up the avenue before she answered. The 'buses were not running close together at this hour and the lamps of the nearest were still two blocks away.

"If I tell you, will you tell me why you spoke my name so chidingly?"

"It seems on its face a fair bargain." He spoke with a pretendedly grave consideration of the subject. Then added, "Yes, I will."

"I was thinking of music."

"What music?"

"Just music as music. Music as the one art which needs no background because every listening human being supplies one. That is where it succeeds where sculpture, for instance, fails. Music is a sort of panacea."

"Oh!" His monosyllable was a trifle disappointed. With such a cue she might at least have admitted his music into the summary.

The light from the overhead lamps fell in a circle of comparative radiance and he had time to note the charming modeling of her throat and a certain delicate nobility in the curve of her brow, where the soft hair merged with the dark shadowing of her hat brim.

"You haven't carried out your part of the contract yet," she reminded him. "I've told you what, but you haven't told me why."

"I mean to. Are you waiting for some one?"

"I am waiting for a 'bus to take me home."

"Where are you going to let it take you? Where is your home, I mean?"

"The Square," she answered, "and there is the 'bus coming, to gather me in, and you still haven't told me why I shocked your voice into that undernote of astonishment."

Paul Burton smiled, and did not yet enlighten her. Instead he went on stubbornly questioning. "The Square does not mean Madison or Union. I have deductive genius enough to infer that, because they're not places of homes. Is it Gramercy or Washington?"

The girl flashed her smile on him again and replied lightly.

"One enters my square under a marble arch and we who live there always think of it as the Square."

"But Washington square is a long way," he remonstrated. "It's a far journey to take alone."

The girl had stepped out beyond the curb and signaled, then as the 'bus drew over and came to a stop, she nodded to the man as she started up the stair to the roof. "Good-night, Mr. Burton," she called over her shoulder. "You are a good custodian of secrets."

But the musician was climbing up after her and when she seated herself at the front he took his place beside her. "I am going to answer all questions put to me on the way down to the Square," he announced.

"But you have just complained that it's a far journey."

"I beg your pardon. I said it was a far journey to take alone."

She turned in her seat and looked at him. The lips and brow were reserved, even grave, but in the green-gray eyes danced a truant twinkle. As the heavy vehicle rumbled and lurched along the way where the asphalt fell into shadow she became a graceful silhouette of slenderness, but as they passed through the brighter zones about the great opals swung from the lamp pillars, the dimpled little chin and small nose revealed themselves in a sort of baffling warfare of sauciness and dignity. Paul knew that there were well-held frontiers of reserve and self-containment in this woman's nature, but that back of it lay an alluring playground of mischief.

"And yet we are told," she was saying in a low voice, whose music suddenly impressed the musician, "that--

'Down to Gehenna or up to the throne,
He travels the fastest, who travels alone.'"

"Just at the moment we are not bound for either of those places," he assured her. "We are going to the Square."

"Why was it?" she demanded suddenly. For a few minutes they had been silent, and Paul had revised his estimate. She could hardly be as old as twenty two. Perhaps she might be twenty.

"Really you are exaggerating," he laughed. "I was neither astonished nor shocked. I was only surprised, and when I tell you why I shall no longer be a man of mystery, consequently I shall no longer be a man of interest."

"But my curiosity will be satisfied. Isn't that quite as important?"

He shook his head. His own curiosity was far from satisfied. He was still wondering why she had no kind word to say for his music.

"I was just surprised to find you there--alone," he said at last.

"Oh!"

Until the bus swung into view of the Metropolitan tower neither of them spoke, and then the man turned to look at his companion and found her smiling to herself. It struck him that if she would only laugh aloud, it would be worth hearing. But of that, at that moment, he said nothing.

"Won't you share the joke with me?" he smiled, and she said:

"I was just thinking of your solicitude about my being alone on Fifth avenue, after all the formidable places where I've been alone--in one-night stands."

"One-night stands?" he repeated vaguely after her and she replied only with a matter-of-fact nod, then, for his further enlightenment:

"You see I am an actress and most of my work has been on the road."

Paul Burton's face did not succeed in masking his surprise at the announcement.

"Have I shocked you again?" she demurely inquired.

"Shocked me, no." He disavowed with an almost confused haste. "I suppose I was surprised because the few actresses I have known have all been so unlike you."

"You mean," she amplified, "because I don't make up for the street?"

"I shouldn't have said that," he laughed, then added: "Now if you had told me you were playing truant from a young ladies' seminary, I would have found it quite natural. I saw you out front just before I began playing. Somehow the simple directness of your expression--I hoped it was anticipation--didn't seem to me characteristic of the stage. I fancied that professional people were usually chary of enthusiasm."

"There are at least several sorts of stage people, and they're not all gutter-children," she answered. "And then I haven't always been an actress. It was thrust upon me--by necessity."

"When I play," the man assured her, "the faces out front always grow vague to me. Tonight I saw yours when the others had gone. Then I lost yours, too. I hope I didn't disappoint you."

She shook her head. "No," she said, but to the simple negative she added nothing affirmative.

Paul Burton remained silent, half-piqued, and she, divining his thought, smiled quietly to herself at his petulance, but finally she spoke slowly and gravely: "You are an artist and until tonight you didn't know of my existence. Anything I might say would mean little to you."

"Even," he impulsively demanded, "if it came from the last face that faded?"

"If that is true," she responded, "I don't need to say anything, do I?"

To Paul's subtly attuned nature many things came in intuitive impressions. Now he was keenly interested because this woman whom he had met that night had told him only one thing about herself, that she belonged to a world of

which, in the personal sense, his world touched only the least creditable segments. He felt that she would not, without a much riper acquaintanceship, tell him anything more. Yet he felt with conviction that her refinement was not only innate and true, but that of an aristocrat; that her mind was not only quick, but cultivated. As though dropping thoughtlessly into a more musical tongue he spoke next in French, and she replied in that tongue as unconsciously as though she had not noticed his change of language. But though he questioned persistently and skilfully until the 'bus rolled under the arch, he drew no further information from her as to herself, save that at present she was unemployed, and that her days were filled with that most cheerless of tasks, calling on managers.

He gathered that the distinguishing difference between triumph and struggle on the stage was that the managers sent for the triumphant and the struggling called uninvited.

As Paul helped Miss Terroll out of the 'bus and walked at her side the short distance between the terminal of its route and the south side of the Square he said abruptly:

"Some day I want you to do something for me."

"What?"

"To laugh aloud. I suppose you sometimes do laugh aloud, don't you?"

Her response was to break unconsciously into a peal of mirth that held in it a tinkle of soft music and spontaneity.

"I can be provoked," she admitted and to that confession she added the inquiry, "Why do you want to hear me laugh?"

"I did want to hear you laugh because some instinct told me there would be music in it," he assured her. "Now I do want to hear you laugh again, and often, because I know it."

When he had said good-night at her door and had walked across to the Brevoort cab-stand at Eighth street, he took a taxi'. During the drive home he thought only once of Loraine Haswell. "I must see more of Miss Terroll," he informed himself. "She is decidedly interesting."

Hamilton Burton shoved back a mass of papers and smiled across his desk at his secretary.

"Carl, do you chance to recall what General Forrest of the late Confederate States of America had to say on the subject of strategy?" Bristoll stretched his arms above his head and leaned back in his chair, grateful for a moment of relaxation after two hours of application.

"I believe he reduced military science to the simple proposition of 'gettin' thar fust with the most men,' didn't he?"

"That was his correct formula--and finance has its points of similarity."

"Is the comment general, or has it a specific bearing?"

"Quite specific. Do you remember my prophecy a short while back? I reminded you that the coin of big business bore on one face the image and superscription of Caesar Augustus Malone--and on the reverse my own poor stamp."

The secretary nodded.

"The time, dear boy, is at hand when one side or the other must be turned down."

"What has happened?" The younger man's voice was tinged with alarm. This child of Destiny might be immune from fear, but those who stood near his person could not always accept without question the talisman of his limitless self-faith. Malone's might was theoretically invincible. Hamilton recognized the undernote of apprehension with a laugh of frank amusement; a laugh which brought to his eyes their most winning sparkle.

"The august over-lord of all the robber barons regards our reign as tributary to his own. He fancies that our loyal respect is thinly spread. We make too little obeisance. Too rarely we 'crook the pregnant hinges of the knee.' Therefore we must be crushed--if possible."

"You mean--"

"I mean that it is in the mind of this generalissimo, to call me before his staff and 'break' me in full view of his halted ranks."

The cheerful grin on the face of the prospective victim was so infectious and reassuring that his secretary laughed with revitalized confidence.

"But how did you learn of this conspiracy, sir?" he demanded.

"The throne which lacks its *cabinet noir*, Carl, is a very precarious one to sit upon." The "Great Bear" spoke casually. "Our secret service is fairly satisfactory. Also, we have a brain which, at times, prognosticates."

"There have been new developments, then?"

Hamilton Burton shrugged his shoulders.

"The stock-holders' meeting of Coal and Ore isn't far distant. After it comes the annual election of officers. I fancy Malone may know of a man who might grace the directorate with a more deferential humility than I show--when he speaks Jove-like from the head of the table."

"To be ousted from that board would mean to wear the brand of defeat."

"If Mr. Malone wants to put some one else in my place he can do it--the chair I occupy faces the window. Sometimes the glare hurts my eyes."

Carl Bristoll thought he knew his chief. Such docile acceptance of reduction to the ranks astounded him and his blank amazement stamped itself on his face. When the elder man had enjoyed it for the space of a long silence he rose suddenly and his voice rang out like a command for a bayonet charge:

"Yes, Malone can have my chair. I mean to take his--at the head of the table."

The secretary started violently. He could never quite accustom himself to the dauntless fashion with which his chief essayed the impossible--and accomplished it. Hamilton Burton's fist came down savagely on the mahogany. The smiling features of a moment ago had vanished and Bristoll was looking up into eyes that rained immeasurable wrath.

"They hate me, because they fear me!" The voice was not loud, but it was terrific in its intensity of anger. "By the Almighty God in heaven, I mean to give them cause to hate me. I mean to crush them to a pulp until nothing remains except the stench of their unmourned memory!" ... Once more the timbre changed and with startling abruptness became quietly declarative.

"This morning, I received a confidential note from Carton."

"The secretary of Coal and Ore?"

"The same. I put him where he is--he's a valuable man--and incidentally a member of my secret service. Malone is calling in all the proxies he can control; he and his myrmidons. He has not taken me into his confidence. How would you construe that?"

"As you do. He means to oust you."

Burton nodded, then a naive smile twinkled in his eyes. "What he is now beginning to do, I went to work on ten minutes after he left my office last spring. Many transactions, some of them of huge proportions, which you did not understand, have since been completed in preparation for this moment. On the floor of the Exchange my brokers have been ostentatiously idle, but others, not known to act for me, have been buying Coal and Ore. They have pretty well gathered in the floating supply."

"Hasn't that been reported to Malone?"

The financier shook his head. "Trading of that character is difficult to trace and is usually presumed to be marginal trading. To disarm possible suspicion my recognized brokers have sold large blocks of Coal and Ore--to my unrecognized brokers. I seem to have been unloading--while I was doing the reverse. When the psychological moment comes, there will be a surprise--and a raid upon the control."

"Then you are ready for the issue."

"No, not quite." Burton rose and took a turn or two across the floor. He stopped before a small painting and spoke irrelevantly. "I always liked Corot. The man could paint, Carl. He understood values." After this art criticism he returned to the desk and sat down again. "No, I'm not ready yet. I've done all that I could do by quiet preparation. The issue now narrows to the hair balance which makes all fights crucial--and interesting. There's a member of the state senate who holds a block I need, and there are two banks in town that hold others. When I have that stock I shall be master of the situation--and of Consolidated--and Malone must take his orders from me."

"And if you fail to get it?"

"I would still be plowing rocks and milking cows, Carl, if I acknowledged the possibility of failing in what I resolve on."

"Yet they may refuse to sell."

Hamilton Burton smiled. "That would be regrettable," he said, and his voice was full of sympathetic softness. "Because in that event an elderly and respected member of the senate will have to reside for a time at Sing Sing and a couple of widely trusted banks will go to the wall."

CHAPTER XIV

FROM the Plaza upward, the blank stare of the avenue was awakening into renewed signs of habitation. Burglar-proof doors had come down and boarded windows had yielded to curtained sashes. Already in the park the trees were turning. Banners of crimson, yellow and burgundy flaunted where the foliage had been sunburned and heat-corroded. The walks and Mall had for scorching weeks been a breathing refuge, and the sheep-pasture a sleeping place, for shirt-sleeved men who panted like dogs. Haggard women and sunken-cheeked children--all heat-fagged and exhausted--had held possession; but now the bridle-path echoed to hoof-beats, and smartly togged equestrians galloped there, while along the driveways droned a purr of motors.

The sun, which had assaulted, blighted and killed, now caressed a revived city, for autumn had come with her clarifying elixirs and her fever-cooling frosts.

Shop windows, freshly decked, tempted the passerby with foretastes of the season's styles in gowns and hats and furs. All was color and sparkle and activity. Soft tones awoke at sunset on old and seasoned walls. Gilt street signs blazed and shaft-like buildings stood out in splintered strips of a dozen hues against skies that were unsullied turquoise.

In the veins of Hamilton Burton, as he motored up-town, a heady exhilaration mounted like wine. As his car bowled up the avenue he watched the human mosaic, and the drive seemed a progress through Bagdad. He was finding it all the city of his dreams:

"--a city blazoned like a missal book,
Black with oaken gables, carven and enscrolled.
Every street a colored page: every sign a hieroglyph,
Dusky with enchantments: a city paved with gold."

Then as he entered his own house he remembered. Tonight he must go to the opera and the prospect bored him. To Paul, of course, it was as wine to the drunkard, but to Hamilton it meant a tedious evening. It was in a way a duty and one of his few concessions to Society's requirements. Had it not been written of another great figure, "the Emperor sat in his box that night?" He would leave early and later in the evening he could console himself with a matter of greater importance.

Yet when he arrived at the Metropolitan he forgot to be bored--until the overture ended, and Music was enthroned in the place of Fashion.

Here at the opera each moment, so long as the house-lights blazed, brought its own tribute of flattery to the Titan of the Street. The men and women from whom these tributes came were the men and women whom the world envied, and cursed--and worshiped. Hamilton Burton realized, as he passed easily from box to box, chatting with this multi-millionaire and that jewelled lady, that no single figure was more often signaled out by pointing and envious fingers than his own. When he handed Mary out of her limousine the street policeman had made the passage clear before him. Ushers had kowtowed and the heads of fashionable women had nodded and smiled. His way had been a march of triumph. To Hamilton Burton it was all like the sniffing of frankincense and myrrh. His inner emotions were those of a great tiger, purring like a house-cat.

That at his back, when he had passed on, these immaculately clad gentlemen muttered derogatory oaths only flattered him further; their hate, too, was a tribute to his power.

He came into Society's world as a monarch walks among the proletariat, to receive homage and return to places where a monarch has better things to do.

But at last the overture ended and the curtain rose. The opera had begun.

For Paul the evening was just beginning, but for Hamilton it was done. He stifled a yawn and rose from his seat, effecting his escape unobserved from the box. From that point on his mind shook off the lethargy of the incensed atmosphere and became dynamic. He looked at his watch and found that his next appointment gave him an hour's leisure.

To his chauffeur he said, "Drive me to my mother's house."

Hannah Burton would be the only member of the household at home and with her nephew would spend this leisure hour. He knew she would be there because she was rarely elsewhere. The man who flashed the searchlight of his thought into so many places at such broad angles smiled as he thought of his Aunt Hannah, but it was a tender smile.

He had transplanted and remodeled his family--but Aunt Hannah he had been powerless to alter.

The room where she received him was an anomalous hermitage, for in spite of the generous comfort it reflected, there broke out here and there jarring notes from many survivals of the old order; things from which she refused to be parted. Upon a mantel over which hung a Gobelin tapestry stood a tin alarm clock. It was an old companion which had once shrilly announced that it was time to drag her rheumatic bones from bed and take up her daily round of dusting and sweeping. Among carefully chosen paintings a screaming chromo issued by the Middle Fork general store proclaimed the superior quality of its staple and fancy groceries, hardware, queensware and feed.

The old lady herself, though silk-gowned, wore her white hair drawn severely back over parchment temples, as though repudiating the pomps and vanities of this wicked world.

It was Ham's time-honored custom to tease his aunt, and while she snorted and sniffed, she enjoyed it, for whatever she thought of a Babylonian life, she secretly worshiped this brilliant young nephew who so well fitted its stress and turmoil.

"Were you down-stairs at dinner tonight, flirting with the grand dukes and big-wigs?" he demanded as he kissed her pale cheek.

"As if you didn't know," she austere rebuked, "that, when company comes, I always have supper right here in my own room."

It would have been a surrender of principle for Hannah Burton to call "company" guests, or the evening meal "dinner."

"There were some very smart people down-stairs, I'm told," the man heckled with twinkling eyes. "Divorcees in numbers and affinities galore."

The old lady shuddered.

"Ham, I wish you wouldn't run on in that ungodly fashion. I'm sure it's no laughing matter. I pray for you day and night, but when a body's blinded by wealth and imagining vain things they're in mortal danger."

Her nephew's face softened. "As long as you're praying for me, Aunt Hannah," he assured her, "I still have a fighting chance."

"Ham," she said suddenly with a shadow of deep anxiety in her eyes, "ain't your father playing cards more than's good for him? I've worried considerable about that here of late. He used to read his Scriptures regular. Now he don't do it. Instead he gambles."

"Father only plays in amiable little games, for the sake of charity, Aunt Hannah." Hamilton smiled indulgently as he enlightened her. "You could hardly call it gambling. In gambling there is an element of chance. Father merely contributes."

The old lady shook her head. "This town ain't much different from Tyre and Sidon and Babylon, so far as I can see," she mournfully asserted.

"They were said to be live towns in their day," he admitted.

Then for the rest of his spare hour he chatted with her and teased her solemnity into laughter, and before he left, because she asked it and complained that her eyes were poor, he read to her a chapter from the New Testament and kissed her good-night. Ten minutes later he was in his own library and was directing that two gentlemen, whom he was expecting, be ushered there to talk business.

The two were alike only in that each had a versatile and executive brain. One was elderly and stout, and, though two decades of established success had polished his original crudity into a certain dignity, there survived in his eyes the darting shiftiness of glance that had settled there in days when his one asset was an almost diabolical cleverness as a criminal lawyer.

An old trick of badgering witnesses with a brow-beating stare from half-closed lids clung unpleasantly to him, discounting his acquired distinction of bearing. This was Isaac Ruferton, of the firm of Ruferton and Willow. From criminal lawyer to corporation-scourge and from corporation-scourge to corporation counsel are logical stages of development. From clients who need, and can pay for, a mind of unusual resource, as formerly from vagabond's in police-court cages, he earned what he was paid.

The second visitor was younger. Mr. Tarring was also a specialist in ideas and from his confidence of bearing one

seemed to derive a snap of electric energy. In many ways Hamilton Burton found him serviceable and on the smaller scale of his delegated functions he operated as Hamilton himself did along the broader front; with dash, determination and the belief that nothing is impossible.

"Gentlemen," began Burton crisply, when the three were seated, "I sent for you this evening to outline a simple matter--but one calling for a nicety of execution. It can neither afford delay nor premature undertaking. It must be done at its own instant. When the stock-holders' meeting of Coal and Ore is called to order I must be in a position to assume control."

Tarring leaned forward in his chair and fixed his gaze on a bronze statuette. This casual announcement meant nothing less than a making over of a map: the map of High Finance. Ruferton was never surprised. He twirled his shell-rimmed glasses at the end of their broad tape and nodded. "And you find yourself at this juncture short of just the requisite balance--though you know where it is held?" Mr. Ruferton always made a point of anticipating his client's next statement--if possible. It was a small thing, but at times valuable. It indicated that he was keeping not only abreast, but a step ahead of what was being told him. Hamilton smiled.

"I still need a block held by Henry of the Deposit Savings and a block held by Fairley of the Metallic National. These gentlemen think they won't turn loose. To see that they do so is Tarring's work. It must be accomplished by tomorrow evening."

Tarring said nothing. Under his imperturbable guise he found himself stunned.

Burton turned to the attorney. "You know G. K. Hendricks?"

Mr. Ruferton's answer followed the question with no margin of a pause. "State senator for three terms. At present candidate for the appellate bench; Tammany's choice. Was very valuable when the charter of Coal and Ore was before the assembly. Has increased his stock-holdings since he acquired his first block as--er--the reward of merit."

For an instant Hamilton Burton eyed the lawyer keenly.

"I must also have his proxy by tomorrow evening. That, Ruferton, is your work."

"Then you didn't know that Hendricks is up-state? He's out at his farm on a narrow-gage branch that runs a train a day from Barry Spa. You are cutting it fine, Mr. Burton. Too fine, perhaps."

The announcement brought to the eyes of the planning strategist a nonplused shadow, but it lingered briefly.

"I have already told you that the moment had to be precisely timed. Hendricks might run to Malone if given a margin of leisure. You can go home and change your evening-clothes. Meantime I shall arrange for a special train. Your instructions are to get that stock or the proxy. If you can't handle him bring him to me; have him in this room at this hour tomorrow evening."

Mr. Isaac Ruferton rose from his chair, and stood looking into the face of his employer as though searching for some indication of incipient lunacy. What he read was inflexible command.

"Mr. Burton," he said slowly, "I'm where I am in life because I have been willing to undertake various things at various times. Other men would have shied at some of them, and even I have my limits. Will you suggest to me how I am, within twenty-four hours, to travel twenty hours by rail, and compel an unwilling man to deliver, merely because you order it, stock which he has no wish to sell?"

Burton's answer rose to anger as he spoke. "If you can't trade with him--and I have given you *carte blanche*--I have already told you to bring him here. I'll do the rest."

"In God's name, how? Can I drag him out of his own house and load him like a trussed pig in a railway car?"

"The details are up to you. You are supposed to be a clever lawyer. The man is in a political campaign and you know enough of his record to give weight to your suggestions. You say he doesn't want to sell--make him want to! My plans are rather too large to admit of 'buts' and 'ifs.' Presumably I employ men who can override them."

Ruferton continued to stare blankly. "But--surely--"

Hamilton had already turned to Tarring and he wheeled with a snap in his voice.

"Ruferton," he exclaimed, "in a moment more you will irritate me. I said get his Coal and Ore, or get him. I don't give a damn how you do it. Tell him, if you like that all Tammany can't boost him on to the appellate bench if I go after him. If you prefer, gag him and drag him here. Do what you like--except waste time by gaping at me. Succeed and name your

reward. Fail and--" Hamilton Burton shrugged his shoulders.

Slowly a light crept into the resourceful eyes of Mr. Ruferton, driving out the vacancy. The matter by its very desperateness began to appeal to him, and already a formula of campaign was shaping itself in his constructive mind. This extraordinary man's hypnotic dominance of personality had carried other audacious days and now it swept the lawyer with its tide of confidence. Mr. Ruferton became at once the man who recognizes the value of seconds and minutes. "I will be here tomorrow evening at this hour," he categorically announced. "And I shall bring with me a proxy or a senator--or his remains. Kindly arrange for my train. I go direct to the Grand Central."

Hamilton Burton smiled at the door through which his emissary had departed.

"He made as much furore about it as though I had required him to do something really difficult," he commented to the lieutenant who still awaited his orders. "Now for your part.... The Metallic National and the Deposit Savings." Between sentences he picked up the desk-telephone and called a private number.

"I want to talk to Mr. Carter.... Not at home! Where is he?... Doesn't want to be disturbed--he's got to be.... Yes, this is Hamilton Burton.... At the opera, you say? Thank you."

The snap of the receiver under his finger was abrupt and decisive as he again called central, and while he waited he talked to Tarring.

"What funds have we in those banks?... Hello! I want Bryant 1146, yes, the Metropolitan Opera.... Hello! Please have Mr. Carter brought from his box to the 'phone. This is Hamilton Burton, talking ... a matter that can't wait.... Tarring, I must have the stock those banks hold. You must have them here tomorrow night.... Hello, is that you Carter? I need a special train for Barry Spa in thirty minutes, and another to meet it there for Lake Mosoc."

There was a moment's silence, then Burton's voice came with violent explosiveness.

"Impossible? It seems to me that every man I talk to prates vacantly about impossibilities. Damn it, when I need a train I need a train.... You understand me, don't you, Carter?"

Again there was the interruption of the voice at the further end. As Burton listened his eyes kindled afresh under blackly drawn brows, but when he spoke it was in a clear and cold voice, more unpleasant to hear than a tirade of passion.

"To hell with explanations, Carter! I want action. Do I get my train? You are burning time.... Kindly listen because I mean this to the last syllable.... Unless you can achieve this highly impossible matter of accommodation--" suddenly the voice leaped to a higher scale and shot out its ultimatum like canister--"I will throw you out of the presidency and the damned road-bed into the river and the shops into the junk heap.... All right, please hurry." He clapped down the receiver, then resumed his second thread of thought as though there had been no interruption.

"I want those bankers here. That is your job, Tarring. They need know only that it is of vital importance and that our meeting must be attended with the strictest confidence. Intimate that my object is the averting of ruinous runs which must follow unless we stop them--and worse disasters."

Tarring rose. His task, as compared with the other he had seen assigned, appeared easy. "Shall I come with them?" he inquired.

Burton nodded. "You are a notary. It may be necessary for you to take acknowledgments."

CHAPTER XV

WHEN the two emissaries had left the library Hamilton Burton sat before his hearth and shook loose the reins of imagination. He burned driftwood in this room and as his eyes dwelt on the shooting tongues of blue flame that licked around the logs his dreams absorbed him. Yamuro, his Japanese valet, slipped in to see if his master required him—but his footfall was noiseless, and when he had tiptoed close enough to study the face, he departed without speaking. The lips in the yellow face parted in a grin that bared a spread of strong, white teeth. The eyes between high cheekbones glistened in dark slits and in his throat, too low to be heard, a little grunt voiced Yamuro's fanatical admiration. Had Hamilton Burton been an emperor in the field Yamuro would have asked no greater privilege than to interpose his body between his idolized master and all danger. Such was the power of this wholly selfish but dominant personality. Outside the Oriental chuckled to himself, "No worry.... Him got great thoughts."

Yet Hamilton was after all only planning an entertainment. When he had captured the control of Coal and Ore he would stand within grasping distance of his ideal of one-man power. He would have rocked the temple of money and snatched out of Malone's teeth Consolidated's marrow bone. That would be a time for celebration. It would be vastly amusing to shake the hands of the vanquished and see them bite back the curses that were welling up from their hearts. While seeming only the host he would in reality be the victor—exactng tribute.

That his victory depended on undertakings yet to be accomplished and beset with gigantic hazards did not disquiet him. Over him shone his Star!

His reverie snapped like a punctured balloon at the sound of the door-bell and when Harrow ushered in his father, Hamilton rose with a smile of welcome on his lips.

The elder Burton entered with a heightened flush on his full cheeks and the son for just an instant studied him with a shrewd appraisement. A man who has, by the custom of decades, spent each day from sunrise to sunset at hard labor cannot find himself idle without seeking an outlet of some description.

If Tom Burton were to decay here in inactivity, he might as well decay genially, taking his pleasure by the way. He was doing it. Like a gentleman and an officer he tippled the evenings out. Rarely was he drunk beyond a genteel limitation—and after an advanced hour he was rarely less so. In slow and mellow fashion he was ripening into slothful and comfortable atrophy. His well-shaven face was beginning to reveal those small discolored spots that are the subtle brands of Bacchus. Under the eyes that had once been like the eyes of a hawk, small and puffy sacks were discernible.

"Well, damn it," Hamilton exculpated to himself, "it was a long time before he had any fun." Then aloud he inquired, "Whose coffers did you fill this evening?"

Tom Burton straightened up a shade pompously.

"I think my game is—er—on a par with that of others—but luck can hardly be controlled."

"The question is," suggested the son, "whether you enjoyed yourself."

"Reasonably well, thank you." The elder man looked about the room and spoke complainingly. "I don't see any whiskey and soda about. Will you please ring for some, Hamilton? I'm thirsty."

"It's there on the side-table." Hamilton followed the other with his eyes and noted the greedy unsteadiness of the fingers that grasped the decanter.

"Do you think you need that drink, father?" he inquired.

The elder man glanced up while the liquor spilled out of the poised bottle—and missed the glass. "Why not?" he demanded. "It's about time for a nightcap. I haven't had anything to speak of this evening."

Hamilton nodded with a shrug, but his brows drew themselves in a pained wrinkle. He would not willingly admit doubt of his father's truthfulness, yet the statement lacked all quality of conviction.

The son did not reflect that of the dry rot in old Tom's soul this deception was a typical symptom. He knew that in the old days Tom Burton's word had been a synonym for inflexible honesty; that it was as good as collateral at the bank.

Then, sitting at ease, the well-groomed old gentleman held his glass before him and gazed at the colors which the firelight wakened in its amber contents. His face wore the contentment of one whose mood has been artificially mellowed and whose thoughts are more glowing than reliable. He cleared his throat and began to speak importantly.

"My boy, a great idea has come to me--a splendid conception, I may say. I have for all these years been of very little service to you, but I now see the way to make amends ... to, as I might say, become an asset rather than a liability--a sharer in your activities."

Hamilton Burton was standing by the table, studying the face of his father, and at the words his eyes darkened. His question was by no means freighted with pleasure or expectancy as he coolly inquired, "Indeed?"

Tom Burton nodded with much gravity.

"Yes. The other day you were relating to me some matters of business which were quite--er--interesting. I have since given them mature thought and I find that I have evolved a method by which you may, with my suggestions, even improve on your original plan of procedure."

"Stop!" The son wheeled and faced the elder man with a face grown suddenly wrathful. As Tom Burton looked up in surprise, Hamilton went on rapidly and dictatorially. "I never quarrel with my family. It is my pleasure to regard them first in all things, but one thing I will not permit even from them. It is the first time it has ever become necessary to say this to you, sir. I hope it will be the last."

"Why, what's the matter, my son? I was only about to suggest that--"

"Well, don't do it. The one thing I will not permit is business interference. I need no collaborator. Once--just once Paul made that same mistake. He presumed to offer a suggestion, Paul--who couldn't figure compound interest--offered me, Hamilton Burton, a financial suggestion! I told him then as I tell you now that any human hand which sticks itself into my affairs will be promptly broken off at the wrist--no matter whose hand it is. That is the one possible thing that could drive me to unkindness to any one of my own blood. In that I am unshakable. I will have no interference. I am the one financier in this family, and I will submit to no trespassing upon my own field of empire. Let's have that plainly understood."

He ended, and Tom Burton gazed dumbfounded at the anger which was slowly dying out of his son's pupils and which had rung through his son's words.

"You astonish me," he said slowly. "I had no idea of trespass--only of assistance."

"Thank you. I have never yet felt the need of any man's assistance. In my own jurisdiction, I admit no peers. I am sorry you forced me to speak so strongly, but candor is best. Until I ask it no human being must volunteer advice or criticism. Go on and play cards and amuse yourself and spend what you like in doing it--but don't annoy me by trying to make money. I won't have it. No--leave that whiskey alone--" He peremptorily stretched out his hand, as his father reached again for the decanter. "You've had enough for this evening. In another moment you will be tendering additional useless information."

Again the bell rang, and in the library door he saw Mary Burton, radiant in evening-dress, and the ermine of a long opera-cloak. Her smile was as luminous as sunshine. Behind her--it suddenly struck Hamilton that the sight of that particular face across her shoulder was becoming a chronic accompaniment--stood Jefferson Edwardes.

Both of them were laughing--with a note of mutual understanding.

"Mary," announced her brother, "I want to have a dinner and a dance next week. I want it to be the most memorable affair of the season. Are you in for it?"

She looked at him with sudden amazement, and then her merriment broke out in a series of silvery peals. She turned to Edwardes and repeated in a mockery of awed surprise.

"He wants to have a dance! Do my ears deceive me? Hamilton whom we can't drag to a party with a truant officer wants a dance."

Edwardes smilingly lifted the cloak from her shoulders and held out his hand. "Good-night. Try to get me an invitation," he begged. "Mr. Burton, can't I drop you at your house?"

"If you don't mind." The elderly gentleman rose and made his way toward the hall, with a step that wavered from the line. When they had gone, Hamilton accompanied his sister to the stairs, with an arm about her waist.

"Mary," he suggested, "a question has just occurred to me. What has become of your duke?"

She turned on the landing and laughed.

"When I came back from abroad, you begged me to rid myself of foreign affectations," she announced. "He was one

of them and I took your advice."

"I only begged you to drop your affectations of speech. What I called your pidgin English," he assured her. "I didn't seek to hamper your young affectations."

"Then I will reply to your question in very colloquial American," she retorted. "As to the duke--I tied a can to him." She turned and ran lightly up the stairs.

Paul had sat through the opera that evening with his customary intensity of interest--but the chatter in the box had irritated him. He had been, of late, seeing a great deal of Loraine Haswell, and he thought she at least might have sympathized with his mood and refrained from disconcerting small talk. Their intimacy had so ripened that she should have understood how the things he had to say in their *tete-a-tetes* could not be uttered in company. So when she invited him to join her supper-party he declined with a poor grace.

Paul Burton took the opera seriously, almost religiously, and as he strolled in the foyer during an *entr'acte*, his annoyance grew. Was there no place where one could enjoy the art of fellow-artists without having one's spirit jarred out of all receptiveness?

Then he remembered the high perches of the less-fashionable devotees. He had never been up there, but he had heard that the occupants of these upper galleries frowned on noise and even refrained from applause, drinking in the music as though it were too sacred a thing to treat as a mere evening's entertainment. Following a momentary whim, he went out to the box-office and bought a fresh ticket. Holding it in his hand, he mounted above the *parterre* boxes and the grand-tier boxes, to the highest and cheapest of the galleries where silence and an almost awed concentration reigned. And there, when the lights came on again, he saw a slender figure in a chair near him, leaning forward with her chin resting on her hand, in an absolute fervor of interest. It was Miss Terroll and again she was alone. Once more she impressed him as someone purring with pleasure, and when the performance ended he found himself on the sidewalk whimsically waiting for her to come down from her dollar seat, among the gallery gods.

When he caught sight of her, she was slipping as quietly and unobtrusively through the crowds of jewelled and fur-wrapped women and men in evening-dress as though she were a mouse vanishing from a hall of banqueting, to which she had surreptitiously crept for her crumb. She did not look at the people about her. She did not seem to see them, for her eyes were still languorous with memories of Tristan and Isolde. As Paul touched her arm, she started and he hastened to say: "My car is here. Won't you let me drive you down-town?"

She let him lead her to his machine and lay back dreamily against the cushions, as they shot down the avenue between twin threads of electric opals.

For a while they talked of the opera, of the music and the voices, and the musician found himself expanding with a warmth of appreciative contentment, because he had a companion whose understanding and enthusiasm kept step with his own, and a step like that of a classic dance, attuned to harmonies.

He found himself often coming with a sort of start to the realization of a discovery under whose influence he tingled. Theoretically he knew that in this city, in whose varying meeting places of extremes the unexpected was to be expected, one should never be astonished. He knew there were artists who shunned Bohemia, and once he had met a barber whose enthusiasms were all for cuneiform inscriptions. He had heard in a club of a hobo whose nails were clean, whose address was elegant and who had confounded surgeons on surgery, artists on art, poets on verse and theologues on theology. He knew that the circles which had soothed his artistic snobbery with an admiration as grateful as soft fingers on a cat's back held no letters patent on charm or cultivation and yet his own mind had catalogued women of the stage, off-stage, under a general heading, in some way associated with cabaret places and false gaiety. Here was one who called upon him to discard preconceived ideas and begin anew. On every topic he broached he encountered intelligent discussion and untrammelled originality of thought. In the back of his brain lurked the feeling that when he had broached all the topics upon which he could talk, he would still have touched on only a part of those at her command.

But between these moments of surprise were others of restful delight when she made him forget everything except that he was talking with a charming woman who saw in the opera a pleasure equal to his own.

And though he did not know it, Marcia Terroll, even this soon, saw in him a nature full of tuneful sweetness, but very weak, and realized that he was an instrument upon which a strong hand could play to an end of harmony or discord--an instrument upon which his great brother had already played, and which his great brother did not in the

least comprehend. Paul's frequent allusions, tinged with hero-worship, had given her that understanding.

"I saw you in your box," she told him with a smile.

"And I saw you in yours," he laughed back at her.

The girl raised her brows, and he explained. "I ran away from the chatterboxes and came up to your gallery." They had almost reached the arch when he earnestly asked: "I wonder if you will go to the opera with me some evening? It would be wonderful to have someone who really cared for it."

Once more she laughed, but this time it was rather seriously. "We inhabit rather different worlds, you and I."

"I want you to let me be an explorer into yours--and your guide into mine," he declared. After a moment's hesitation she gravely answered: "It might not hurt you to know something of my world after all. It's rather humanizing for an artist to free himself from a single environment. It is possible to suffocate on incense."

Paul Burton smiled. "But you know," he said, "until I was twelve I never wore a pair of trousers that hadn't been bequeathed to me by my older brother--and when they reached me they were always liberally patched."

She was alighting from his car and her smile flashed on him as she held out a small, white-gloved hand. "And I," she retorted, "at that age was being tricked out in Paris finery. Time brings changes, doesn't it?" It was the first flash of self-revelation she had given him. But after that Paul Burton saw Marcia Terroll more than occasionally, and admitted to himself an interest which he did not seek to analyze.



J. J. Malone returned from the opera that evening for a consultation in his study with Harrison and Meegan.

"On the day after tomorrow," he reminded them, "the stock-holders' meeting of Coal and Ore is held. By use of the cumulative system of balloting we can concentrate our fire on Burton."

"Do you gather," questioned Meegan anxiously, "that our fears of a Burton raid are founded in fact?"

The elder chief spread before his associates several sheets of closely written paper.

"On the contrary, I gather that Burton has not selected this time for his *coup*. I fancy we have forestalled him."

"Yet," suggested Meegan anxiously, "we want to feel sure."

Malone nodded. "Unless several men whom we trust prove traitors, we may feel sure. Gentlemen, I think we have soon enough, but none too soon, safeguarded ourselves against piracy. I hardly believe that what Gates did to L. and N. will be done to us by Burton.... I have been very busy and for some reason I do not feel quite myself. I think I shall now beg you to excuse me." The man of mighty resource rose smilingly from the table and then suddenly rested both hands on its polished surface. His ruddy face became pallid and he lifted one hand with a bewildered gesture to his brow.

Harrison and Meegan sprang with a common impulse to his side.

As they helped him to a chair, his step was unsteady. "It will pass," Malone assured them. "It is an attack of indigestion." Yet within the half-hour his powerful frame was being racked by convulsions and two hours later specialists at St. Luke's were making those preparations which precede an operation for appendicitis. Tomorrow when the Stock-Exchange opened the newspapers would spread the news that J. J. Malone was out of the game and Wall street would once more mirror an anxiety which any small thing might convert into a parlous situation.

At the same hour a special train with a guaranteed right of way was thundering along its road-bed with a wake of red cinders and black smoke trailing from its stack and a single passenger in its single coach. The Honorable Mr. Ruferton was going to call on the Honorable Mr. Hendricks.

In ignorance of what the morrow held, the Honorable Mr. Hendricks was meanwhile sleeping peacefully in the quiet of his country house.

Shafts of sunlight came pleasantly through the dining-room windows on the following morning as he breakfasted alone, and still in ignorance. The forests were decked with the first coloring of an early frost, and Mr. Hendricks strolled out for a cigar in the crisp air of his woodland. Physically he was fit and his conscience did not trouble him; since his conscience was both lenient and practical.

Then as he took pleasure in his life and his Havana, he saw a dilapidated buckboard laboring up the rutty trail. It halted at his gate to let out a man of whom chance had, on more than one occasion, made a colleague, and occasionally an adversary.

"Hello, Ruferton," he shouted amiably, "what brings you here?"

Mr. Ruferton's face wore an expression of deep concern. He consulted his watch. "I came on a special train, Hendricks," he bluntly declared, "and it's waiting to take us both back to New York."

Hendricks laughed. "My dear fellow, I've been speech-making until my throat is raw. The final days before election mean more hard work. Meantime I am resting. It's the doctor's stern command."

Ruferton stood at the gate and faced his host. He spoke impressively. "An election-eve scandal threatens you which will probably involve a grand-jury investigation. If that is a matter of indifference, stay here, by all means, but if your future is in any degree important to you, pack your bag and pack it quick."

For an instant the former state senator and present candidate stood bewildered. What traitor had betrayed a false step? His tracks were all well covered, he thought. At last he found his tongue. "In God's name, what are you talking about?"

Mr. Ruferton held his portfolio tightly grasped in his hand. In it there were documents to which the other could hardly be indifferent--but unless all other arguments failed, he preferred reserving them for future use. He met the stupefied gaze of his protagonist with one of serious apprehension.

"I might as well be entirely candid with you, Hendricks. I don't know. I was sent by Hamilton Burton to bring you back to New York; with specific orders that you were to be at his house not later than nine-thirty this evening. There he will tell you what you should learn. I have come in person because he did not care to trust to such a message as could be telephoned or telegraphed."

"Hamilton Burton?" The Honorable Hendricks was more than ever at sea. "I have had many dealings with Mr. Burton, but wherefore this sudden and absorbing interest in my welfare?"

Ruferton smiled. "My dear fellow, perhaps you had better go and ask him. If Hamilton Burton has turned things topsy-turvy to act as your savior in an eleventh-hour crisis, common sense compels me to infer that he has a reason too interesting to ignore."

Mr. Hendricks paced the path for a few minutes in the disquiet of intense nervousness, then he spoke with sharp accusation and distrust.

"You don't know what this matter is! You have come here by special train to warn me that I face ruin; and you pretend to have no inkling of the nature of my peril! You speak of veiled threats. Are you lying to me, Ruferton?"

"Draw your own conclusions." The time had come for playing the card of offended sensibilities and Mr. Ruferton turned promptly on his heel. "Stay where you are and--read the newspapers. Burton's instructions were to bring you back, but I don't suppose he expected me to kidnap you in your own behalf. I presume he anticipated your sane realization that he didn't send for you to smoke a cigar with him. He presumed you were interested in avoiding disgrace."

"Don't you understand," demanded Hendricks blankly, "how inconceivable it is that you should come on a mission like this without knowing its exact nature?"

The other nodded. "Burton didn't know that you were out of town. When last night, quite late, he learned of this matter he sent me to find you. There was no time for discussion or explanation."

"Wait until I pack my bag." The Honorable Hendricks, whose dignity on the bench would so honor the judicial ermine, rushed wildly into the house while Hamilton Burton's envoy stood outside contemplatively kicking about among the fallen leaves.

With the flaming of that morning's headlines announcing J. J. Malone's illness a spirit of nervousness began stalking in the Street. Of this restlessness Hamilton Burton was duly apprised and while he scornfully laughed at blind luck he acknowledged the power of his Star, and gave thanks to his own unnamed gods.

His eye was brilliantly clear and his step resilient, but Paul, whose delicate nature possessed a quality approaching the clairvoyant, divined that his great brother was exalted by some prospect of portentous moment, and that it might mean triumph--or reverse. Timidly the younger questioned the elder.

That afternoon while Hamilton was outlining future and audacious strokes of finance Paul was with him. For hours they sat together, the younger man at the piano and the older listening, being soothed and softened by the magic touch upon the keys.

This was their custom when momentous affairs were brewing. At last Hamilton interrupted. "Paul," he questioned slowly, "can't you give me something that has the crashing of bugles in it; something like a hymn before action?" Abruptly his voice mounted and he threw back his head. "By God, little brother, I want the sort of music that goes before the charge of an irresistible phalanx!"

The musician wheeled on the piano bench and his fingers left the keys. He rose impulsively and came over to where Hamilton stood with an unquenchable light blazing in the eyes. The dreamer laid a hand on each of the achiever's strong shoulders and gazed long and searchingly into the confident face. Hamilton read a fear in that gaze and affectionately smiled back his reassurance.

"What is it, little brother?" he asked.

"Hamilton," began the other in an awkward, diffident fashion, "you are planning something a little vaster than usual. I am frightened. Sometimes the end of empire is--St. Helena."

The financier laughed.

"It is not written that I can fail, Paul. It's not in my horoscope. You are right. I am planning something broader than I have done before." He paused only to add in a vibrant voice: "I told you that the day would come when above me there would be no man. That day will be tomorrow."

"Is there no chance of defeat?"

"I admit none. To me the influx of gold, and that attendant power which is its only worth, have become a tidal wave. Nothing can check it."

"And the end of it all?" questioned the other.

"While there is a game to play, Paul, no man has won enough. It's the splendid sense of growing power. It's the thirst that grows with the wine you drink. It's fighting and conquering. It is the magnificent dream of world-mastery. The money itself!" He spread his hands contemptuously. "That is a beggar's reward--it's the symbol of Might that counts."

Their mother entered the room as he spoke and paused at the threshold. Her two sons went forward to meet her, and for a moment, she stood looking into Hamilton's eyes. Under her gaze their lust of conquest softened into tenderness and she brushed back the hair from his forehead as she shook her head and her eyes became misty.

"My egotistical boy," she said in a low voice. "My dear, egotistical boy!"

Yamuro appeared in the door, bearing a telegram, and swiftly Hamilton Burton tore the envelope.

"I am bringing in the pelt," were the highly informative words. "Hendricks accompanies me, Ruferton."

The financier crumpled the slip in his hand and smiled.

"It's fortunate," he murmured half-aloud, "very fortunate--for Ruferton--that he didn't fail."

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Mr. Ruferton and Mr. Hendricks presented themselves at the door of Hamilton Burton's house the clock was striking nine. After divesting himself of his overcoat the politician stood waiting before the open fire with the manner of one who faces a doubtful half-hour and who faces it with grave anxiety.

Ruferton meanwhile made opportunity to slip his portfolio to the butler with the request that Mr. Burton should run through its contents before he came down-stairs and that was a request with which his employer fully complied.

Yet within a few minutes the financier entered the library, his face lit with a sunny smile of cordiality. Hendricks took a hasty step forward. "Mr. Burton," he questioned tensely, "in heaven's name, what is this menace of which you sent me warning?"

"It is grave enough," came the prompt response, "to warrant my asking you to come--at whatever inconvenience. But, first, may I put to you a brief question? Will you sell to me your holdings of Coal and Ore stock--at a price well above the market?" The question came casually at a moment when Hendricks burned for personal information and it took him off his feet. Incidentally it informed him subtly that whatever Hamilton Burton was willing to do for him would be predicated on what he was willing to do for Hamilton Burton. Burton bargains were rarely charities.

"My Coal and Ore is not for sale," he answered vaguely.

"Though I offer your own price?"

"No. The question is not one of price, but of loyalty."

"Loyalty to Malone and Harrison?"

"Among others, yes. To the heads of the Consolidated group. Now will you please give me the news for which I have come a long distance?"

Hamilton Burton's eyes grew flinty. "Do you not recognize in me one of the heads of Consolidated?" he curtly inquired.

Already the active mind of this successful and tricky manipulator of politics was piecing together fragments and glimpsing the connection between the threatened scandal and Burton's anxiety to buy. He became wary, covering himself with an assumption of boldness.

"To be candid, Mr. Burton, your effort to augment your holdings so largely and suddenly on the eve of the annual meeting might indicate that the interests of yourself and Malone run counter each to each. Why should I antagonize those in supreme power?"

"I shall be equally frank." Hamilton Burton came closer and his lips drew themselves in a taut line. "Tomorrow I shall wrest from the Malone gang this supreme power of which you speak. I mean to force Malone and Harrison to their knees and to assume complete mastery."

The state senator lifted his brows ironically. "It's a large contract," he commented. "So you call on me to slip you the ace you need to fill. Well, I can't see it."

"Then I'll assist you. I expect you to remain, as you have shown yourself in the past, a practical man. I expect you to realize that you have more to gain by allying yourself with a victorious leader than in walking the plank at the heels of Malone and Harrison."

"I am so practical," the other reminded him, "that I want stronger evidence than mere assertion that you can overthrow these men."

"At all events I can overthrow you." The words were suddenly fierce.

Hamilton Burton spread on the table several sheets of paper, drawn from the breast-pocket of his evening-coat and previously from Ruferton's portfolio. "That memoranda in the hands of certain civic-reform societies would sound the death knell of your political future. You talk of what evidence you want--that would satisfy a grand jury."

The master schemer glanced hurriedly at the too-familiar contents of the typed pages and gasped.

"A half-million dollars!" he exclaimed weakly.

"Incontrovertible evidence," Hamilton assured him, "as to how you, while a member of the state senate, spent five

hundred thousand dollars to secure the Coal and Ore charter. Malfeasance, bribery--you know the legal terms in which such conduct might be defined better than I."

For a moment Hendricks laughed--then with a well-simulated coolness he retorted. "A weapon hardly available to your hand, Mr. Burton. You will recall that I acted for you. To accuse me as agent would be to convict yourself as principal."

But Hamilton's laugh was the more confident.

"Think again. I may have erred in granting you too free a hand as an agent, but I left the details to you. My only offense was over-confidence in you. It was not I who debauched a senate. Moreover, this accusation will not come from me--ostensibly. It will come through the press tomorrow morning--and come hot."

Hendricks drew back a step and his face paled.

"By God!" he exclaimed in a voice of betrayed bitterness. "There is only one name for this--sheer blackmail."

"In that case," warned Burton ominously, "I would, in your position, refrain from using any name. I have neither the time to bargain nor the inclination to plead. The bull that charges my railroad train must take his chance. The engine will not stop. You can rise with me to power and rely on my staunch friendship, or--well, there won't be much left to go down with Malone."

The two men stood facing each other, one implacably resolute, the other in a torture of quandary. At last, Burton added:

"You may believe me when I tell you that I cannot be legally touched in this matter and that you can be sent to Sing Sing. Choose your course--and choose quickly. I offer you a fair chance between uniting your fortunes with a rising dynasty and shackling them to one which is tottering."

Hendricks took a step in the direction of the door. "From here," he said, "I go direct to the district attorney."

Burton stretched a hand toward the telephone and smiled as he suggested. "Whom you will find so busy with preparations for prosecuting you that he will not at once find leisure to prosecute for you."

Hendricks sought to veil his terror under a seeming of bluster.

"Will you buy the district attorney, too? Some men are not purchasable."

"That may resolve itself into a matter of price. I am not shopping in ten-cent stores, Mr. Hendricks."

The politician had been thinking fast as he talked. Suppose Burton had the strength of which he boasted? His own interest was to stand with winners, not losers, but before he changed flags he wished to be sure that he jumped toward victory. That determined, the rest was expediency.

"Let's come to a decision." Hamilton Burton showed just a glow of brick red on his cheekbones that argued an early break in his over-strained temper.

"If I am a tyrant at least I do not call myself a lord-protector. Will you sell at your own price and go with me to the top--or refuse and take your chances on substituting the state-prison for the bench?"

An abrupt change came over Mr. Hendricks. He smiled through his pallor. "Are you prepared to show me that if I make common cause with you, there is no chance of defeat?"

"I offer you my personal and positive assurance--and access to my papers within an hour--during which time you will not be bound." The reply was prompt; the voice hypnotic in its persuasiveness.

Hendricks lighted a cigar, and nodded. "Very well," he announced slowly. "But understand this. If I jump to you I jump with all four feet. It happens that certain other proxies have been put into my hands--by Malone interests. Had I not come to town I should have mailed them today--as it is I still have them. I shall vote them as you direct."

With this chameleon turn of complexion, the astute contriver realized that he had scored. To Hamilton Burton's eyes came a quick flash of gratification and he held out his hand. "If I can be implacable in battle," he said quietly, "I can also be a friend to my friends. I told you that in an hour I could guarantee victory--or release you. I am awaiting two men with whom I have yet to deal. Will you also wait?"

Mr. Hendricks bowed. "This--this evidence--" he questioned suddenly. "Has any other possible enemy access to it?"

Hamilton Burton smiled as he shook his head. "No, it is in my sole keeping. I shall not surrender it to other 'possible enemies.'"

With the two bankers, whom Tarring shortly ushered in, Hamilton came even more promptly to conclusions.

"Malone is ill," he began. "Any alarms thrown into the Street just now would start pandemonium. If tomorrow should bring such conditions, would your banks suffer?"

Fairley of the Metallic shook his head gravely. "If a panic developed just now many institutions would go to the wall. As to how many or which ones, I could not answer off-hand."

Henry of the Deposit supplemented with added detail. "The national mind is hysterical beyond the usual and this is a time of heightened danger. It's the period when \$200,000,000 are needed for crop-transportation and delivery. That means financial equinox."

The young Titan glanced seriously from one to the other. "I know of influences coming to a head tomorrow which are calculated to throw the Street and Exchange into panic condition--unless we devise means of averting that catastrophe. For that reason I asked you to come here tonight."

The bankers stood silent, but upon their faces was stamped the shock of the news. Coming from so authoritative a source, it required no actual proof.

"We may gather then," suggested Henry at last, "that you stand with us in our desire to avert this calamity?"

"Gentlemen," Burton's voice again became compelling and crisp--but very hard, "on certain conditions I shall avert this panic--on others I shall cause it. The alternative is for your decision."

Fairley and Henry drew a little closer together by common impulse as if for alliance in danger. A long silence, freighted with tensivity, followed until Fairley inquired in a stunned voice: "Please explain."

With the crisp impersonality of a prosecutor Hamilton Burton talked. He outlined his plans, gave a glimpse of his tremendous levers of power; let them see what engines of destruction he controlled and finally made his demand. When he was through neither of his visitors could doubt his might or his intent. At the end he said:

"You hold among the securities of your two banks just the margin of Coal and Ore which I need for complete safety. Turn your proxies over to me tonight and tomorrow will pass quietly. I will support every market depression caused by Malone's illness. There will be no panic. Fail to do that and ten minutes after the gong sounds on the floor, I shall be ripping the entrails out of the Street! Full-page advertisements in every paper in town will feed the general uneasiness into an orgy of terror. Frightened mobs will clamor about the doors of your banks. Other things will happen which it is not now necessary to enumerate. It will be the blackest day in Exchange history and one that will reflect itself in all the bourses of Europe."

After eleven o'clock, when Mary Burton and Jefferson Edwardes returned from the theater, the girl caught a glimpse of a strange picture as she paused in the hall.

Six silent men stood or sat about the brightly lighted library with blue wreaths of cigar smoke drifting upward above them. It was plain that this silence had fallen upon them only as they heard the door slam, and that, like their attitudes, it was strained and artificial.

Hamilton Burton stood before the hearth with his face set as unyielding and immobile as chiseled granite. Ruferton eyed the two bankers with a sidewise stare between drooping lids, and Hendricks, at the window, presented to view only his back. But the features of the bankers themselves were haggard and miserable; like the faces of men making a last desperate stand, yet fronting inevitable defeat. Such faces one might imagine in a nightmare, staring on a passerby and failing to see him, from a rack of torture.

Mary Burton shuddered a little, though she did not know why, and the lips of Jefferson Edwardes compressed themselves as he followed her to the music-room on the second floor. He had caught the tigerish cruelty and power-lust in the eyes of Mary's brother, and he knew that for their satisfaction someone must pay very dear.

Paul sat at the piano as they entered the music-room and the emotions which he expressed upon the keys were emotions of deep unrest. They ran in strains of folklore plaintiveness and rhythmic sobs of wailing cadences. When Mary spoke the musician turned with a start. He had not heard their entrance.

"I didn't know we should find you here, Paul."

He nodded as he rose from the instrument. "Hamilton asked me to wait," he explained. "He's having some

tremendously important conference--and after a trying fight he always likes me to play for him."

The three sat for a time unaccustomedly silent. Mary could not forget the impression of those conquered faces, and Edwardes, with the same thought, forebore from comment. Within a half-hour Hamilton himself joined them. His eyes were glowing beacons of triumph and his lips wore a smile of victory.

"Tonight I have met and defeated Malone's attempt to crush me," he announced with a half-savage elation. "Tomorrow the financial world will recognize in me the actual and unchallenged head of Coal and Ore." Then, turning to Jefferson, he added: "You know what that signifies, Edwardes."

The visitor nodded, but no words of enthusiastic congratulation came to his tongue. "It means," he replied slowly, "that you hold a mightier financial power than any other business man in New York."

"And now that you have all that," Mary put the question slowly and gravely, "to what use will you put it?"

Hamilton bent upon her a gaze of tense visioning and his answer came in rapt eagerness: "To build a greater structure of power than any man before me has ever reared."

After a moment's pause he went on: "Edwardes, have you no word of congratulation? It was you who first kindled my dreams into a blaze, you know."

The visitor spoke with his eyes fixed on those of the man who had outgrown him in financial stature and become a Colossus.

"I was thinking of that," he responded, "and I was wondering at what cost you had won this victory."

"Conquest," retorted Hamilton Burton shortly, "can take no thought of cost."

"I wonder!" Edwardes spoke reflectively; then with a straightforward honesty he went on: "It rather seems to me that once in a great while there rises in the world a marvel-man. To such a spirit the impossible is possible and opportunity is pliant. He may become the greatest boon or the greatest scourge of his generation. Such a man uses or prostitutes his great gifts in just so far as he uses, or fails to use, a conscience."

For an instant Hamilton's cheeks flamed, then he laughed:

"A very pretty golden rule of finance, Edwardes," he observed quietly, "and since I suppose you feel in a way responsible for me it's a homily you have the right to read. Does it carry a personal implication?"

Edwardes smiled and held out his hand. "You are the best judge of that," he replied. "Good-night."

But as the door closed upon him the smile died on the guest's lips, and a premonition of evil settled upon his mind. No one had ever defied this man and come through unscathed. His power held leashed lightnings that might destroy, and Edwardes had been frank to a point which might stir that wrath. To his direct manner of thinking his answer had been unavoidable, yet to put Hamilton Burton among his enemies was a dangerous thing. His love for Mary and the very endurance of the business which had stood so long in honor and prosperity might have to suffer for the overfrankness of his words. For a moment before entering his car he stood on the curb and looked back at the house he had just left.

"The man is a tyrant--and conscienceless," he exclaimed. "He is as destructive as a sawed-off shotgun!"

CHAPTER XVII

IF Hamilton Burton had been one of the most picturesque figures in finance before, he was now a flaming meteor of public interest. He had come out of the dark and raided the directorate of a giant corporation, gathering into his strong hands reins that the world believed to be held beyond the possibility of filching. Moreover, this corporation was the keystone and crowning pride in the firmly cemented arch of Consolidated's power.

The world of business was stunned. It went to bed one night, believing certain forces immutable, and awoke to find them overthrown and a ministry changed. Along the chasms and canons that debouch from lower Broadway one question was insistently asked--and went unanswered: "What will he do next?" Perhaps the nearest approach to a reply was the prophecy of a cynical curb-broker--"Whatever he damn pleases." One thing was definite. While Hamilton Burton had forced the admiration of his world, he had forced it by the audacity of a strong grip on its throat and by bending it to its knees.

Such admiration is accorded a tyrant and carries scant love. When the gong sounded in the Stock-Exchange it was an alarm and the faces on the floor were faces that mirrored fear of the day. Yet the first transactions showed Hamilton Burton's brokers standing like pillars under the shaky market. As the day wore on these same lieutenants met and stemmed every tendency toward receding prices. Several banks announced incipient runs and at once from the Burton treasury came a tide of gold, so that reassured depositors turned away smiling.

When the actual meeting of Coal and Ore stock-holders was called to order both Burton and Harrison were present in person.

"Before this vote is taken," said Harrison, rising with a face upon which was indelibly stamped the grim determination of one so long victorious that defeat was unspeakably bitter, "I wish to be heard. Though the registry of transfers tells the story in advance, I know as Hamilton Burton knows, that it is a victory for traitors. If there is a chance that some of these may yet turn back from their treason, I want them to listen to me."

Burton glanced about the table, where the mastery was his own.

"When I attend a meeting of this character," he curtly announced, "we vote first, and whoever wishes to can talk after I have gone."

Outside, as the two men left the room, waited the batteries of reporters. On the threshold, the appearance of each was noted and flashed in first-page stories wherever news went. The new One-man-power stood slender and strong, and tigerish; an incarnation of dominant youth and triumph. Harrison might have been passing into exile, but he walked with his head high and eyes that met every questioning gaze with the forbidding glitter of a newly trapped and caged lion. There was something about the man so suggestive of a broken warrior that the scribes whose duty was to interrogate refrained and stood respectfully silent as he passed between them.

But they questioned Burton and Burton smiled. "Gentlemen," he said in that velvety voice that fitted in so charmingly with the winning quality of his smile, "you know my rule. I am never interviewed--but you may announce that the Coal and Ore directorate will be reorganized."

At the curb Paul was waiting in the car, and around it pressed an inquisitive mob, which the police were already beginning to push back and stir into motion. As they cleared a path for him through the idle humanity the man who had come from the abandoned farm went to his machine with an unconcern which took no note of their interest. To his brother he commented in a low and musical voice. "They aren't so different from Slivers Martin. I bought those lambs for seven and sold them for ten. But it's only the first transaction, Paul, that gives one the real thrill."

When he reached his library he found Mary there. "I have been reading the papers, Hamilton," she said quietly. "As near as I can make it all out, 'it was a famous victory,' but why do the papers all call it a raid?" Her brother looked at her and a flash of pride kindled fondly in his eyes for the face which a shaft of the sun lighted into vivid beauty.

"I told you once," he said, "that we should reign together. This is for me a victorious day. I am glad that you are the woman to whom I come fresh from the field I have won and the frontier I have pushed forward." He turned away from her and stood for a moment at the window in a flood of yellow radiance. The clarity of his eyes and luster of his dark hair and the hue of his cheeks were all declarations of gladiatorial perfection of condition. His brow was unclouded.

He began to speak, at first with a modulated voice that mounted with his words to a fiery eloquence:

"Many marches follow, Mary ... toward vaster victories. To me a certain memory lives clear in every detail. I see a small girl with her thin little body shaking with sobs ... because her life seemed doomed to drudgery and emptiness. I

see my mother and my aunt and my father suffering like beasts of burden under the goad and yoke of poverty. I see a boy, ragged and rebellious, declaring war on the world and swearing to wrest from it every good thing that those he loved might ever covet--and for himself unparalleled power." He paused and spread his hands apart with a gesture of dismissing the abstract. "I have proven myself able to realize my dreams. I shall go on. My aspirations of empire look far ahead: my horizons are limitless. There are few people to whom I can express my ambitions. But you--" He came across and took her hand. "You can understand. Tell me, Mary, is there anything in the world you want? Because, by heaven, if there is it shall be yours."

The girl's eyes, as she met his gaze, were deeply grave.

"In all this dream of power, Hamilton," she said softly, "you have never spoken of any sense of trust or stewardship, and what you call a victory, the papers call a raid. Has it ever occurred to you, my dear brother, that perhaps your dream is, after all, one of colossal selfishness?"

The rippling ease of his muscles stiffened and his smile faded.

"Is it selfishness to give back to those one loves the things of which life has robbed them?"

She shook her head. "No--but there is such a thing as suffocating the souls in them with material kindness and bodily luxuries," she answered.

"You have been spending a great deal of time of late with Jefferson Edwardes." The manner of the man underwent one of its swift changes and grew cool and acid. "Perhaps he has been talking to you as he undertook to talk to me last night."

A light as dominant as that in her brother's came to Mary Burton's pupils.

"Perhaps," she replied.

"I'm not at all sure that I care for this intimate association with Mr. Edwardes," he curtly announced. "I am not enamored of the vaporings of visionary and self-ordained preachers."

"Possibly it is not necessary that you should be," the girl suggested. "Maybe for the purpose of my own friendships, it is enough that I like him. I hardly think you would understand his type, Hamilton."

Her brother's face reddened dangerously.

"I should call my intelligence human," he declared. "I've been able to make certain use of it."

"Call it superhuman if you like--or inhuman, yet I hardly think it can truly gage that type of gallant gentleman who has kept his dreams untainted and his ideals clean."

The man who had found the world a thing upon which he could stamp his hall-mark stood for a while without speaking; then his voice came keyed to a satirical coldness.

"Whatever your estimate may be of my ability to understand this peerless gentleman and chevalier, one thing I can do. I can crush him into pulp. If he has poisoned against me the minds of my own family, I swear to you that I both can and will nail him to the cross of utter ruin. You had better warn your knightly friend, Mary, that the days of grail-seeking are ended."

The girl came to her feet and her eyes were stars of scorn as she faced the man whose sudden anger had brought out the arteries corded on his temples.

"Such talk," she said, "belongs to the shambles of your cut-throat finance. I have no wish to listen to it." Gradually the scornful light in Mary's pupils hardened and brightened into the fighting fire that might come into those of a tigress whose den has been threatened. Her delicate nostrils quivered and her cheeks flamed.

"Five minutes ago you were inquiring what costly gifts my heart desired, that you might buy them for me with your money. Well, there is something I want that I haven't got--and your millions can't buy it. I want decent love. You had me schooled into a Circe and you almost killed my soul. Thank God, some one came in time, some one whose thoughts are above sordid conquest. Some one who wanted to save me from the legalized prostitution of a loveless marriage. And because he has said to your face what all men say in your absence, you talk of crucifying him." She broke off and her breath came fast.

Hamilton Burton gazed silently for a moment, then he said shortly:

"I'm not such a damn' fool as to try to argue with a woman in a rage. You have too much brain, Mary, and at times

you irritate me. Paul is the only one in this family who soothes me. I'll go to him."

"Yes," she retorted contemptuously, "Paul will burn incense to your vanity. Go to him."

She turned to leave the room, but at the door she paused. "Jefferson Edwardes will dine here this evening," she volunteered. "Any discourtesy to him will be an insult to me."

A little strange it was, perhaps, and yet true, that Hamilton Burton, who feared no man and showed consideration to few, discovered himself standing in something like awe of his imperious sister. At all events his outbreak of wrath subsided and that evening he gave to the man who had aroused it no intimation of its recent upflaming.

But in the days and weeks that followed, Hamilton Burton saw much of Edwardes and that very directness of gaze, that level glance which concealed nothing and evaded nothing became to him at first a small annoyance, and then a constantly aggravated irritation. His star of Destiny rode at its zenith. Every venture turned under his Midas hand to gold and increased power. He mounted to succeeding heights until it seemed that like Alexander he must soon brood over the smallness of the world's opportunity. Colossal mergers grouped themselves into structures of stupendous strength. His pride was bloated with successes, yet all the while across his own table he must encounter eyes that withheld reverence and politely masked something like contempt. Some day he knew those clean-souled eyes would goad him to an outbreak.

But impulse is the menace to a strong man's strength, and no one save Hamilton Burton himself suspected that this antipathy was growing into an obsession.

Besides, there were more important matters to consider, and a hundred active enemies to watch. Any such moment of relaxed vigilance as he himself had seized to overthrow the preeminence of others would be used to overthrow his own.

While he rode on the highest crest of Fortune's wave the one member of his family who had remained unchanged fell ill. For a week all else was forgotten while the Burton family waited the outcome in Aunt Hannah's bedroom.

That austere old spinster talked in her delirium of other days and denied that they had altered. In broken rambling words she took them all back with her to a life they had put behind them. The names of cows and horses in whose care Hamilton had so many hundred times taken down and put up the panel of stable-lot bars dwelt on her trembling lips and she smiled contentedly over simple things. Finally, she told them that she was sleepy and would talk no longer, because tomorrow morning she must be up early and give the house a thorough cleaning. With that announcement she turned her seamed face to the wall and slept. It was a placid sleep which no clamor of an alarm clock would ever disturb.

Because she had always insisted upon it with the childish pertinacity of the simple-souled, the Burton family went back with her to the ragged slopes of the White Mountains. They saw again, for the first time since they had turned away from their padlocked door, the hills and rocks and rutted roads that had once been their own country.

Jefferson Edwardes went with them, and when the funeral was ended and the little cortege left the churchyard, he and Mary Burton remained a while among the graves. Most of the trees were stark and naked, but to one or two still clung shreds of departed autumn brilliancy. A maple still boasted a few scarlet tatters of the banner with which it had done honor to the Frost King. By the decaying wall of the little church a scrub oak rattled its tenacious leafage of russet brown.

About the two tilted and careened the neglected tombstones of those who slept humbly but restfully here. The gaunt hills, too, tilted and careened in heaped-up barriers of dilapidation to the distance where the autumn veiled them in a smoky purple. But above them was the glow of crimson and rose-ash, where the sunset burned.

Mary's beautiful eyes were bright with tears and as she stood there slim and straight, the man came close and his arm slipped about her. For a moment she seemed unconscious of his presence, then she turned and her eyes looked steadfastly into his, and, as they looked, they smiled through their mistiness.

"Thank God," she said in a low voice into which a tremor stole; "thank God, you came to me and woke me up--in time."

After a little she spoke again hastily as though in fright.

"Dearest," she declared tensely, "as I stood here today a fear came over me: a fear and a premonition. It seemed to me that every hill and every tree was accusing us. Silent voices were calling out, 'Why did you go away?'" She broke off, and then, as though from the strength of his embrace, she drew reassurance, she went on: "Suppose it was all a

ghastly mistake? Suppose Hamilton's overvaulting ambition with all its vast egotism should totter and fall? What would become of us in that world down there? I have, since we left here, seen only one look of serene and utterly calm peace on any face in our family. It was her face--" The girl nodded toward the grave and shivered.

The man drew her closer.

"Loved faces in death always wear a peace that life does not know," he told her. Then whimsically he smiled as he voiced a fantastic suggestion:

"Maybe, dearest, there's some land beyond the stars where all the mistakes we make here can be remedied ... where we can take up our marred lives and live them afresh, as we have dreamed them. Perhaps in that other world we can go back to the turning of the road where we lost our ways ... and choose the other path."

Constancy and fixedness belong to strong characters. The granite crag stands unchanging, but the waters at its base lash themselves into a thousand shapes and colors and semblances. Hamilton had in him the firmness of the hills, but Paul's nature was as fluid as the waters that whirl or lilt along the easiest channels, and that turn aside to avoid obstacles. On his table stood a photograph of Loraine Haswell in a gold frame. It was a photograph of which there was no duplicate, and one which her husband had not seen. When it had been taken the sitter had selected a pose of graceful ease, as though the photographer had ambushed her and caught her in a moment of almost sacred privacy, a moment when she had relaxed into an attitude of intimate and somewhat melancholy thought.

The slender hands rested with fingers loosely interlocked in her lap, holding a drooping rose. The splendid slenderness of her figure was enhanced by the veiling of delicate negligee, and the face under its night-dark profusion of hair looked out wistfully with a sad half-smile on something that her heart chose to hold before her gaze. Certainly, had it not been that such excellence of the photographer's craft could only have been attained by careful posing, one might have said that he had taken an unfair advantage and had permitted his lens to spy upon a lovely lady in the secrecy of her boudoir, whose sole companions were emotions which must remain locked in her beautiful breast.

She had told Paul when she gave him the picture, and the same ghost of pathos had flickered into her eyes and the droop of her lips, that the flower was one from a box of his giving, and that she had been thinking of him when the camera clicked, forgetting for a moment the pose she had meant to assume. Often, she whispered, she sat like that thinking of him.

So Paul kept flowers on each side of the frame, and made of it a sort of shrine.

And yet, sometimes, when he had said good-bye to her after a luncheon or tea together, he would turn his car southward and find himself driving down the avenue to Washington square and the old house on the south side, to invite Marcia Terroll for a spin beside him. And sometimes he would call her on the telephone and they would meet for a walk.

To himself alone, he confessed his love for Loraine, for a specter of timidity rose often and marred their meetings. How was it to end? He could no more escape the realization of the husband's existence and possible ire than can the quail in the open grain-field forget the shadow of a soaring hawk. And Paul was not the most daring cock quail in the stubble. He saw shadows of proprietary wings where the sky held only wisps of fleecy cloud.

With Marcia, there was the security of safe companionship, and a combination of stimulus and soothing.

That this interest was tinctured with an essence of the enthusiastic, which to other eyes than his own--even to her eyes--might seem to hold a stronger personal note, he did not admit to himself. That would have meant another complication and a fresh alarm, so if the idea came he laughed it away as preposterous. But in a fashion those were very good days. He was discovering New York.

There are quaint places about the square, where insurgency reigns and finds expression, where existing conditions are denounced, where freedom is verbally fought for and capital and conventions are vocally annihilated. In some of them food is served at prices which astonished his training at the expensive restaurants. There the musician and the girl went, he as explorer, fastidiously critical, yet enduring what he regarded as squalor and anarchy, for the new experience of feeling that he was penetrating Bohemia.

She acted as guide, and since she knew the world of ease and the world of necessity and could walk alike with the aristocratic and the commonalty--and remain equally herself--she sat amused, watching him as he watched the rest. The twinkle that sought to flash into her eye flashed only in her mind, but the play of keen humor and wit quaintly

expressed sparkled through her conversation, so that when they were together they laughed a great deal.

Acquaintanceship which is nourished in the sunlight of laughter blooms rapidly into intimacy, and Paul Burton would have been surprised had he known how often his eyes wakened into a tell-tale glow of delight and admiration, and how easily any one looking on might have fallen into the egregious error of construing his attitude into one distinctly loverlike. All this while she continued to pique his curiosity by a sustained reserve as to herself.

She spoke quite frankly of her failures to get employment, making deliciously laughable stories out of disappointing and disheartening experiences, but it was only in incidental comments that she referred to things in the past which made him know that her life had once held in abundance those things which it now lacked.

One day when Paul had selected with great care a mass of roses of a new and particularly exotic variety to be sent to Loraine, the florist inquired, "Will that be all today, Mr. Burton?"

The musician had nodded, then suddenly he said, "No, I think there is something else I want." It suddenly came to him that he had never given Marcia any sort of present. Of course she would have no use for a small cart-load of expensive flowers. One had to send gifts of that sort to Loraine, because she was herself so gorgeously expensive, but Marcia might like some violets. Violets would look rather well on the blue suit she most often wore. He was to meet her in a half-hour, though he had not mentioned the appointment to Loraine. So he had the violets wrapped up, feeling somehow a sort of diffidence such as he had never felt before when giving flowers to women, and took them with him.

It was crisp afternoon and as he reached the square a small hand waved to him and he saw her walking briskly along by the arch, so he ordered the car stopped, and jumped out.

"I was just coming over for you," he said. "It would have been a disaster to have missed you. Barola is giving a violin recital at Carnegie Hall. Shall we run up? There's just time."

"You weren't going to miss me," she laughed. "I had no intention of letting you, but the afternoon was too utterly delectable to stay indoors, so I waylaid you here." Then after a moment, as she stepped lightly through the car door which he had opened, she added delightedly, "Barola! And I was just crying for some music. Did you hear my wails from the Flatiron building down?"

"I was too busy crying to see you," he laughed back. "My agonized sobs drowned the traffic whistles."

As the car turned, he held out the box, which proclaimed its contents, as violet boxes always do. A man may have a bottle of rum or a chest of stolen gold wrapped up so it looks as innocent as a pair of socks, but no swain bearing violets can deceive the eye of the most casual observer. Marcia was not deceived.

"Violets!" she exclaimed. "Do you mean they are for me?"

"Of course," he answered, and, for no reason at all, colored like a schoolboy.

Marcia opened the box and sat gazing at the flowers.

Into her face came a sudden gravity and the delicate features seemed almost sad. She said, "Thank you," in a low voice and continued to gaze at her gift. Then she buried her face in their fragrance and for a moment held it there. When she raised it to him again it was smiling, though still gravely.

"They are lovely," she told him. "I'm glad you thought of them."

"You seemed almost sad," Paul spoke with a voice of deep solicitude. "Did I make a mistake? Do violets stand for something you don't want to be reminded of?"

She shook her head and laughed, and this time with the old note of merriment.

"Violets stand for everything that's nice," she assured him. "It was just that--I hardly know--just that it suddenly occurred to me how long a time it's been since anyone gave me flowers."

"Someone is going to--often," the words came quickly, and impulsively he laid his hand over hers for just a moment.

"Do you know, I have the instincts of a sybarite?" she informed him. "When I go to sleep tonight, I shall put these violets near the head of my bed, and whenever I wake up I'll smell them."

Despite his strong defensive preparations and his almost clairvoyant foresight, in Hamilton Burton an insidious

change was taking place and the brain which so astutely coordinated many things was totally unconscious of its own transitions. Egotism had made him. A self-faith which took no account of difficulties, had carried him to the apex of his ambitions. Now it was blinding him with its own brilliance. Hamilton Burton was drunk, drunk to the core of his soul, with the strong intoxicant of self-confidence. He looked on life through a mirror--and saw only himself.

So, while he intrenched and safeguarded his destiny, he failed to realize that he was being lulled into a reckless faith in the star he believed shone over him and for him. He did not pause to reflect that the wolf, gaunt and powerful, who by the courage in his shaggy breast and the strength of his fanged jaws, runs unchallenged at the pack head, may change.

He took no account of the fact that the wolf gorged is the wolf weakened.

As his plans grew his methods became more unscrupulous and his scorn for forms of law increased.

One day he sat in his mother's house showing her, with the enthusiastic glee of a child for new toys, several freshly acquired miniatures of the First Napoleon.

Mrs. Burton turned one of the priceless trinkets over in her hand and gazed at it wonderingly. It was a small thing, wrought on ivory by Jean Baptiste Jacques Augustin and framed in pearls. She thought she had seen more flattering portrayals of the round head which stared out from the jewelled circlet.

"I suppose," she said with such a sigh as mothers utter when they fail to understand with full sympathy the enthusiasms of their children, "I ought to rave over this. From your eyes I realize that it is treasure-trove and yet to me it is meaningless. Of course," she naively added, "the pearls are very pretty."

Tenderly, Hamilton stooped and kissed her forehead, then he took the miniature from her hand and stood looking at the painted face. He stood straight and lithe, and he spoke slowly:

"Sometimes I wonder if the belief in reincarnation is not the truest faith, mother. Sometimes, I seem to look back on the career of this man as on something in an unforgotten past. To me it is all more vital than history; more real than chronicle. It is memory!" He paused and his eyes were altogether grave.

"As I reflect on Austerlitz, I find myself saying, 'I did well there,' and for Waterloo and St. Helena my chagrin and misery are personal. Why should I doubt that once my own spirit dwelt in another body--in his, perhaps?" His voice mounted, and he continued, "But this time the spirit must go further. It must never taste defeat. Its triumph must grow to the end, and surrender its scepter and baton only to Death."

The mother looked up at the exalted fantasy which glowed in her son's face and her head shook uncomprehendingly. "It seems only yesterday," she said "that I held you, a soft little morsel of pink flesh, close to my breast. I dreamed of no great triumphs for you. Only goodness and health. Perhaps it was as well that way. I sometimes wonder if any woman could face her responsibilities if she knew she was giving birth to one of the masters of the world. My only vanity was to name you Hamilton. And Paul I named for the great apostle." She laughed very low--and her son knelt beside her chair and drew her into his embrace.



CHAPTER XVIII

PAUL, who was named for the apostle, and Loraine Haswell had drifted further into midstream than either realized. Less keen observers than Norvil Thayre now spoke of their frequent meetings. Club conversation intimated that not only financial stress was responsible for the silencing of Len Haswell's jovial laughter.

Loraine's point of view was shifting dangerously. Paul had at first been a pleasing playmate and a celebrity whose devotion was flattering as a tribute to her charm and beauty. Now a constant comparison asserted itself to her mind between her husband's financial limitations and the pleasing scope of Paul's access to Hamilton's treasury. Discontent had entered her Eden--and it was no longer an Eden.

One morning Paul's telephone rang before he was out of bed.

"I must see you," announced Loraine, and the familiar voice was excitedly urgent. "Len has been odious and I--I want your advice. There's no one else that I can talk to."

Paul Burton hesitated. His timidity balked at facing a moment which might call upon him to take a courageous stand or one fronting possible reprisals. Over his face crept a terror very much like that which had blanched it years ago when the Marquess kid threatened him with grimaces across the school aisle. He divined the subject which she wished to discuss and dreaded the interview. The ethical side of the matter gave him no concern; but the same lack of stamina which caused him to shrink made it impossible for him to refuse.

"Where shall I meet you?" he hesitantly inquired, "at Sherry's as usual?"

"No," she hastily objected. "That has become rather too usual." She named a place in lower Fifth avenue which Fashion regards as delightfully Bohemian and Bohemia considers alluringly fashionable. She named an hour when the place would be empty enough for an undisturbed rendezvous.

Now, as Paul Burton sat opposite Loraine Haswell at one of the small and snowy tables, he sought to cloak his nervousness under a guise of debonair ease and soon the woman was embarked upon the recital of her grievances.

"Len has had an utterly intolerable fit of jealousy," she confided; then fell silent while she nibbled at a melon. But her dark eyes were full of beauty's appeal and injured distress. "It's reached a point, Paul--" her voice became very soft, almost tearful--"where I'm afraid I must make a decision: the sort of decision that it's very hard for a woman to make."

"Was he unkind to you?" Her companion sought to speak with indignation, but a note sounded through his voice which punctured the assumption with falsity. It was occurring to him that Len Haswell might be particularly unkind to him.

She leaned far over the table and spoke guardedly.

"He has made me promise that I sha'n't see you again, except where we meet by accident; that all our innocent little parties must end."

"And you promised?"

Slowly and reluctantly she nodded her head. "It was that or--" she broke off.

"Or what?"

"Or a separation. He said I must choose definitely between you." Paul Burton studied his plate in the silence of indecision, and she went on rather haltingly. "When marriage reaches the ultimatum stage, it doesn't offer much chance for happiness, does it?" Then after a pause she added thoughtfully, "It's not as though there were children to consider."

Her voice trembled with a seeming of repressed emotion of suffering under injustice and of bearing, with fortitude, a life of cumulative injury. Had Paul been bent on persuading her to remedy her alleged mistake, he could hardly have asked a more propitious opportunity.

But this man was capable of no swift and positive decisions. It was not his to cut Gordian knots. Never before had the woman across from him seemed so alluring, so desirable. Never had she so fully stirred his susceptible senses to intoxication as she did at this moment, and never had he felt his fondness for her so genuine. Yet, when she seemed almost to offer him herself and her life--if only he would stretch out his arm and lift her across the stream of dilemma--he could not urge, but sat tongue-tied. He could think only of the difficulties; and the thought of them staggered and

blinded him. This was not the indecision of a man weighing the responsibilities of a step which might ruin the life of another man; it was merely the futility of "the unlit lamp and the unglazed loam."

"If your husband should hear of this meeting, after your promise of this morning," suggested Paul, "it might have serious results--I mean for you."

She shuddered a little at the thought. "I believe he would become a maniac," she answered, "but this place is safe enough. He would never think of our coming here. It's too far down-town."

"Too far for calling or shopping," Paul reminded her. "So entirely out of your accustomed orbit that if he learned of this, he could construe it only one way--as a clandestine conference."

"But, Paul," she declared, with deep self-pity and a strong appeal to his instincts of knight-errantry, "I had to talk with you--at any risk. If--if--it does come to a separation, I shall have absolutely nothing." Her voice was pathetic. "I suppose I should have to go to work."

She looked sadly at him and shook her dark head until he hated himself for not assuring her that she would not have to "go to work," yet he could say nothing.

Then as they sat there in an embarrassed silence, the tall figure of Len Haswell appeared in the door and the many mirrors of the wall panels multiplied him into a seeming army of giants.

With him was Norvil Thayre. For such a development Paul Burton found himself totally unprepared. No ready phrases came to his lips and his sudden pallor was a seeming confession of guilt. The husband stood for a moment in the door and his face, too, paled, but that was only momentary. At once it became fixed in a resolute determination to remain expressionless. The alert mind of Thayre, grasping the situation, addressed itself to averting its awkwardness with artless and inconsequential small talk. He came over to the table and shook hands, while Len Haswell stood at his elbow, saying nothing. Paul instinctively offered his hand, but Len ignored it. He heard Loraine declaring with a charmingly assumed innocence, "Chance brings us into quite a little party. First I happen on Mr. Burton, then on you two."

Suddenly an idea of escape struck Paul, as it had struck him at the school. He, too, laughed, turning to Loraine. "And since you are in better hands, I'll run along. I have an appointment at a studio on the square."

Len Haswell favored him with a satirical glance. "You seem," he suggested coolly, "to be only beginning your meal. We are here on business, and won't interrupt." The big man turned on his heel, and, followed by his companion, went into the adjoining dining-room. Loraine Haswell laughed nervously, but Paul's face clouded with deep anxiety.

After he had put Loraine into a taxi the cloud deepened. The same self-accusations that had tortured his childhood with the suffering of self-contempt after each act of cowardice had him again by the throat. Never had it been his plan to urge this woman toward divorce. He had simply drifted with pleasant tides and now he found himself washed seaward with a dragging anchor. It was small compensation to reflect that his fault was less vicious than craven.

The square was bathed in a radiance of frosty sunlight, and the buildings at the south stood diamond-clear under a flawless sky. The monument to the man whose courage and decision had cradled a nation's birth gleamed in its granite whiteness. But Paul Burton felt small, afraid and besmirched of soul. He hurried to his own house and shut himself in with a thousand weak misgivings, until finally an idea formulated itself. He would go to Hamilton for counsel and strength.



As far as the clean sweep of mountain winds differ from the suffocation of a miasma, so far did the thoughts of Mary Burton differ from those of Paul that afternoon.

She and Jefferson Edwardes had been riding in the park, and though their horses had only cantered their hearts had ridden madly and on winged steeds. Now, with twilight stealing in and softly blotting out the angles of the room, they sat together, still in saddle-togs, before the great, carved mantel which Hamilton had brought back from a European castle where once Napoleon passed a night. A brave glare from roaring logs of driftwood cheerily flooded with light the hearth and the huge polar bear skin stretched before it. Mary Burton sat in a big chair, also castle-ravished, which swallowed her like a cavern, and as Jefferson Edwardes knelt on the rug beside her, and watched the flames caress into gorgeous vividness the color of her eyes and lips and cheeks and hair, it pleased him to think of her as seated on a throne, and of himself as at her feet.

They had no light but the firelight and needed none, for they had captured the brightness and joyousness and warmth of June and meant to carry it with them wheresoever they went and through all the meaner months.

Mary's right hand was still gloved, but the left was bare and she kept turning it this way and that, watching with engrossed fascination a diamond on one finger that caught and splintered the firelight. It was the jewel which proclaimed that Mary Burton was to be Mary Edwardes.

When her companion spoke, his voice was softened by a very tender triumph.

"Who am I," he asked wonderingly and humbly, "that life should be so lavish and generous with me? Mary, Mary, I told you once that you were as beautiful as starlight on water, but you are more than that. That is only a beauty to the eye, and you are a miracle to the heart and soul as well."

"Once," she said while her voice trembled happily, "I was satisfied with what beauty I had." She bent forward with a sudden gesture of possession and tenderness, as she caught his head between her two hands. "That was when it was my own. Now that it's yours I wish it were a hundred times greater."

"And you are the girl," he smiled, "who once pretended to think she had no soul, and very little heart."

"If I have either, dearest," she declared, "I owe it to you. You found a poor little spark of soul and fanned it into life--but a heart I have, and it's ablaze and it's yours to keep!" Her voice thrilled as she added: "If I had the world to give, it should all be yours, too--all of it."

"I feel," he assured her, "as though you have given me the universe."

For a while they sat silent; then the girl's eyes danced into sudden mischief as she reminded him, "We have still an ordeal ahead, you know. We have to tell Hamilton."

"A love that feared ordeals," he laughed easily, "would hardly be worth offering you. Does he still dislike me?"

The girl nodded. "He isn't exactly as mad about you as I am," she confessed. "But," her head came up and the regnant pride that seemed inherent there shone from her eyes, "my life is mine to use as I wish, and I have no use for it, dear heart, save to give it to you--for always!"

They heard the door open and close, then Hamilton's clear voice came from the hallway.

"You are a fool, Paul," it announced in a tone which blended irritation and indulgence. "This is the maddest sort of whim; nevertheless, if it appeals to you--all right." The two did not at once come into the library, but talked in the hall.

Paul answered nervously.

"How can you help me, Hamilton? She's married--it would be impossible."

"Impossibilities are my specialties. You say you want this adorable lady?"

"Yes." The response was faint.

"Very well," came the laconic announcement. "You shall have her, though you are, as I said, a fool. Loraine Haswell is a pretty and an empty-headed doll--"

"Don't!" Paul protested quickly, yet even in defending his lady's name, his voice carried more of weak appeal than command. "You mustn't say that!"

"I repeat, she is an empty-headed doll--but since she's not going to be my doll I shall dismiss that feature from consideration."

The colloquy had been so rapid that, as Hamilton and Paul showed themselves in the door, the two unwilling eavesdroppers came to their feet, startled.

Jefferson Edwardes turned toward the fire and stood silent, but his momentary expression of disgust had not escaped the financier and instantly all Hamilton's cumulative dislike burst into passion. From the threshold he demanded, "So you listened, did you?"

The visitor replied slowly and with a level voice: "We had not meant to overhear a private conversation--but we did hear."

"I suppose you realize that what you heard in no way concerns you?" The voice was surcharged with challenge, and under its sting Edwardes found self-composure a difficult matter. He had no habit of turning aside from quarrels which

were seemingly thrust upon him, yet he realized that at this juncture he must govern his temper. For the moment he ignored the question and, with a gaze that met that of the other man in undeviating directness, he responded:

"I was waiting here to see you, Burton, on a mission which in every way concerns me." He raised the girl's hand to his lips and let his gesture explain his purpose.

But the pent-up animosity of Hamilton Burton could remember only the contemptuous curl he had recognized on the other man's lips. He came forward until he stood confronting Edwardes and as he was about to speak Mary interrupted him. Her voice was vibrant with anger and scorn. "If any one should feel called upon to make explanations and apologies, Hamilton, it is yourself ... after what we have just heard. It was monstrous." She shuddered.

Hamilton refused to be turned aside. In a tense voice he demanded of the girl's fiancé: "Do you add your self-righteous approval to that sentiment?"

A sense of being intolerably bullied seized Edwardes and made red spots of anger dance before his eyes. His fists clenched and he took a forward step, then with tensed muscles he halted and stood there so close to the other that their eyes locked at a range of inches. Very deliberately he inquired: "Are you determined to force me into a quarrel, Burton? I'm seeking to avoid it."

"I am asking you a question and I demand an answer."

Edwardes' voice rang out passionately. "I am no prig who supplies unasked codes of conduct to others—even when they need it as badly as you do. But since you ask—yes, I agree fully, and I add this to boot. You are the most appallingly irresponsible man whose hands have ever grasped power. You are maddened with egotism until you are a more malignant pestilence than famine or flame. Now you have asked my opinion and in part you have it."

For an instant Mary Burton thought her brother would spring upon her lover in a tigerish abandon of fury, and she knew from the fighting flame in the other's eyes that he would be met half-way. Paul had dropped into a chair, where he sat as one stunned.

Burton returned the gaze which had never dropped from its inflexible directness; and his own voice was changed to a key of satirical quiet.

"If I am all the things you charge," he suggested, "it's a pretty full indictment and may warrant some discussion in passing. Paul," he added with a curt gesture of dismissal, "I hardly think this conversation will amuse you." The younger Burton rose and left the room, and as he went Mary took her place at the side of the man she had promised to marry and stood there as straight and unflinching as himself.

"Mr. Edwardes," Hamilton began, "years ago I was a country boy, not yet fully able to translate the voices that spoke to me from within: voices that told me I was a son of Destiny. In a fashion, I owe you something as an interpreter of those voices. You have just spoken more bitterly than it is easy for me to forgive. Yet, I am anxious to talk temperately—and God knows it will require an effort. Will you meet me half-way?"

Jefferson Edwardes had not moved. He was still white with anger, but the tempest that had brought his eruption of denunciation had passed, and he gravely bowed his head in assent.

"Very well. We seem to hold standards of conduct irreconcilably divergent. To my thinking you are a self-righteous and tedious dreamer and an impertinent preacher."

Edwardes nodded and his answer was composed. "We are all dreamers of varied sorts. You are yourself the mightiest of dreamers: because you make your visions realities. Paul is a lesser dreamer—almost a sleep-walker through life. As for Mary—" his voice grew suddenly tender—"why, I first saw her in the sun and dust of a mountain roadside, dreaming of fairy princes. I come last, but I'm a dreamer, too. All my visions are simple, but I've tried to keep them compatible with honest ideals."

"At least, you have hardly succeeded in keeping them to yourself." Hamilton Burton's voice was still controlled, but it was witheringly bitter. "Let me make myself clear. In an unhappy marriage I see a fact where you see a gauzy sacrament. I have become what I am, because to me the broad canvas alone is interesting, and picayunish prejudices are contemptible. You bring into my house a visage of disapproval, and when you overhear private talk permit yourself to sneer. It is intolerable."

There was such a ring of sincerity in the voicing of this distorted reasoning that Edwardes almost smiled.

"And yet," he answered, "until questioned I said nothing when I heard you offering to buy, as your brother's plaything, the wife of another man—a man who has served you with loyalty."

"You sneered. You allowed your sanctimonious lips to curl. Had you dared, you would have rebuked me out of your cramped virtue."

"Dared!" Once more Edwardes found his words leaping in fierce and uncontrolled anger. His hand had been almost drawn back to strike the man who stood there treating him as an emperor might have treated a corporal, but as the curb slipped from his cruelly reined temper, he felt the girl's hand on his arm, and stepped back, with every muscle in his body cramped under the tensivity of his effort. Yet his words were hardly less an assault than blows.

"Had I dared!" he laughed ironically. "I dare to tell you now to your face what all men say of you in your absence. They believe you to be--and rightly--a conscienceless pirate. You are a scathe and a blight; a pestilential ogre, drunk with self-worship. When first I saw you, you were gloating over having bought lambs that you had never seen for seven dollars which you sold, still unseen, for ten. Since then you have simply amplified, on the scale of a Colossus, that single cheap ideal. You have exalted vandalism and rechristened it Conquest."

Hamilton Burton's face worked in a paroxysm of wrath and his words hurled out fury to meet fury.

"By Almighty God! I have listened to your damned insolence. Now you shall listen to me! I had meant to retire soon from the world of active business. I was almost satisfied. You have altered my plans. Just once again I shall return to the arena and I shall never leave it again, until I have accomplished my single purpose." He halted with eyes burning like those of a maniac, and the fever of passion shaking him. Words poured torrent-wise.

"I will go back into the Street. If need be I will tumble the entire structure of finance into ruins, but under it I will bury you! I will bury you deep beyond salvation! As there is a God in heaven, I will do that. I will neither rest nor abate my warfare until I have utterly ruined you! You and your self-righteous virtue shall become a jest to the world. From now on until you walk the streets, disgraced and penniless, I wholly dedicate myself to your destruction!"

He paused, panting, and wild of glance, with his fists clenched and his temples pulsing, and when he fell silent, Edwardes spoke slowly, almost as in soliloquy: "I was not mistaken in you. You are the pirate and no more. I will not call your boast empty. I have seen your power. You are willing to bury in general ruin all those innocent persons whom you must overthrow before you can reach me. Very well, you will find me fighting when you come after me."

"I am after you now," shouted the other. "I would wreck all New York to smash you. To me it will be worth the price, and, by God, I'll do it!"

Edwardes turned and held out his hand to Mary Burton. "Good-night, dear," he said. His voice was weary and, as he looked at her, a deep shadow of longing crossed his face.

"Wait!" she commanded--in a tone which neither of them had ever heard before, "I am going with you."

CHAPTER XIX

MARY Burton's usually colorful cheeks were now as pale as ivory. Her attitude and expression declared a total dedication to one idea: war upon the brother who could see in her entire future only a house of cards to be swept down because it had not been reared in harmony with his requirements. As she took a step toward the door Hamilton stepped between, barring her way. His outburst of infuriated words had left him breathing fast, and he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and passed it across his brow.

"Mary!" he exclaimed. "Are you mad?"

"I am so sane," she assured him, "that to your demented eyes I must seem a very maniac. You turned me from a woman into a doll and this man turned me from a doll into a woman again. I am his woman. He is my man, and my place is with him."

"That man," her brother pointed an outstretched finger to her fiance, "is going to have no place for you to share. My hand holds the power to make and crush and I have stamped him for obliteration. He is doomed. You are my sister, and you must hold loyalty above infatuation. You must not give countenance to my enemies in time of war, Mary. That spells treason."

It was as though the three persons standing there had all passed, at a single step, through the explosive phases of wrath to the colder, steadier and deadlier zone of feeling where all their words came level, and with an almost monotonous quiet.

"Loyalty!" Into her eyes came so splendid and serene a light that she seemed transfigured. "I am ready to hold loyalty above life itself. If Jefferson Edwardes goes to his execution, I shall go with him and I shall be prouder to share his ruin than any other man's victory. I have just promised to marry him..." Slowly she raised her hand and gazed at the engagement ring. The ghost of a smile trembled about her lips, though a sudden moisture dimmed her eyes. It was a mist of tenderness, not fear. "That promise was not given lightly," she added. "It outweighs even a Monte Cristo's arrogance."

Edwardes shook his head.

"I release you from that promise, dear," he told her. "It is to be war now, and bitter war. Before he can hurt me he must ruin hundreds of innocent noncombatants; must trample down scores of honorable institutions; and because I am responsible to them I must fight their fight to the end, asking no quarter." For just a moment his chin came up and he spoke with pride. "Our concern is no weak one. It has foundations in a nation's faith. Now it must meet the assaults of a Colossus running amuck. Your brother or I must go down. If it is I, you mustn't go down with me, dearest."

Very gravely she shook her head, and, turning her back on Hamilton, clasped her hands about her lover's neck.

"That, dear," she told him, "isn't exactly my idea of loving. Whoever fights you fights me as well. I am your mate. My brother has revealed his monstrous malignity of nature today and to sleep one night more under his roof would shrivel my soul. I'd rather walk the streets. I accepted you without terms. Now I impose one condition. You must marry me tonight. Take me away--make me anything but a Burton."

Edwardes pressed her close and neither of them for the moment spoke to Hamilton or looked at him. "It can't be too soon," fervently declared the lover.

"Do you suppose," inquired Hamilton Burton, his eyes narrowing until they held a homicidal gleam, "that I shall permit you to leave my house--with *him*?"

Mary laughed, then suddenly her voice rose fiercely, ignoring his question. "You say, Hamilton, it is to be war. I shall start the war--now. Jefferson, please find Len Haswell's telephone number. I'm going to give him warning."

With an exclamation of incoherent fury Hamilton Burton leaped for the telephone and tore it loose from its wires. He hurled the broken instrument clattering to the floor and the directory into the flames. Then he stood above the wreckage with his feet apart and his hands clenching and unclenching in a panting picture of demoniac rage.

Mary laughed as one might laugh at the passion of a child. "After all there are other telephones," she said, then added quietly: "You will find in my rooms all the gifts you have loaded upon me. Unfortunately I should have to go out of your house naked if I left behind me everything that has come from you. Will you ring for my maid?"

For a moment the financier stood glaring and silent; then with a powerful struggle for self-mastery he went over and touched a bell. "I can't use physical force against my sister," he said. "You are of age, and your own mistress, but if you

make common cause with my enemies, you become my enemy yourself."

When Harrow responded to the call, only the broken telephone bore evidence of the violence of the past few minutes.

"Please ask Julie," instructed the girl quietly, "to pack a bag for me and one for herself. I shall only need enough things for a day or two. Ask her to hurry."

For several minutes the three stood without further speech, and when the brother broke the silence it was in an altered tone.

"Mary," he said seriously, "your happiness is very dear to me. For nothing else would I let any differences between us amount to an issue. For God's sake, forego this mad idea. You are disrupting a family for whose upbuilding I have fought with a very fierce singleness of purpose."

"And to what end?" she demanded, with blazing eyes. "Of my father you have made an artificial gentleman--and once he was a real man. To my mother you have given luxuries instead of life. Paul you have turned into a society lap-dog, and now by adding your strength to his weakness you are trying to make him a beast of prey."

"Those are very bitter accusations," he answered gravely. His face was set, but shame for his recent outburst safeguarded him for the moment against a second.

Harrow appeared after a short time to announce that the maid was ready, and Mary rose from her seat. "Good-by, Hamilton," she said.

"Will you at least go to my mother's house?" he questioned.

"Mother's house is as much your house as this one. No, I shall go where Jefferson Edwardes chooses to take me."

"Then, by God Almighty, you will not go at all!"

Hamilton Burton took his place at the door, and stood barring their way while a dangerous gleam came into Edwardes' eyes. Mary spoke very coldly.

"Hamilton, please let us pass. It would be a pity to edify your servants with a physical collision."

Over the taut whiteness of the brother's face went a wave of doubt. He recognized confronting him a spirit as indomitable as his own. Somehow his arrogance, under her gaze, withered and shrunk into a cheap bravado, and he realized it as such. He spoke once more and his words came slowly.

"I shall not use force. It is, of course, for you to decide. I have perhaps loved you better than any other member of my family. My pride in you has been triumphant. That man who stands at your side came into my house and poisoned your heart against me. He is a traitor and I have marked him for ruin. Decide between us calmly, Mary, because when I resolve I do not deviate."

"I have already decided," she answered. "Please let us pass."

He drew aside and stood there motionless as the street-door opened and closed. Afterward he walked slowly back into the room and stood restlessly on the great bear pelt, gazing into the cavernous hearth. Then he dropped down into the tall Moorish chair where a little while before his sister had been sitting, her eyes brimming with joy. He leaned forward and his hands fell limp from the wrists that rested limp on his knees. Something had gone suddenly out of Hamilton Burton. The eyes that stared into the blaze wore, for the first time, a trace of that fatigue and distress which portraits show in the eyes looking out from St. Helena. Mary was gone; gone with his enemy to fight under his enemy's colors! Her motive bewildered him. What was this love that so powerfully impelled her to desert her own blood? Suddenly his mind flashed back to a kitchen tableau of a small girl breaking into a sudden tempest of tears, and a boy saying, "I mean to see that Mary gets whatever she wants out of life." Then quite irrelevantly a fragment of verse leaped into his memory and prickled it with irritation.

"The Emperor there in his box of state, looked grave
as though he had just then seen,
The red flags fly from the city gates, where his eagles
of bronze had been."

His gaze dropped to the white fur of the rug and abstractedly he picked up his sister's riding-crop and one glove. She had dropped them when Jefferson Edwardes placed the ring on her finger. Hamilton turned the things over in his hand

and a groan escaped him. Then suddenly that mood vanished. He rose and paced the floor like a lion lashing itself into fury, and his eyes were fiercely tawny as he paced.

Well, she had chosen. One thing remained possible. The man responsible for this greatest sorrow and humiliation with which he had ever been visited should pay in full the score of reprisal.

With an abrupt impulse he sent for Paul and he was still pacing the room with quick, nervous strides when his brother arrived. The younger man's face was haggard and he cast a quick glance of trepidation about the room.

"Where's Mary?" he demanded, and Hamilton wheeled on him with eyes that were scarcely sane.

"Gone!" he barked out. "Gone with that rat, Edwardes. That's one of the things your whim has cost so far--your baby-doll--your toy-woman!"

With a sudden cry that came from his heart, Paul dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands. His shoulders shook to his convulsive sobbing, and after a moment Hamilton went over and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Forgive me, little brother," he said softly. "After all, Edwardes was the real reason. Edwardes with his damned self-righteousness! Mary flew virtuously to his standards. She is no longer my sister, Paul."

But Paul rose with his face full of pleading. He talked rapidly, excitedly, like a frightened child.

"Hamilton, she *is* our sister. She loves him.... You promised her happiness years ago.... You can't let her go like this. It will kill us all."

His elder brother thrust him back at arm's length and gazed into his grief-stricken face. "It's not a question of letting her go. She went in spite of me. She went to the enemy." The words came very bitterly and for the first time in his life Paul saw tears in Hamilton's eyes.

The musician rose and passed an unsteady hand over his brow. "I'm thinking about mother," he said brokenly. "I must go up and be with her when she learns."

Hamilton wheeled, speaking quickly. "Yes, do. I shall follow you shortly. Tell mother that I withheld my approval to this marriage, and they took the bit in their teeth."

Within the half-hour Carl Bristoll, Ruferton and Tarring were with their chief and between them lay sheafs of memoranda and financial data, which littered the table.

"I want to know in exact detail," Hamilton Burton told them as his glance burned into their faces, "everything that it is possible to learn concerning the firm of Edwardes and Edwardes. Most particularly I want to learn their points of greatest vulnerability. I must have lists of those securities in which, directly or indirectly, they are most vitally interested and the exact nature and extent of all their liabilities."

Outside, Jefferson Edwardes found his car waiting, and the realization came ironically to his mind that it was precisely the hour he had expected to leave Hamilton Burton's house--though his intention had been to leave only long enough to change into evening-clothes and return for dinner. To his chauffeur he said in a low voice, "Drive in the park until I tell you to stop." Then as he took his seat beside the girl he turned upon her very serious eyes and said resolutely, "I couldn't debate it with you in his presence, Mary, but I can't marry you tonight."

She turned her face to him and the color left her cheeks.

"Not marry me?" she questioned in a dazed voice.

"Not yet, dearest. Under other circumstances no time could be too soon, but now--" He raised his hands in a gesture of weariness and sat looking at her with a hunger of the heart.

"Now what?" she prompted.

"Now I am pledged to a life-and-death duel with your brother. Now I must fight not only my fight, but that of many others. It is foolish to treat lightly the threats of Hamilton Burton. His power is incalculable and his implacability is absolute. I can't tear away every family tie that is rooted in your life merely to make you my comrade in ruin. That is not my idea of loving, dearest."

"And if not that--what?" Her chin was raised and her lips parted. Her voice was very soft, almost faint. Never,

Edwardes thought, had she been so beautiful. "I have left my brother's house to go with you. I shall not return. Am I, then, to find myself like a beggar woman, with no place to go except the streets of New York?"

With a gasping exclamation of pain in his throat he bent forward and seized her in his arms. The car was now in the park and between the light globes were spaces of darkness.

"For God's sake," he cried, "don't. It is because I love you so!"

"I think, Jefferson," she answered as he held her close with his kisses on her cheeks, "you need me as much as I need you."

"Need you! Because I need you so much, I can't let you do this now."

"You spoke just now," she said, "as though you had no hope of victory in this warfare. If that is true you need me to help you fight. I have no intention of tame submission. You must have a Burton to fight this Burton."

"If I spoke so," he declared, and his voice was far from submissive, "it was because any chance of ruin is too great a chance to subject you to. It is because I mean to defend myself and my clients and my honor to the last breath that I say I can't marry you now. Certainly not until you have gravely considered these new occurrences. I shall take small pleasure in his overthrow, if I overthrow him, because he is your brother."

"I think," her eyes flashed into a fierce animosity, "I shall glory in it. I know that I shall not go back to his support. I offer myself to you. I cannot compel you."

For a long while they talked, she resolved to fight his fight with him or take off his ring; and he, in a torture of soul, refusing so great a gift at so ruinous a cost to herself. At last it was arranged that she should go to her mother's until she had made up her mind, and that they should both accept an invitation for a week at the hunting-lodge of friends in the Adirondacks. There, except for their host and hostess, they would be alone and Edwardes might have a breathing space before his battle.

There they tramped together on snowshoes over white-mantled hills and forgot that any shadow threatened their happiness. They drank deep of air that was spicy with the fragrance of pines and because to them the present seemed so perfect they refused to borrow fears from the future.

Sometimes the man would see a vagrant shadow of foreboding steal into the mismated eyes, but when Mary became aware of its recognition in his own, it was always swiftly banished for one of serene happiness and confidence.

"Dearest," he told her at such a moment--it was the moment of candle-lighting, when dusk brings shadows of fear, "why heed the rumble of the distant drum? We love each other, and when my fight is over no one shall part us."

And she in the circle of his arms looked up and laughed and they both banished from their hearts all thought of Hamilton Burton.

At her mother's house before she came away, Mary had talked to Paul, and had won his weak promise that he would permit his brother to take no dishonorable step toward freeing Loraine Haswell. So she had not kept her threat of warning the husband, and after she had returned to town, her mother fell ill, and in the first call of loyalty there Mary remained with her. About this time she read that Loraine had gone to Europe, and had gone alone.

Days had passed into weeks and Hamilton Burton had struck no blow. Mary had begun to believe that he meant to strike none, and her lover encouraged that view, but he himself knew that it was a phantom hope. He knew that the arch master of financial strategy was building and strengthening every sinew of war, and that the crushing impact of his attack would be only the more terrific because he had curbed his impatience and held his hand until the exact fraction of the psychological moment.

CHAPTER XX

LEN Haswell carried a stricken face about the clubs where once he had been the center of jovial gatherings, when he appeared there--which was not often. Old associates who read the signs avoided him out of kindness save those who like Thayre could be with him without reminding him of his hurt. Thayre, with all his seeming of bluff and noisy gaiety, had an underlying tenderness of heart and delicacy of perception which made him a friend for troubled hours. He knew how to remain silent as well as how to be loquacious and he could radiate an unspoken sympathy.

One evening the Englishman chanced on Haswell in the otherwise deserted reading-room of the National Union Club. Because it was a club chiefly dedicated to the elder generation Thayre came infrequently and it surprised him to find the other there. The big man was sitting with an unread paper on his knee and his eyes were brooding as he gazed out through the Fifth-avenue window on the twilight tide of motors and 'buses and hansoms that passed in an endless and unresting flow.

"I had the idea, Haswell," remarked Thayre as he plumped himself down on the leather arm of the other's chair and grinned his greeting, "that you came to this place once a year--when they held the annual meeting."

"And you?" countered Len in a dull voice. "I didn't regard you as an habitue either."

"Right-o!" The Englishman stretched out one gaitered foot and lighted a cigarette. "I'll tell you a secret. When I grow savage in mood--" his clear-eyed smile belied that state of mind--"I just run in here for a bit of bear-baiting--rather good sport--bear-baiting. This is a den of bears you know. Oh, yes, rather! They are all elderly bears, very crabbed and self-absorbed and very smart and immaculate--but bears none the less. Each has his particular chair, which to his own self-centered mind is his private pedestal. They sit here with their manicured hands resting idly on their robust, waistcoated tummies and stare out on the world like little clay gods." He saw that the other man was following him with a forced and uninterested attention, yet he went on, not like Larry Kirk, but because he was leading up to a purpose of friendship.

"Well, old chap, I just pop in here and squat on one of these pedestals, d'ye see? Presently its proper occupant comes in and glares at me from the door, puffing with indignation. Inwardly he is saying, 'How dare you trespass, you bally young cub?' and I pretend to be quite unconscious of his baleful gaze. I know there's really nothing he can do about it. If he were in London, I expect he'd write to the *Times*."

Thayre glanced up and started to add: "There's one now glaring at you," but he quickly bit off the words, for he recognized the stout frock-coated figure of old Tom Burton. Old Tom was progressing, for now before the lights were switched on something in his face told that the afternoon rubbers had not progressed without their libations.

After a long pause Haswell said in a heavy voice: "I come here because I don't meet many men who insist on talking to me."

"Oh, I beg pardon, old chap," Thayre hastily rose. "I'm sure I didn't mean--" But before he could finish the big fellow put out a hand and gripped his arm until a pain shot to the elbow.

"You are the one man I do want to see, Norvil. Even a miserable devil like me can talk to you, and there's a thing I want you to do for me, if you will."

"Name it."

Haswell glanced wearily about the big room and assured himself that no one was near enough to overhear his unbosoming. He still spoke in the dulled voice of a dulled heart. His utterance, like his movements, was slow and labored.

"There are times when you've got to talk--or get to feeling giddy and wrong in the head. I've about cut most of my clubs, but I can't cut meeting the men--down-town."

The Englishman nodded, but he said nothing.

"I'm getting rather sick of being asked--" Len halted, then forced the words doggedly--"how Loraine is and when I expect her back. I--well, I don't expect her back, and it hurts like hell to say so."

Norvil met the other's eyes and read in them a fulness of dumb suffering, such as might come into those of a great, faithful dog. His own question followed with a softness of assured sympathy. "And, of course, you want her back?"

A paroxysm of pain distorted his companion's face and his head flinched back as though it had been heavily struck.

"God! yes, like a strangling man wants breath," he said.

It was a misery for which there was no aid, so Thayre satisfied himself with the inquiry: "What is this thing you want me to do?"

"Just intimate to these men that they stop asking those questions, that's all."

"Is there any one you particularly blame?"

Haswell shook his head. "No. There was at first, but the principal point is that she has decided she can't be happy with me. If I try to hold her after knowing that I become her jailer. I treat her as my property. I hope I'm not that sort. I had my chance and have failed."

"I say, I don't want to be impertinent, you know." Thayre bent forward and spoke earnestly. "There are things a man doesn't like to have put up to him. But you aren't letting this knock you off your line, are you? You aren't going to let it bowl you over?"

Again the tall man shook his head. "No, I'm quite all right," he said. "I'm going fairly straight--so far."

Late that night a wet snow was falling and Madison square was almost deserted. Here and there in the Metropolitan and Flatiron buildings shone an isolated and belated window light. At the Garden a Wild West show with rings and side performances had long ago disgorged its crowds and quieted its pandemonium of brass bands. Len Haswell had been walking with the aimlessness of insomnia, and asking himself over and over one question: "What changed it all?" In answer he accused himself and argued the case for the woman without whom he was too lonely to go home and face an empty house.

It was after one o'clock and the saloon doors were barred, but as he passed a small place not far from the square, he saw a side door flap, and he entered it. It was an unprepossessing door, outwardly labeled, "ladies' entrance."

Haswell called for whiskey, and was served by a waiter in a spotted apron, whose dank hair fell over a sallow and oily face. Save for himself, there were only four other customers. In a corner partition a slovenly woman in bedraggled finery berated the man who sat with bloated eyes across from her. The waiter looked on sardonically. At another table were two derelicts from one of the Garden side shows. A truculent and beady-eyed dwarf whose face hardly showed above the boards was brow-beating a cringing giant of unbelievable immensity. "You crabbed my act, you big stiff," shrilled the midget truculently--and his huge vis-a-vis fell into a volume of excuse and apology.

Haswell set down his glass half-empty. "No good," he muttered as he rose and went out again into the streets. "One can't be alone." Yet he felt very much alone.

In these days Paul Burton found his thoughts turning often to Marcia Terroll and himself becoming more dependent on her companionship. In her sunny courage and sparkle of repartee he found a tonic exhilaration for his own jaded spirits and an antidote for growing morbidness. He knew that her daily rounds of the managers' offices were fruitless, and that she walked long distances to save nickels, and in his man's ignorance he marveled because her white gloves were always spotless and her appearance unmarked by poverty. With more money than he could use, his impulse clamored to volunteer assistance--and his judgment forbade the liberty. These days of growing intimacy were troubled days for him, too.

Loraine Haswell was away and her letters kept him reminded that the purpose of her exile was ridding herself of those encumbrances which stood between them. Yet in her absence, there was also the absence of her personal fascination, the daily renewal of her hold on his senses, and, strangely enough, he began to feel that instead of having barriers swept from the path of his love, he was being bound to a future marred by intervals of clouded misgiving.

The thought of Mary also brought him distress. There was no policy of ostrich-blind self-comfort by which he could escape from the realization that he was indirectly a party in responsibility for the destructive menace that hung over her happiness. His few attempts to discuss the subject with Hamilton had not been hopeful or pleasant, and he could not doubt that Edwardes would ultimately be swept into a chaos of ruin because he had opposed the irresistible onrush of his brother's power. He sought to persuade himself of Hamilton's infallible wisdom and Mary's folly of infatuation, but the only certain conviction was that of a bruised and heavy heart in his own breast. Paul was pitifully weak, but, also, he was sensitively tender. Love he gave and commanded with the uncalculating quality of a child.

To Marcia he had not confided any word of his status with Mrs. Haswell, but her quick intuition told her he was

deeply troubled--and her quicker sympathy responded. Sometimes Paul longed to see Loraine, but after each visit to the tiny apartment where Marcia Terroll and a girl who drew fashion illustrations had set up their household gods, the vision of his far-away Cleopatra grew a shade dimmer and a trifle more impersonal.

Bit by bit he had pieced together a few sketchy fragments of Miss Terroll's biography, just enough to make the wish for fuller knowledge tantalizing. That was her maiden name, also used as a stage name, but she had been married when just out of Wellesley. She spoke little of that episode. Her girlhood was a pleasanter theme and its environment had been that of his own world--full of the gaiety and sunshine that is girlhood's inalienable right. All these scraps of personal history filtered into their conversation; rather as incidentals than as direct information. This young woman was not of the type that gratuitously relates a life-story. That she had been left resourceless with a young daughter and had fought the world unaided and unembittered, herself retaining the seeming of a child, Paul now knew, but he knew all too little to satisfy his interest. She had been secretary in a business house and an interpreter of German and Spanish. Now she was the only actress he knew--untypical and unemployed.

Paul felt that in the presence of her superior mind and larger education he ought to be abashed, yet he was not, because when she laughed it was with the merriment of a gay child and when she was serious she was sweetly grave. Sometimes he played for her and sometimes she sang for him, and both did what they did so well that the critic in the other found no disappointment.

Unpremeditatedly and very naturally they had struck the basis of a dependable comradeship. She saw the occasional flash of genius in his musical creativeness and his need of practical attributes. To him she was something of a mystery. To her, save for his well-kept secret of loving Loraine, he was an easily read human document. She told him of her broader experiences, always tinging them with a delicious humor in the recital, which twisted into comedy what might have been related as little tragedies, and because she had seen so much of life, where he had seen so little, she was willing to recognize his lovable qualities and overlook his weaknesses.

But just as Paul did not talk much to her of his own affairs and the people of his set, so he did not talk with them of her.

At first she had interested him as an experiment; then as affording the possibility for a new type of adventure in friendship, and when he came to know her in that degree which represented their present association, he ceased to ask why she interested him, and only knew that she did.

Of late she had been unusually gay because of revival of hope. A part which she knew she could play had been half-promised her which would bring Broadway recognition and the chance to be judged on her merits. More than that it would mean the possibility of bringing her small daughter back from the relatives who were playing parents in these days of uncertainty.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE gray and penetrating afternoon laid its depressing fingers on Paul Burton's heart with a heavier touch than usual. Even Hamilton was wearing a frowning and unsympathetic brow these days, and when the musician saw Mary, despite the inflexible courage of her eyes, there was something in them that hurt him to the quick. He knew and shared his mother's grief, but could not bear the trace of unshed tears in her voice. So, seeking asylum from the anxious ghosts that stalked between the walls of his house, he made his way down-town and rang the bell on Marcia Terroll's door. There are women men go to in triumph and women they go to when hurt. Often they are not the same women. It was a raw, bleak afternoon of disheartening drizzle and a reek of fog which veiled the tops of the taller buildings. As he waited for an answer to his ring, he could hear the fog-horn voice groaning over river and bay as though some huge monster were troubled in its sleep.

Then Marcia opened the door and as he made his way along the four-foot hall to the small living-room he discovered that she, too, was pale and distraite.

"What is it?" he demanded with that sympathy which always lay close to the surface of his nature. To his astonishment, the girl whose courage and composure had become the reliance of his own weakness dropped on the disguised cot and buried her face in her hands while her slim figure shook to her sobbing, among the cushions.

Paul stood embarrassed and perplexed. Then, moved by impulse, he crossed to the lounge and his hand fell with a gently caressing touch upon her arm. "Why, little girl," he remonstrated softly, "where is your gay bravery--what has happened?"

She sat up then and almost impatiently shook his hand away. After that she rose to her feet.

"That's just it," she declared, and for the first time in their acquaintanceship her eyes shone with an angry gleam, which quickly faded again into distress. Her tear-stained face confronted him accusingly "Everybody talks about my intelligence--and my courage. That's not what I want. I'm just human and I want a human chance."

"What sort of chance?" he asked in that vague distress which confuses a man and makes him stupid, at sight of a woman's tears.

She lifted her head defiantly. "A chance to work and live and be happy," she told him vehemently. "A chance to support my child and myself. They all praise me, but no one will hire me. I'm tired of fighting--unspeakably tired." Once more her face went into the support of the two small hands and her body shook.

"But your part in the new piece--don't you get it?" he questioned.

"They gave it to another woman," she told him faintly between her fingers. "A woman who--who is the friend of the author."

Heretofore Paul had always felt a half-submerged diffidence with Marcia, such a partially acknowledged deference as one accords to another who has drunk deeper of life and more extensively built wisdom from experience. With her his easy pose of acknowledged genius that passed current in the drawing-rooms lost its assurance, and with her he was at his best because most natural. But this was a new Marcia, a Marcia whose delicate, childlike face was stamped with grief; a child in distress and a child who needed comforting. Just as once before, when there was no escape, Paul had fought the Marquess kid and had been astonished at the ease of battle, so now an impulse seized him and he found himself acting without premeditation. He was the man looking on at the tears of a woman, and a woman whose laughter had often been his comfort. Instinctively he folded her in his arms and kissed the soft hair which was all that showed itself of the bowed head and hidden face.

Now when for the first time he held her close to him he felt a tremor of sobs run through the slender figure. His pulses heightened their tempo as he became conscious of the soft palpitation of her shoulders and bosom.

Sympathy, he thought, actuated him. He took the averted face between his hands and raised it gently, but with a strong pressure until the tear-stained eyes were looking into his own.

Her lips were very petal-like and her eyes were very dewy and on each cheek bloomed a spot of color heightened by the pallor of the moment.

Paul Burton at the instant forgot Loraine Haswell, the prize of his brother's grand larceny for his pleasure, forgot that this woman was no more than his Platonic friend and remembered only that her chin rested in his hand and that his arm encircled her, as he bent his head and pressed his lips against the mouth that trembled.

He did not think of the demonstration as necessarily loverlike. His nature was instinctive, not analytical, but suddenly there swept into the utterly lonely and battle-weary eyes of the woman, who was *not* a child, a smile of happiness and comfort which parted her lips, so that her face reminded him of sudden sunshine flashing into rainbow hope through an April shower. He could feel the heart fluttering wildly in her breast, and at once he knew that to her his kiss had meant an avowal of love--that in her code there was no place for light or unmeaning caresses.

He rose and his face paled. The indecisiveness which never dared to grasp the thistle firmly was troubling him with a new dilemma. Yet something in Marcia Terroll made a call upon him which no other woman had yet made--the call to be honest at all cost.

With his averted face toward the window, in a forced and level voice, not daring to meet her eyes, he told her almost all there was to tell about Loraine Haswell. The new spark of manhood she had awakened in him made him silent on one point. He said nothing of his own doubts; his own wonder whether after all he loved or wanted Loraine. Just now he fancied he wanted Marcia Terroll.

When the recital reached its end he stood for a space gazing into the fog which seemed an emblem of his own life. He was waiting for her to speak, but the silence remained unbroken. At last he turned and saw her sitting there no longer tearful, only a little stunned.

"I couldn't lie to you," he protested in a hurried utterance as he came over and knelt on the floor at her side. "Not to you.... Of course, you know that I love you very dearly as a man loves his rarest friends.... You know what our comradeship means to me--"

With an impulsive forward sweep of her hands she interrupted him and her voice was burdened with deep pain and heart-ache.

"Don't!" she pleaded, and the monosyllable was like a cry. "Oh, don't!" Then after a little while she went on slowly: "You are a romanticist, Paul, and a dreamer. Some day you will wake up. We all do."

"It was better to tell you, dear, wasn't it? It would have been unfair--"

She bowed her head wearily as though realizing the futility of expecting him to understand. "Yes, I suppose so, only--"

He waited a moment, then prompted:

"Only what?"

"Only perhaps a stronger man would have told me before he--kissed me."

"Did that--make so much difference?"

The green-gray eyes grew soft and the lips smiled wanly. "Yes--all the difference," she said. "It made me think for a moment that--that everything was different.... Ordinarily people don't--I mean men don't--" She broke off and then explained a little laboriously. "To me that sort of kiss must mean a very great deal to excuse itself."

"But I did mean it," he fervently assured her. "Marcia, I have been horribly unhappy and you have been lonely. We have seen so much of each other because we wanted each other--needed each other."

The girl rose and went quietly over to the window. Outside the murk of the fog was raw and choking. The stertorous snore of the ferry whistles was uneasy, ominous: the spirit of the town's myriad anxieties. She began to speak with measured syllables and an averted face.

"No, you don't need me, Paul. I hadn't understood before, but I do now. I am this moment's whim, that's all. I don't need you either, I don't need anyone." A trace of resolution and hurt pride tinged the voice, but the resolution was predominant. "I've depended on myself for years and I can go on. When you came today I wasn't myself. I was disappointed and miserable and my misery made its appeal to your sympathy. You were carried away because you're emotional, and it was all my fault. I'm supposed to be practical and I let you do it. We must forget about it now, that's all."

"Some things--" his voice mounted to a thrill of feeling--"can't be forgotten."

"They must be."

"I have made you angry," he said with deep contrition, "and it's the last thing in the world I wanted to do."

Marcia smiled again, as she might have smiled on a child who promises to be good all its life, and who will in a

forgetful half-hour be again breaking all the laws and ordinances of the nursery.

"No, I'm not angry," she said thoughtfully. "One should not be angry with a person of your exact sort, Paul. In another man the same thing would have made me angry, but not in you. I am only sorry it happened. Let's pretend it didn't."

"Why," he inquired, puzzled, as he gazed at the face still moist with its recent tears and now rather cryptic in its expression, "are your laws of judgment different for me than for other men?"

Marcia shook her head.

"Perhaps just because you are yourself different from other men. Maybe in the artist there is something of the woman and something of the child, as well as something of the man. One doesn't grow angry with a child."

"Oh!" The monosyllable came with an undertone of chagrin. "I'm not exactly responsible. That's what you mean?"

She did not answer in words, but her eyes as she looked off through the drizzle with her fingers hanging limply motionless at her sides gave him the affirmative reply, and he went on in a low voice.

"Of course, that would make you hate me. It must make anyone hate me if it's true."

There was a moment's silence and he heard her laugh. It was a sound of a single note and it was neither a laugh of amusement nor of ridicule. If there was any betrayal of laughing at the expense of someone, the someone was evidently herself, and Paul was not sure it was a laugh after all. Possibly it was a single sob or half-sob and half-laugh. But she went on in a voice flattened by weariness.

"Life deals in paradoxes. Possibly that very thing might make one love you."

Paul stood in the small room, feeling himself very small and contemptible. The face of Loraine rose before his memory, beautiful and petulant, appealing and regal, features of ivory with poppy-like lips, dominated by dusky eyes and night-black hair.

Suddenly she seemed responsible for all his uncertainties. He saw her just then as a Circe. He was a man, swung to an ebb and flow of mood by influences outwardly as nebulous as moon-mists. Just now the influence of Loraine Haswell was at ebb-tide. Tomorrow it might run again to flood, but Paul Burton obeyed the prompting of the present.

With a low exclamation that was wordless and a face tense and white, he was at the girl's side and his arms were again about her. She shook her head and tried to draw away, but he only held her the more closely until she raised her face and said patiently, "I'm very tired, don't make me fight both myself and you."

The musician shook his head and talked fast. "You said when I kissed you that you thought it meant something very different. You could have meant only that you thought I loved you. But that was not all. Thinking that I loved you would have meant nothing to you if you hadn't loved me--if you didn't love me now. You do. You have just said, 'Don't make me fight myself.' There would be no fight with yourself--if you didn't love me."

He paused and his arms held her very close, as he saw her turn away her face and make an effort to release herself, but in the eyes that she averted he read the cost of the effort.

"Please let me go." The words came faintly.

"Not until you answer me. I love you, Marcia. This time it means all that you thought it meant before. I love you."

Her eyes came around again and intently studied his own, then the voice spoke in low tone:

"No. You think you do--but it's only impulse."

"I love you," he insisted, "and you love me. Your pupils confess it. Why deny it with your lips? You love me."

She gently disengaged herself and sat again on the lounge.

"Very well," she told him as she looked at him with an honesty of expression under which his own gaze fell discomfited, "suppose I do confess it, what then? I hadn't ever meant to confess it, but perhaps it's better that we understand things. We mustn't drift blindly. Just now, Paul, when you declared your love you thought you meant it. For the fleeting time it took to say it you did mean it. If you saw her tomorrow you would tell her the same things, and you'd believe yourself honest. If I loved you beyond all hope of forgetting you, it would only prove that we had both made a mistake. We mustn't go on with it."

As a wind may veer without warning, the current of Paul Burton's emotions shifted. While wishing to deny and argue, he knew that what she told him was true. He had entered the house with no thought of love-making. Had she accepted his protestations at their face value, he would have left it shaken with an agony of doubt and misgiving. After all he had sworn his love first to Loraine. He had permitted her to separate from her husband on the assumption that his own allegiance would hold. Could a man truly love two women at the same time, he wondered. Whatever he did he must appear a weak fool. The fact that this phase of the matter presented itself for consideration at this time proved only that it was Paul Burton who found himself in the situation.

"I don't know what to say," he admitted brokenly. "I know only that I would like to be happy, if it's humanly possible, and I'd give anything on earth to see you happy. At least you believe that much, dear, don't you?"

She nodded. "Yes," she said, "I believe--that much."

Then after a few moments she continued seriously:

"We have been trusting ourselves on quicksands, Paul, and between us we've done one wise thing. We've discovered it in time. Maybe it would be still wiser now to be really frank for once and then to be very careful afterwards."

"What do you mean, exactly?"

"I divined your unhappiness, and I knew my own--for a long time I've known my own. You have been petted and praised by women--women of that world which was once mine. You say I love you. Do you know why--?" She wheeled suddenly and spoke without disguise. "Not because you are a great musician or a celebrity. It is because I realize how weak and foolish and helpless you are." The man winced, but she went on steadily. "In all woman-love there is a ruling element of mother-love. I wanted to take you into my heart and make you happy, to ... to give you all a woman can give a man."

He came forward and his words were unsteady.

"You can at least let me be your best and closest friend--"

"No. I doubt if men and women can really be friends. It comes to mean too much--or too little."

"But, Marcia--"

Again she interrupted and again the voice was monotonous, almost lifeless.

"No, dear. All our silly little jokes--things that have come to be dear little traditions between us--would be mockeries now." She raised her chin, and said suddenly, with a forced laugh: "I don't often have these brain-storms. They make me very foolish. We must see less of each other, Paul."

"And yet," he stubbornly argued, "it has been only an hour since the basis of our comradeship was secure enough."

"In that hour we have come a long way, dear. It's going to be hard enough to get back as it is."

She stood still and, after a brief silence, spoke once more.

"I must brush these cobwebs away from my brain ... only--" suddenly her eyes flooded and there was a gasping sob in her voice--"only they aren't cobwebs--they are cables and chains! I was a fool to expect to be happy. I haven't been happy for years. I've never had what I've wanted.... I haven't even been able to have my baby with me." Marcia went slowly to a chair and sat staring, wide-eyed, at the wall. At last she looked up and commanded in a whisper. "You must go now--don't say good-by--just go!"

Paul took up his hat and let himself out into the narrow hall.

CHAPTER XXII

THE illness of Elizabeth Burton proved tedious and perplexing to the specialists who traced its origin beyond the purely physical to some unconfessed thing gnawing at the peace of her brain. Accordingly they did what they could and, having effected a temporary repair, fell back on the customary prescription of change and travel.

During these weeks Mary had been constantly with her mother--and when she was even a short while away the elder woman anxiously called for her. Sometimes she and Hamilton had met, but at these times there was no syllable of surrender from the lips of either; only a tacit sort of truce such as might have existed where two armies drawn tensely in confronting battle-lines pause to care for the wounded in which both have interest. But when the mandate came that Elizabeth Burton must go abroad Mary Burton faced the sternest dilemma which had ever presented itself for her decision. The mother refused absolutely to obey the verdict unless her daughter accompanied her, and while Mary was abroad she could only guess what crises her lover might be meeting at home--because he was her lover.

She and Edwardes were walking together one afternoon as they discussed this new complication in their affairs. They had chosen for their tryst neither the smooth stretch of the avenue nor the paths of the park, but those tangled by-ways that thread the woods back of the Jersey Palisades.

It was a cold day with air as biting as a lash and as clear as crystal, and since these woods were wild and desolate in spots though skirted by smooth road-ways and flanked by handsome estates they had for the most part uninterrupted solitude. Ragged outcroppings of rock stood baldly etched against the brilliant sky and through the open spaces they occasionally saw the Hudson and the contour of upper New York. Twice they came upon rouged and powdered men and women with beaded lashes, but these men and women were too busy doing varied things before cameras to take notice of them, for their refuge was also the open-air workshop of moving-picture folk.

"Of course you must go," Edwardes seriously told her. "Your mother's health--her life itself--may depend on it. You aren't the sort who can hesitate to answer such a call and it won't be forever, you know."

"And while I'm--over there--with an ocean between us"--she broke off and her eyes darkened with terror--"you may be facing a decisive battle here--a battle decisive for both of us. If you have to fight, it's my right to be near you--to share your fortunes and your misfortunes. Our love didn't begin as little loves do. It sha'n't end that way."

"If I thought--" his voice was very deep in its earnestness--"that anything could mean an end of our love, I couldn't make a fight whether you were here or elsewhere. I think our love will outlast all battles. I want you to go."

"And if I do go," she demanded with a gaze of questioning which demanded a truthful answer, "will you swear, by whatever is holiest and means most to you, that you will cable me at the first intimation of storm?"

For a while he stood silent and his features were trouble-stamped; then he took both her hands and their eyes met. Slowly he bowed his assent. "I swear it," he told her, "by my love for you, but if I read the signs aright the time is not quite that close at hand."

In these days Hamilton Burton's secret service was preternaturally active. Less of the Titan's affairs passed through the hands of Carl Bristoll. He could be implicitly trusted, but called on only for honest service. More went through Tarring and Ruferton and Hendricks--who questioned no motives.

After two months Mary returned, and when she met the gaze of Jefferson Edwardes she read in it the struggle which his fight against his heart's clamorous insistence had cost him. "I have thought of little else since I went away," she told him, "and I have decided that either I am worthy to stand with you in whatever comes to you, or I am not worthy to be your wife at all. Hamilton hurled his threat at us and we, like a pair of timid children, let him frighten us. In this as in everything else he has had his way and we are paying the price--giving up our lives."

"It's very hard," he answered, "to stand out against you, when only my mind argues against you and my heart is so insistent on the other side. You say you have thought of little else. I have thought of *nothing* else. The clocks have chimed it--the bells have rung it--the voice of the city has roared and echoed it. I want you so much, dear, that without you I am starving. You pledged yourself to me and then came this menace. I couldn't let you act blindly. Now if you are still resolute--"

"I am more so," she declared. "My brother issued his challenge and we accepted it. Yet we went abjectly away and obeyed him. If he means to fight he must fight now. I am no less a Burton than himself and I am tired of submission."

Jefferson Edwardes smiled. For the instant everything except her own undaunted courage seemed to shrink into minor consideration.

"You are right," he said, and he said it with a note of triumph. "We shall announce our engagement and set a day--neither hastening it nor delaying it--but acting precisely as you would act had he never opposed us. If he thinks he can stop us let him try." He paused and his face suddenly hardened as he added, "There have been moments when murder has tempted me--when I wanted to go to Hamilton Burton and kill him with my hands."

Paul was commissioned by his mother to convey to Hamilton the news which would on the following day appear in all the society columns, the statement that in thirty days Miss Mary Burton would become the bride of Mr. Jefferson Edwardes, head of Edwardes and Edwardes. At first Hamilton said nothing. His face paled a little and he reached out and fingered a paper-weight and a pen, with the gesture of one whose brain takes no thought of what his hand does.

Then slowly his eyes kindled into the tawny gleam of a tigerish light.

"It was very good of them to wait so long," he said significantly. "I think I am just about ready now."

"What do you mean, Hamilton?" Paul bent forward and spoke with alarm.

"Mean!" Hamilton came to his feet and his anger snapped across the table like a powerful current leaping a broken wire. He took up a delicately fashioned statuette of porcelain and tossed it to the stone flagging of the hearth where it lay shivered. He walked over and contemptuously kicked some of the fragments toward the open fire.

"Mean! I mean that I shall treat him like that. What's left when I'm through Mary can have--for a wedding or a funeral whichever seems most suitable."

For once in his life a flame of resistance and momentary courage leaped up in Paul Burton.

"You shall do nothing of the sort," he vehemently declared. "Mary is my blood and your blood and my mother's blood. You sha'n't sacrifice her, merely because she loves a man whom you hate."

"Stop!" Hamilton raised his hands warningly. "Don't throw yourself to the enemy, Paul. Don't make an irreconcilable breach between us. I don't find fault with your sympathy. I should hate you if you didn't feel it--but this man Edwardes is doomed. Nothing can save him. If heaven itself fought for him, I would make war on heaven, whoever attempts to thwart me--even if it be you, Paul, shall go with him to ruin. We won't talk of this again."

Mary Burton awoke one morning to see, through her window blinds, a mixture of snow and rain falling from low-hanging clouds; yet her lips parted in a smile. She glanced at the clock by her bed. It was eleven. In just one week and sixty minutes she and Jefferson Edwardes would be standing at the altar.

She threw a dressing-gown about her, and, slipping her small pink feet into small pink slippers, crossed idly to the window. Then with a face that in an instant went white with a premonition of disaster, she wheeled on Julie and her voice came in an agitated whisper.

"What are they calling extras about? Get me a paper quick." When a few minutes later a sheet still damp from the presses lay before her she needed only the flaring headlines to corroborate her fears. With throbbing temples she swayed unsteadily as she made her way to a chair and sank down, gripping the paper tightly in a clenched fist. Four words were hammering themselves into her brain and heart: "Stock-Exchange in Frenzy." ... Her apathy of inactivity lasted only a few moments. Then she came to her feet and, instead of panic, resolution sounded through her voice. "Dress me, Julie," she commanded. "Dress me quickly. I must be down-town at once. Phone for the car. Don't waste an instant." At least she would be there--where battle was raging.

"But, mademoiselle, in an hour you are due for a fitting--your wedding-gown."

"Don't stop to talk--hurry!"

Her wedding-gown! She wondered if she would ever need it.

As her car neared the business district she could feel in the air such an electric tensity as one might expect to find at the verge of a battle-field.

At first it was only a spirit of heightened excitement in the street crowds; and the way men ran to meet the newsboys half-way. Then it was humanity jostling about the doors of a bank with the excitement of swarming bees. Across City Hall park came a glimpse of surging throngs at the bulletin boards, and the unpleasant chorus of voices as fresh bulletins went up.

Hamilton Burton had reached his office that morning at eight-thirty and was ready upon their arrival to confer with those lieutenants whom he had ordered to be with him at nine. Len Haswell appeared with the lack-luster seeming of a jaded spirit and though Burton had on past occasions chosen him as leader of every fierce assault on the floor, because of his quick brain, his commanding physique and the voice that could boom out like a heavy gun over the pandemonium of a frenzied exchange, he now eyed his gigantic broker dubiously. This was no day for his lieutenants to carry into that Gehenna which he meant to precipitate senses dulled, or hearts cast down. This morning's work called for such spirit as carries forward a tide of bayonets thirsting for blood back of the trenches they charge. There must be the ferocity of barbarians bearing knife and torch: of the hordes of the Huns and Vandals. There of course was Hardinge, a man who, had he not been a broker, might have made a headquarters detective, so hard and devoid of humanity was the fashion in which he went about his work. His nature was that of a cock tossed into the pit or a bull turned into the ring. Such men Hamilton wanted now, for into the five hours of the Stock-Exchange day he meant to crowd such a sum of mad disaster and panic conflagration that the history of the Money World should be beggared for a comparison. They had tauntingly named him the Great Bear, but this day should demonstrate that heretofore he had been only a gentle and playful cub. Cash--cash, cash! Such had been his watchword and he had stamped on the world of finance a belief that his command of gold was endless. Even should he reach the end of his resources with his task unfinished, he knew that his tremendous nerve was in itself unlimited backing. The nature of the trading on the floor precluded any discovery, during the length of the session, of a depleted treasury--and left open the path for onward charges. But before his treasury was depleted the whole structure would lie in ruins.

He glanced out of his window and smiled. It was the sort of a day which men in police circles describe as "suicide weather." Coroners will tell you that on such days their calls are most numerous and history will tell you that on such days the greatest financial disasters of the world have visited stock-exchanges and bourses. Burton's jaws were set and his eyes ablaze with a fiery tenseness which was hardly sane. His loins were girded and to one focal object was every power dedicated. He was going to mete out death and destruction. He would grapple with enemies who had taught him the art of death and destruction. As he ended his instructions to his brokers he looked at his watch; it was nine-forty-five. "Cut loose!" he almost shouted. "Railway Generals closed at 175. By noon I want them down to 50. When Malone's gang begin pegging the market, break their pegs. Don't spare Coal and Ore. Keep them too busy with self-preservation to let them think of rescuing others. Give them slaughter--and unshirted hell!"

The light that rains down from the ceiling of the Stock-Exchange is a softened, benevolent light, even when the outer skies are lowering. The gentlemen inside play their game in a well-appointed gambling parlor.

It would not be fitting that they should seem pikers. Above them stretches a ceiling of soft color scheme in delicate pink and blue and from this canopy sixty-two ceiling lights shed down a tempered radiance from globes suggestive of inverted golden blossoms. The great bronze-framed windows, too, at the east and west make a greater part of the wall area as receptive of brightness as does a studio skylight--for the world's cleverest financiers must be cheered by brightness and protected against gloom.

Today the great interior cube of space needed all the light that could flood the area between its marble walls--for despite the sixty-two inverted blossoms it was to see black hours.

Of that there was of course no suspicion at first.

The assembled brokers chatted carelessly, and between them sedately passed the floor employees in cadet gray, and boys carrying green watering-pots with which, when many feet had pounded the boards into dust, they would sprinkle this hot-house of Finance, as they might have sprinkled a bed of thirsty geraniums.

Then from the marble balcony, where is placed the president's chair, sounded the clang of the opening gong. The session had begun.

Hamilton Burton's lieutenants meant to waste no moment of the five-hour session. Another day meant the drawing of new lines, and time for tallying and rallying, but what was done today was immutably done. Hardinge and Haswell stood near the post at whose head hung the sign, "Railway Generals." About them lounged a handful of dilatory brokers. Railway Generals had closed yesterday strong at 175, but quotations from London, where by reason of difference in time there had already been several hours of trading, reflected an unaccountable nervousness over-seas. So the stock opened five points off.

Every game has its traditional rules. It is a cardinal by-law of the Exchange that until the gong peals every man on the

floor must maintain an unruffled and blase composure, though when the clamor of the big bell unleashes their restraint whosoever chooses may leap into the frenzy of a madhouse.

A voice at the Railway-Generals post drawled out "170 for any part of 5,000 Generals," and on the instant Hardinge's deep basso boomed a challenge and a battle cry as he yelled back, "Sold!"

The bidder was Jack Staples, and he bore the credentials of J. J. Malone. For just an instant he eyed his vis-a-vis and his prominent lower jaw seemed to protrude more aggressively, as his indolent manner dropped from him and his eyes kindled. He brushed back the white lock on his forehead and defiantly shouted, "168 for any part of 10,000," but before the words had come to conclusion on his lips, the rifle-like retort had met him from the throat of Hardinge, "Sold!"

"165 for any part of 10,000!"--"Sold!" This time the deep-lunged monosyllable burst volcanically from the lips of Len Haswell, and it rang across the floor and echoed between the walls like a thunderclap between the cliffs of a mountain gorge.

Instantly crowds surged forward and elbowed their ways to the Generals post. Where five minutes back there had been scant dozens there were now full hundreds who shouldered and shoved and fought, struck by a sudden wild realization that a fight was on. At the center of the vortex they could see the sandy head of Len Haswell high above the crowns of other men and in his face they read the gage of battle. No longer was this the heartsick face which of late had avoided the gaze of his fellows. It was the fighting face of one who hurls himself into the thick of a struggle, seeking forgetfulness in the ferocity of combat.

"163 for any part of 10,000"--"SOLD!"

With each repetition the unchanged formula took on an added ferocity--a deeper meaning. It was a three-cornered duel. Jack Staples leaned eagerly forward, his eyes burning and keen with aggressive alertness like a boxer facing opponents in a battle royal. Len Haswell seemed bending to meet him, his long arm raised and his face afire, while Hardinge, whose place had been for the moment preempted, mopped his brow, already perspiring, and smiled grimly like a relay racer waiting his turn.

But what gave an undercurrent of terrific force to the battle of these three men was the thing which every broker present understood--that one of them was the floor spokesman of Malone and Harrison and the old invincible order of Consolidated--and that two voiced the message of the new power and in the name of Hamilton Burton were declaring a war to the death.

"160 for any part of 20,000"--"SOLD!"

Generals had broken fifteen points in ten minutes and were slumping as though their foundations floated in thin air. A yell went up over the floor through which sounded demoniac notes of panic and rage. Men surged around the Generals post, struggling as cowards might struggle to leave a burning theater, collars tore loose and eyes glittered like those of a wolf-pack. The blackboards at north and south burst into a hysterical flashing of white numbers, and a word went out which set the cylinders of printing presses whirling. A Burton bear raid was on, and the Street was in panic-making excitement!

But close around the post three figures still dominated the picture. Staples with his tigerish teeth to the crowd fought the two men who carried Burton's orders and who with implacable monosyllables still hammered the market with sledges of mighty resource. What had been the orderly floor of an artistically designed mart of trade was now a hell of pandemonium. With the sweat pouring down his face, his hands clenched above his head, and his deep voice strained into a hoarse bellow, Jack Staples of Consolidated fought as a man fights death, to breast and stem and turn the tidal wave of disaster.

Other stocks followed suit, and while Haswell, forgetting in his excitement that he had been officially superseded, crouched face to face, battering his opponent, Hardinge fought his way like a madman out of the maelstrom and declared war on Coal and Ore. Voices blended into a frenzied Walpurgian uproar. Frantic telephone calls made the blackboard one flickering, wavering, confusing area of black and white where no spot was white for any consecutive minute and no spot black.

For an hour it raged so, down!--down!--down!--with no moment of recovery and no instant of changing tide. When now and again the din subsided for a few moments of recovered breath, while traders "verified," faces streaming sweat looked as haggard as though it was blood that was pouring from them. Voices cracked with hoarseness as men stood panting like dogs torn from the embrace of battle and waiting only for the leash to loosen and free them again for renewed battle. Underfoot they trod the confetti-like scraps of torn papers. Among them went the men with green watering-pots. Outside newsboys called yet new extras. The market had been open an hour and the Street was seeing

the most delirious day of mania in its history. Then in one of the lulls came that sound which between the hours of ten and three is never heard save as the clarion of disaster. The great gong in the president's gallery sent out its strident and metallic voice, and in the dead silence that followed its command an announcement was made.

"The Western Trust Company announces that it cannot meet its obligations."

The weakest barrier had fallen, and it was only the beginning.



CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN Mary Burton presented herself in the anteroom of the suite whose ground-glass doors bore the legend "Edwardes and Edwardes," and asked for the banker, a man with a pale and demoralized face gazed at her blankly. Could any one seek to claim, except on most urgent business, one minute out of these crucially vital hours? They were hours when the real target of the whole panic-making bombardment was striving to compress into each relentless instant a separate struggle for survival.

"I am Mary Burton," she said simply; and the man stood dubiously shaking his head. His nerve-racked condition could only realize the name Burton--and in these offices it was not just now a favored name.

As he stood, barring the way to an inner room marked "private," the door opened and Jefferson Edwardes came hurriedly out. He looked as she had never seen him look before, for deep lines had seared themselves into his face, aging it distressingly, and the mouth was drawn as that of a man who has been called back from the margin of death. But his eyes held an unwavering fire and his jaw was set in the pattern of battle. Mary remembered a painting of a solitary and wounded artilleryman leaning against a shattered field gun amid the bodies of his fallen comrades. The painter had put sternly into the face an expression of one who awaits death, but denies defeat. Here, too, was such a face. The man, hastening out, halted suddenly. Then he stepped back into his own office, silently motioning her to follow.

"It has come," he told her quietly. "We should have expected it, yet we were taken by surprise. Today tells a grim story."

"What does it all mean?" she pleaded. She stood close with her face almost as dead white as the ermine that fell softly about her shoulders. "I read the papers--and I came at once--to be near you in these hours. What does it mean?"

"I can't explain now," he answered in the quick utterance of one to whom time is invaluable. "Now every minute may mean millions--even human lives and deaths. I told you that he must trample down the innocent and the ignorant to come within striking distance of me. He is doing it. The bottom has dropped out of everything--pandemonium reigns. Each minute is begging hundreds--each half-hour is sending old houses to the wall and shattering public confidence. By this afternoon the country will be in the lockjaw paralysis of panic--unless we can stem the tide. Will you wait here for me? I must go to Malone."

"And there is nothing I can do--nothing?" Her voice was agonized and, with his hand on the knob, he abruptly wheeled and came back. He caught her fiercely in his arms and held her so smotheringly to his breast that her breath came in gasps. She clung to him spasmodically and the lips that met his were hot with a fever of fear and love. "Nothing I can do," she whispered, "though I am--the Helen who brought on the war?"

"Yes," he spoke eagerly, passionately, and she could feel the muscles in his tensed arms play like flexible steel as her hands dropped to rest inertly upon them. "Yes, there is something you can do--something you are doing! You are giving me a strength beyond my own strength to fling myself on these wolves and beat them back. You are giving me a battle-lust and a hope.... Now I must go."

She released him and forced a smile for his departure, then sank into a chair--his chair by a paper-littered desk--and her eyes, very wide and fixed, gazed ahead--at first unseeing. Yet, after an interval they began to take in this and that detail of the place, where she had never been before.

This was his office, the workshop in which he carried on his affairs and the affairs of the concern which had its foundation in unshaken ideals and high honor. In an intangible fashion its inanimate accessories reflected something of himself. On one wall, from a generous spread of moose antlers, hung a rifle and a pair of restrung snowshoes: reminders of the open woods he loved. There were autographed portraits of many men whose names were names of achievement, and one, in a morocco frame surmounted by a gilt crown, attested the personal regard of a reigning monarch. With clenched hands and a grim determination to divert her mind from the danger of madness, she went about the walls, reading those brief tributes to the man she loved. Then she came back and picked up a gold frame which rested on his desk, where, as he worked, his eyes might never be long without its view--and she was gazing into her own eyes. She glanced out across the steep-walled, fog-reeking canons where Finance has its center and whence its myriad activities palpitate through arteries of masonry and nerves of wire. He was out there somewhere, in the maw of that incalculably destructive machine, fighting its determination to grind him between its wheels and cogs and teeth. Mary Burton shuddered and tried by the pressure of her fingers to still the violent throbbing of her temples.

Then her eyes began absently studying the inscriptions on the windows of the next building, beyond an intervening court, and she smothered an impulse to scream as a sign across several broad panes flared at her in goldleaf.

"Hamilton Montagu Burton." A bitter fascination held her gaze there. She saw offices teeming with the fevered activity of a beehive--and another window showed a room where the electric lamps shone on emptiness. After she had watched it for a time a solitary figure came into view and stood by the ledge looking out. It was her brother, and though, through the gray fog, he was silhouetted there against the light at his back, something in the posture revealed his mood of Napoleonic implacability. It was as though he were, from an eminence, actually viewing the battle whose secret springs his fingers controlled, and as though he were well pleased.

Jefferson Edwardes had hurried out with a feeling of renewed strength. It was to him as though a promise of hope had been vouchsafed in a moment of despair. At Malone's office, he met Harrison, Meegan and several others. The old lion of the Street himself was slamming down the telephone as the newcomer entered.

"I've been talking with Washington," he announced, and his voice was one of steel coolness. At such an hour as this Malone wasted no minim of strength in futile anger. That belonged to other moments. "We have done what we could. It is not enough. We must do more. We have pegged those stocks where the slump would be most demoralizing and already this highbinder, Burton, has smashed those pegs like match-stems. We have sent money to a dozen banks that seemed hardest pressed, and scores are sending out calls for help. Good God, gentlemen, it's like sweeping back the sea with brooms."

"Why did you send for me?" demanded Edwardes, though he knew.

"To ask your aid," came the crisp reply. "This is a general alarm. The next few hours will roar to the continuous crash of falling banks--many of them banks that have a close relationship to you, Edwardes. Once more we must go to the rescue and it will take fifty additional millions. Otherwise--panic unparalleled. We expect you to stand your pro rata."

"Gentlemen," said the latest comer bluntly, "this raid is primarily aimed at me--its principal object is my destruction. Already I am hit for millions. I, too, was about to call for help from you. When this succession of crashes comes, Edwardes and Edwardes may be among the ruins."

The bushy brows of Malone came together in astonishment. "Great heavens, man! Edwardes and Edwardes is a synonym for Gibraltar."

"And under heavy enough artillery--" Edwardes spoke with bitter calmness--"Gibraltar would be a synonym for scattered junk. What news from Washington?"

"Washington has called Burton on the telephone. The Secretary of the Treasury has failed to connect with him. He does not acknowledge telegrams. He is ignoring the government and treating the President with contempt. He wants to have today for his massacre--and to talk about it tomorrow. We have sent repeatedly to his office. He can't be reached."

"That effort may as well be dropped." Edwardes shrugged his shoulders wearily. "He will have his day--and leave tomorrow to itself."

"And by the Immortal!" For an instant a baleful fire leaped into Malone's face. "We will have tomorrow! Every sinew of American finance shall be strained against him. But tomorrow may be too late. Can you hold out?"

Edwardes smiled grimly. "I'm trying like all hell," he said. "I've not laid down yet."

It was two o'clock and the Stock-Exchange was a shambles. Every security in the Street was down to panic figures and plunging plummet-like to further depths. At shortening intervals over the hoarse shrieks of the floor's tumult boomed the brazen hammer blows of the huge gong, which should sound only twice each day. At every recurring announcement of failure a wall-shaking howl went up and echoed among the sixty-two inverted golden blossoms of the ceiling.

The faces of the men to whom these cracked and hoarsened voices belonged had become bestial and wolfish. Where the morning had seen well-groomed representatives of Money's upper caste, the afternoon saw a seething mass of human ragamuffins, torn of clothing, sweat-drenched and lost to all senses save those twin emotions of ferocity and fear. Back and forth they swirled and eddied, and howled like wild things about carrion. At one side, panting, disheveled and bleeding from scratches incurred in the melee, bulked the gigantic figure of Len Haswell. He had no need now to bellow in a bull-like duel of voices and ferocity. The stampede had been so well put into motion that the floor was doing for him his deadly work of price-smashing. Telegraph wires were quivering from every section of the United States to the tune of--"Sell--cut loose--throw over!" A universal mania to get any price for anything was sweeping the land like a conflagration. Tomorrow would bring those reflexes from today when banks and trust

companies from the Lakes to the Rio Grande would topple in the wake of their metropolitan predecessors. Ruin sat crowned and enthroned, monarch of the day and parent of a panic which should close mills, and starve the poor and foster anarchy--but Hamilton Burton's hand was nearer Edwardes' throat.

Staples and his twenty cooperators fought on doggedly, grimly, to turn the tide before the close, but the nation was mad, and the men who fought and clamored here in this pit of its bowels were the most violent maniacs.

And while these things went forward Mary Burton still sat alone in the private office of Jefferson Edwardes, waiting. Through century-long hours she had in her ears only the din from the street and that incessant ticking of the stock-tape at her elbow.

Every few minutes she rose and anxiously ran through her fingers the long thin coil of paper which it fed so endlessly into its tall wicker basket. She could make little of those abbreviated letters and numbers, though she realized that every succeeding glance showed a shrinkage of each value. One thing she could read with a deadly clarity--those hideous words that meant the falling of the outposts. "So and So announce that they cannot meet their obligations." There were other grim scraps of information, too, wedged between the hurried quotations such as, "Police reserves called to quell riot at closed North Bank," and finally, "Troops from Governor's Island to guard sub-treasury."

Finally she went to the window and raised the sash to let the cold air blow against her fevered cheeks, and as she did so she heard yells and the gongs of patrol-wagons. The madness was spreading beyond the confines of enclosing walls.

Mary Burton turned, heavy-hearted, back to the room's interior and her glance fell on the clock. It recorded two-forty. She wondered when Edwardes would return. She had spent the day in his office because she knew that when he came in, as he had done several times, only to hasten out again, he found in her forced smile renewal of strength for his combat, which enabled him to go out smiling through the drawn agony of his harassment.

The hateful ticker drew her back with its light clatter. Perhaps at last it had good tidings to offer. Unless it brought them soon it would bring them too late--like a reprieve after execution. She took the narrow thread of paper in her hand and glanced at its latest entries. As she watched the small type wheel revolve and stamp, it broke upon her that the inanimate herald was spelling out, letter by letter, a familiar name.

"E-D-W-A-R-D-E-S A-N-D E-D-W-A-R-D-E-S."

With a smothered shriek Mary Burton dropped the tape as though it had scorched her fingers. She groped her way half-blindly to the chair by Jefferson's desk, and, sinking into it, buried her face in her crossed arms. She could not have shed a tear or uttered a word. She was paralyzed in an icy terror. That was how all these other announcements had begun: With the name of the failing firm. After what seemed a decade she drew herself up and sat erect and white, trembling from her throat to her feet. She forced her agonized features into a semblance of artificial calm. Suppose he should return to her now, defeated, ruined, crushed, and open his door on that picture of despair and surrender!

The clock said two-fifty-five. So she had been sitting here ten minutes! Grasping the arms of her chair and bracing herself, she rose with a labored effort and went resolutely back to the ticker where, as one draws aside a veil which may reveal tragedy, she picked up the tape again. She saw no name this time, and suddenly it occurred to her that the monstrous thing had passed callously on to other news--as though there were other news!

She dragged it out of its twisted coils in the basket and read in cold, unpunctuated capitals, EDWARDES AND EDWARDES FAIL TO MEET OBLIGATIONS.

The girl reeled and leaned limply against the wall, and, as she stood there overpowered and dizzy, a low incoherent moan came up from her throat. Then as she mechanically held the tenuous death-warrant in her pulseless fingers, her eyes fell on an item just finished.

MARKET TAKES TURN BURTON BROKERS BIDDING UP.

A comprehension came to her and her brain reeled in fury and torture. Now that his end was accomplished, the Great Bear had turned bull. He would sell back on the rise what he had slaughtered on the fall, and when tomorrow's reaction came with its roster of deluded misery he would harvest vast profits on his massacre.

She heard a sound beyond the ground glass as though a hand groped before its fingers found and closed upon the knob. Then slowly the door swung inward, and Jefferson Edwardes entered. His overcoat hung over one arm, and, as Mary saw his face, her hands clutched at her heart, but he did not seem to see her--or to see anything. With a most careful deliberation the ruined man closed the door silently behind him. He did it as though he were entering a sick room where he must guard against disturbing the patient with the slightest sound. Then he took a step or two forward

and halted to stand gazing straight ahead of him, while with the sleeve of one arm he brushed at his forehead and moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

Mary wondered for an agonized instant whether the cord of his sanity had snapped under the day's terrific ordeal, and she stood there still leaning limp and pallid and wide-eyed against the wall, holding before her the tape that had told her the story--and not realizing that she held it. Then the man awoke from his sleep-walker's vacancy and realized her presence. At the sight of her despairing eyes and inert figure resting for support against the mahogany panels, his expression altered. His eyes woke to life and, again moistening his lips, he forced the ghost of a smile which at first succeeded only in being ghastly.

"So you know?" he questioned.

Mary Burton did not reply in words. She could not, but she nodded her head and something between a groan and a sob came from her parted lips. Then her voice returned and she murmured in heart-broken self-accusation: "It was because of me."

He stood shaking himself as a dog shakes off water. His drooped shoulders came back with an abrupt snap and his head threw itself up and his chest out. With a swift stride he had reached her and folded her into his embrace. For once the regal confidence had left her and the courage was dead in her heart. She lay in his arms a dead weight, which, but for his supporting strength, would have crumbled to a limp mass on the floor. But as he held her, fresh bravery flooded his arteries and his voice came clear and untainted of weakness:

"We still have each other," he told her passionately. "You once asked me whether, if you were penniless, I should still want you. Today I am penniless and owe millions--do you still want me?"

Her arms clung to him more closely and the eyes that gazed into his revealed, as they had on that first night, all that was in her soul. Once more she answered him with a question: "Look at me--do I want you?"

He swept her from her feet and carried her to a chair, where he put her gently down, then he knelt by her side with her hands clasped convulsively in his own. For a moment it is doubtful whether he realized anything save her presence. His voice was the voice of the man who had met her by the mountain road, of the man who had come to her in the darkness at Haverly Lodge and claimed her without preamble.

"The mountains still stand--and there are cottages there where even a very poor man may find shelter. I would rather have it, with you, than to own Manhattan Island without you."

There was a knock at the door of the private office, and Edwardes, rising from his knees, went to receive the message. He came back very gravely.

"I have to face an unpleasant interview, dearest," he said. "One of those bankers who were crushed as incidents to my ruin--who was guilty only of standing in your brother's path, is here. I'm told that he is half-mad, and I must do what I can." He opened a door into a small conference-room. "Will you wait for me--there?"

With his arm around her he led her across the threshold, and then, closing that door, he came back and opened the other.

The man who half-stepped, half-stumbled in staggered to the desk chair and dropped into it to raise a face in which the eyes burned wildly. The whole figure shook in an ague of unnerved excitement. He spread two trembling hands and tragically announced, "I'm ruined."

Edwardes nodded gravely. "You need a physician, Fairley. You're unstrung," he suggested. "Perhaps a drop of brandy would help. I think I have some here."

"No!" the reply was violent, and the President of the Metallic National shook his head with the uncontrolled air of a man who is close to the border of insanity. "No, by God, I'm past physicians. What I need next is an undertaker." He dropped his head to the desk and broke into a crazed storm of weak sobs.

"There is no profit in wild talk," his host reminded him. "I'm ruined, too. We must make a fresh start."

"Fresh start, hell!" The words rang queerly through the accompaniment of a bitter laugh. "Hamilton Burton took me and squeezed me dry. He put the thumbscrews on me and bled me of my Coal and Ore stock. He made me a traitor to Malone and today when Malone might have saved me I had no friends. Then because you sought to befriend me, Burton turned on me and ruined me. My family will be in the streets. Now--" the voice rose into a high treble of frenzy which penetrated to the room where Mary Burton waited--"I'm going to kill Hamilton Burton first and myself next."

With the wild threat the banker rose unsteadily and his palsied hand went into his overcoat pocket, to come out clutching a magazine pistol which he brandished before him.

Edwardes' first thought was to seize the wrist, but the breadth of the table intervened and he knew that he was dealing with a man of temporarily dethroned reason. So he held the wild and shifting gaze, as well as he could, with the cool steadiness of his own eyes and spoke in a measured, soothing voice:

"I shouldn't do that, Fairley. In the first place you don't know where to find him. Your effort would probably fail and you would only be locked up before you accomplished either purpose."

The noise of the outer offices had drowned the visitor's excited tones among the employees, but to Mary Burton, standing anxiously in the conference-room, all the words were intelligible.

Fairley leaned across the table, and for an instant left the weapon unguarded. With a movement of cat-like swiftness Edwardes seized it, but a wild snarl of rage burst from the other's lips and his fingers closed vise-like over Jefferson's hand.

"No--by God--you don't!" he screamed.

Mary Burton threw open the door, and saw the two figures bent across the table with four hands desperately gripped while between them glinted the blued metal of the pistol, which the frustrated Fairley was striving to turn upon his own breast and Edwardes struggled to divert.

Before she could give outcry or reach them, there came an out-spitting of fire from the ugly muzzle and a report which the confined space magnified to a sullen roar. Edwardes lurched suddenly forward and remained motionless with his face down and his arms outspread upon the desk, while a tiny red puddle spread on the mahogany.

Fairley had leaped back and cowered, suddenly sobered, against the wall as the outer door opened and figures poured into the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

AFTER the low scream that came moaningly up from her breast, which was drowned in the echoes of the report, Mary Burton made no outcry. She no longer leaned limp and nerveless against the support of the doorway. Something had seemed to snap the cords of her paralysis and out of her blanched face her eyes stared wide and piteous. As the older banker staggered back she was quick to reach the motionless figure and to lift its head to her breast. Yet she did not really have to look, something fateful and unquestionable told her from the first instant that no human aid could avail--and that he would not speak again or move a muscle in life. His employees found her supporting the weight of his shoulders against her bosom and seeking to staunch with her handkerchief the flow of blood from the temple.

In one trivial respect the cruelties of her day of cumulative tragedy were abated. The steel-nosed bullet, even at that close range, had cut clean and spared his face, save for the trickle of red and the smirch of powder burn--such defacement as she could not have endured. The eyes, not yet glazed, gazed out with their accustomed resolute calm and the lips were firm, a little grim with the purpose of thwarting another's death, but it was still, though lifeless, a face without surrender.

The girl bent low, whispering into the ear which could not hear her, and then she raised her eyes, still holding his head against her shoulder, to see the little circle of stunned faces, and hear Fairley's voice announcing in broken syllables, but very quietly, "I was--attempting suicide--and he grappled with me."

She knew even while she awaited the physicians that no spark of life remained and that this was the last time her arms would ever be closed around him in life or death, and as she stood there, for the time upheld by a strength beyond her ordinary physical powers, strange inconsequential little fragments of talk, things he had said to her and she to him, were repeating themselves in her memory, and the exact inflections of his voice were renewing themselves in her ears.

Then as two physicians hurried in, closely heeled by two policemen, she surrendered her beloved burden to stronger hands, and, as she moved back with still no trace of tears in her wide eyes, the whole picture darkened and out of muscle and nerve and brain-cell went every vestige of autonomy and consciousness. They caught her as she fell and laid her on a broad upholstered window seat. When her eyes next opened hot pains were scorching her temples and her gaze turned instinctively toward the desk. It was empty of its human burden, and, save for the clerk who had that morning received her in the outer room and a physician, the private office was empty, too.

Following the hungry question of her mismated eyes, the doctor gravely nodded his head.

"It was instantaneous and painless," he said. Then he added, "We have sent for your brother. He was not in his office, but--"

With the startling ferocity of an aroused tigress, Mary strove to rise and make her way to the door, but the physician restrained her. "Not yet," he gently commanded. "You are hardly ready for exertion;" and even before he had finished speaking her knees gave way and she sank back.

"My brother!" she whispered, and her eyes burned feverishly. "It will kill me to see him. I shall try to murder him--I--"

She was interrupted by the noiseless opening of the door, and Hamilton Burton stood across the threshold of the enemy whose life he had that day broken.

He was no longer the Napoleonic Burton. For the instant he was stunned and pale. It was breaking on him that the price of conquest may be excessive. Even before this staggering news had reached him he had seen the headlines of the extras, had read his name coupled with the open and bitter denunciation of public hate.

At his shoulder stood young Carl Bristoll, as pallid as a specter. But the brother came swiftly over, dropped to his knees by the girl's side. At sight of her stricken face all the tenderness of family love leaped into a freshly blazing power in his heart until for the time it burned out the remembrance of every other thing. He thrust out his arms and said in a shaken voice, "Little sister, little sister!"

But with a cry as though for protection from the touch of something unspeakably foul, she threw both arms across her face and turned, shuddering, from his touch.

"Doctor," she besought in a voice of supreme loathing, "in God's name protect me from this murderer!"

She struggled to her feet and stood with her back to the wall, her breast heaving and her pupils blazing out of the death-like pallor of a drawn face. Her hands lay flat against the wainscoting with spread fingers that convulsively

twitched as if she were seeking to press back the solid partition and escape that way.

"Listen to me, or you will break my heart," pleaded Hamilton tensely. "I thought it was a curable infatuation. If I had known you cared so much--"

"Break your heart! I wish to God I could, but you have no heart," she screamed, and she swayed to the side until, had the doctor not supported her shoulder, she would have fallen, but her words poured on in a fierce torrent. "You have broken my heart, and you have killed him. You knew how much I cared. You are a monster, but not an idiot. You have sacrificed a country to your one unspeakable Moloch of a god--I hope you--and your god--are satisfied."

For an instant some echo of the old dominance flickered into the man's face. "Edwardes fought and defied me," he said. "I punished--" But his sister interrupted with a wrath which nothing could stem:

"You have overreached yourself--you, too, will go down in this carnage. I shall pray God that you do--my God who is over your god; my God and his." Her voice became calmer, but her phrases were broken by gasping pauses. She spoke as though her God had commanded her to read this bitter indictment against her brother.

"Because he shined his honor above your insatiable greed you undertook to doom him. You have written a page ... into history ... a page full of horror ... you have made criminals of honest men ... and suicides of brave ones. Now in the trail of your incendiary malice you cast his life--" her voice fell in a tortured sob--"the life ... he so bravely fought for there in the hills ... and after it you toss my heart."

The financier moved a step forward and his lips opened, but the doctor laid a hand on his arm. "You must leave her, sir," he said quietly, but finally. "She is in no condition to stand more of this."

"How can I leave her like this?" remonstrated Hamilton and once more the physician raised his hand. "In such a case the doctor must be obeyed--unless--" his own voice hardened--"you are anxious to add even worse results to today's work."

Hamilton Burton turned. "Do what you can," he said. "I will send Paul." So he left the place, passing between the employees of the bankrupt firm of Edwardes and Edwardes in the anterooms.

At his elbow followed young Bristoll, but when they had reached the ground floor the secretary halted his chief with an impetuous touch on the arm.

"It's no use, sir--we separate here," he said passionately. "I must give you my resignation, at once."

At another time such an announcement would have been greeted by this imperious master with swift acceptance and quiet irony. This day he had smitten his enemies and they had withered before his power. Results had differed in no respect from the outlines of his preparations and yet so poignantly personal had been the recoil that he found himself, when his brain needed its most alert resourcefulness, inwardly admitting a new and strange sense of uncertainty--almost of uneasiness.

Once before for a weak moment he had felt that flagging of confidence--when Mary had left his house, but he had swiftly conquered it. He would as summarily conquer its repetition. His nerves were not such uncontrolled agents as to be shaken by the wild folly and accidents that grew out of weaker natures. All battlefields leave black scars and pictures which are not pretty pictures. To pause and surrender to brooding over these details is to clip one's wings and dull one's talons. He forced a smile.

"As you please, Carl," he said. "Though I had made the mistake of counting on your loyalty as dependable."

The young man answered with an effort.

"It's a hard thing to do. I haven't just worked for the salary. I have made a hero of you, and been very proud of even my small part in your career. It was as though I were a staff officer to a Man of Destiny."

"And now," the voice was bitingly satirical, "finding that the Man of Destiny can't always fight with confetti and the blowing of kisses, you grow faint-hearted."

"Put it as you like, Mr. Burton.... All I know is that, after today, I should no longer feel proud.... I should feel like an accomplice in crime."

Hamilton Burton laughed. It was a short and not a pleasant laugh.

"Please yourself. To me no man is indispensable. Good-night."

Mary did not wait for Paul. As she drove up-town with the physician, she had in her ears the shouts of newsboys

heralding the death of Jefferson Edwardes--and other deaths.

When she was in her own bed they mercifully gave her something which smoothed her brain into the black velvet softness of sleep. The future must tell whether her body and mind could ever be brought back to the harbor of health.

Hamilton Burton's lights burned late that night in his office, and up to them many baleful glances turned from the sidewalks below. The financier told himself that he was the same man that he had been, safeguarded by his star; but as he worked he found himself instinctively turning to the chair where Carl Bristoll should be and where now sat a more inept subordinate. Each such moment brought its tiny stab at his pride and self-assurance, and the brain which he must concentrate kept straying to the disquieting vision of a grief-maddened girl leaning against the wall, with her fingers twitching in little groping gestures as her lips rained accusation. Today he had made a panic, but between the opening and closing peals of tomorrow's gong each hour must be filled with the most exact and brilliant maneuverings.

All day today he had borne down the market on a scale unprecedented. All day tomorrow he must be in a position to reap the harvest he had sown--else he might find himself the victim of a trap which he had prepared, at a mighty cost, for others. No one knew so well as he how even his colossal strength had been strained with the titanic effort of pushing apart the masonry of the temple's pillars.

He had no doubts of the morrow, but these troubling remembrances came blurringly across the crystal of his brain.

Abruptly he took up his telephone and rang his house number. "Yamuro," he said when he heard the sibilant, quaintly distorted voice of the Japanese from the other end, "ask Mr. Paul to wait for me there until I come in." Paul's music should soothe him.

"Scuse, please," came the apologetic reply. "Mr. Paul, she no here. When she come, Yamuro tell. Thanks."

It was late when the financier left his car at his own door and demanded of Harrow, "Where is my brother?"

"In the music-room, I think, sir." Hamilton thought he detected in the butler's voice a note of anxiety and for a moment he glanced with a keen scrutiny into the servitor's eyes, and the eyes dropped under his gaze.

"Very well, I sha'n't need you again tonight." The Titan turned and climbed the stairs.

The lights of the music-room were burning brilliantly and on a table stood siphons and bottles and glasses. At the door Hamilton paused and glanced uneasily about, then he saw Paul, and smiled. Weary with his vigil Paul, the affectionate and faithful, had evidently fallen asleep in his chair. Hamilton crossed and laid a hand on his brother's shoulder. Then as quickly he withdrew it. Something unaccustomed in the younger man's appearance arrested him and he stood gazing down.

The musician sprawled in an attitude of demoralized inertia and over his cameo face the dark hair hung disordered. His hands fell grotesquely and his closed eyes were puffed. Hamilton bent down and with a low oath studied his brother. His sleep was no natural napping. It was a drunken stupor proclaiming itself in a stertorous and uneasy breathing.

Angrily Hamilton shook the sagging shoulders until the sleeper's lids opened heavily and the lips voiced some incoherent thing. Then Paul attempted to turn his face away and go to sleep again.

"So," exclaimed the elder as he dragged his brother to his feet and restored him to a semblance of consciousness, "so this is the way you waited for me?"

Paul blinked owlily through the stupidity of his condition, and upon his delicate features the unaccustomed and swollen flush dwelt in a disfiguring blot. He shook his head and informed thickly, "Jefferson Edwardes's dead."

"I know that--and you're drunk."

The musician stupidly nodded his assent to so incontrovertible a statement and as he gradually awoke to a fuller realization, he rose and made his way unsteadily to the piano. But his fingers were stiff and unresponsive, and after a brief effort he gave that up.

Once more he looked up and an expression of deep terror spread over his face. Tears welled into his eyes and he wept for awhile in silence as Hamilton looked on.

"Jeffson Edwardes's dead," he reiterated with parrot-like singleness of idea. "Mary's heart's broke.... I'm drunk." One

hand waved broadly in an oratorical gesture. After a moment he added in solemn afterthought, "Father's drunk, too."

Hamilton ground his teeth. "I suppose," he said bitterly, "you regard the first two facts as justification for the others."

Paul rose and through his condition something of his more normal self asserted itself. He laid his hands on his brother's shoulders. "Hamilton, I think my heart's broke, too. Mary's a sweet girl. I haven't slept for a long, long time--been worrying--an' tonight I--"

"Never mind explaining." Out of the elder brother's voice the wrath had died. "That won't help now. Come, I'll put you to bed."

As he turned away from Paul's bedroom a half-hour later the face of Hamilton Burton was not the face of the conqueror. In his own room he went to a window and looked out. He saw a star and some fancy identified it as the same star that had caught his eye that night when he came back to the farm-house and found his father ill. Once more it was not in the east riding toward the upper heavens, but in the west, setting beyond the Palisades of Jersey--soon to drop from view.

For a breathing-space Hamilton Burton felt faint and uncertain, as one may feel in a dream which is half-wakefulness.

Then he was conscious of his own voice speaking half-aloud:

"Slivers Martin paid me ten for 'em an' I got 'em for seven--an' he had to go after 'em."

The words had come involuntarily--as from another personality speaking with his tongue, and they startled him. With a fiercely impatient gesture he brushed his hand across his forehead and picked up from a table a new appreciation of the life and campaigns of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Yamuro slipped in with his cushioned tread and stood awaiting orders, and after a while the master whose attention refused to remain fixed even on Napoleon glanced up.

"You may go, Yamuro," he said in a wearied voice, but the Japanese valet did not go. Instead he approached and his face grew anxious as he noted the confused and fatigued droop of his master's eyes and lips.

"Scuse, please," he hazarded as his white teeth flashed in an apologetic grin. "You tired. You go down gymnasium--take exercise--one half-hour. Yes, one half-hour and me rub you Japanese way; make you sleep--yes, please."

Hamilton Burton raised his head slowly. "Perhaps," he acceded in a dull voice, "that mightn't be a bad idea. I do feel a bit fagged--for some reason--and I need to be fit tomorrow. Tomorrow will be a decisive day."

So with the narrow-eyed little servitor in whose breast beat a heart of unquestioning loyalty, the untriumphant victor went down into the basement of his house, where between marble slabs and porphyry columns he had equipped a small gymnasium finished with the magnificence of a Roman bath.

Beyond an arched portal was another room where the basin of a swimming-pool spread cool and inviting between mosaic floors.

Here each morning Hamilton plunged into the icy water and came out with a splendid vitality glowing on his firm flesh. But at night he used only the warm shower and when they came into the gymnasium they did not touch the switch which lighted the pool.

Then Hamilton Burton stripped and attacked the punching bag until his muscles glistened and shone as if they had been freshly oiled. Yamuro stood looking on with sparkling eyes. Hamilton Burton stripped and in action would have brought a glow of delight to the face of those Hellenic masters of training who saw in the human body the most sacred temple of the human soul, and paid tribute to physical perfection. The flow and ripple of these strong, justly modeled sinews were like the play of steel under satin and their smoothness was as rhythmic and full of power as some young gladiator's, who might have stirred the appreciation of Phidias or Praxiteles. When at last he had burned his mental restlessness into physical weariness, Burton halted and stood with his shoulders thrown back and his head erect, the breathing of chest and abdomen as regular and deep as the sequence of waves at flood tide. Yamuro went out into still another room for the accessories of his Japanese art of muscle-kneading, and Hamilton turned idly toward the darkened swimming pool. He strolled over to the edge of the marble basin and walked out on the spring-board. It was all very dark in here, but his feet were familiar with every foot of space.

"I might as well cap it with a plunge," he told himself, and, lifting his hands above his head, launched outward in a graceful arc.

Yamuro came back a moment later and looked about the empty gymnasium. His face suddenly went pale. "Mr. Burton--please!" he screamed, and in his excitement his voice was more than ordinarily sibilant. Then he turned on the pool light and rushed frantically back. It had not occurred to him to warn his chief that that afternoon the basin had been emptied and repaired, and that below the diving-board were only six inches of water--just enough to give back, in semi-darkness, a liquid reflection, and, beneath that, solid slabs of marble.

Yamuro peered over the edge and a deep groan broke from him. At the bottom lay the figure of Hamilton Burton, with its head bent to one side. It lay very still, and the water was slowly coloring from a wound in the scalp.



CHAPTER XXV

HAMILTON Burton had always denied with scorn the existence of blind luck as an element in human greatness or failure. Now if he had leaped head-foremost into an empty swimming pool, at the exact moment when he stood midway of an enterprise which should crown him as omnipotent--or ruin him, perhaps it was a thing beyond coincidence. Yesterday he had aligned colossal forces for today's conflict--and taken his toll of vengeance. Today he must turn to profit the chaos he had wrought to that end through plans known only to himself--and today he lay with a fractured skull, sleeping the sleep of unconsciousness.

Today every hand in the world of finance was turned against him with the desperation of a struggle for survival--save those of his own lieutenants who were leaderless. All the way down the line from the Department of Justice to the small sufferers of the provinces a slogan of war without quarter sounded against the most hated man in America. That such would be the case he had known yesterday, but he also knew--or thought he did--that his directing hand would still be on the tiller and his uncannily shrewd brain would be puzzling, bewildering and deluding his enemies into unwittingly serving his ends.

From the morning papers the secret of his accident had been successfully withheld. So the press of the country sounded forth a united thunder-peal of stinging and bitter anathema, pillorying Hamilton M. Burton as the most menacing of all public enemies and an ogre who had in a single day fattened his already superlative wealth on the sufferings, the starvation and the lives of his victims. Editorial pages from Park row to a thousand main streets, double-leaded and double-columned their clamorous demand that such a plunderer should be nailed to the cross of punishment. Burton-phobia was epidemic. At first the physicians who gathered in his darkened room would not commit themselves to any promise of recovery. The skull was fractured. Ahead lay a long illness at best--after that--but here they left off words and resorted to a non-committal shrugging of frock-coated shoulders.

"Do you mean," Elizabeth Burton put the question with trembling lips and chalk-white cheeks, "that perhaps--even if he gets physically well--" She, too, broke off.

"Frankness is best," responded the family physician, who feeling the most personal responsibility, assumed the hard role of spokesman. "Sometimes in cases of this sort the brain is left--with a permanent scar upon its efficiency."

The mother groaned. At her own house lay a daughter in that collapse which had followed the overtaxed courage of the first shock. Here lay Hamilton, her oldest; her Napoleonic boy for whose condign punishment a nation's voice cried out. To her they were simply her children, equally dear.

Only one child was left her in his proper condition of mind and body. He, because of his sensitive, almost clairvoyant nature, had always been very close to her. Now she turned to Paul, and Paul, although his heart was shaken with terror and distress, rose for the time beyond his weakness and was almost a man as he sought to brace his mother's need.

From her first interview with the doctors she went to the music-room and, pausing on the threshold, heard him at the piano. He was singing very low.

"If I were hanged to the highest tree--Mother o' mine, Mother o' mine,
I know whose prayers would come up to me--Mother o' mine."

She went in and Paul took her in his arms and helped her to a chair. Then as he had used to do when a little boy he knelt down, gazing into her face while she talked, and she reached out a hand which was much thinner since her own late illness and ran it through the dark hair over his white forehead. For a merciful little moment it seemed to this grief-stricken woman that she was no longer white-haired and beautifully gowned. In her fancy the fingers with their wealth of rings were again red with the drudgery of the washtub and the head she caressed was the head of a little boy, who, because he was delicate and shrinking, found a greater delight here at her knee than in the rougher companionship of playmates. Paul spoke softly.

"Ham"--it had been a long time since he had used that abbreviated name. Perhaps he, too, had slipped back into the past--"Ham will get well--and work more miracles, mother. He won't surrender even to death. His spirit, and his star, will bring him through."

"I almost wish," her words were faint, "he had never had a star. I wish that we were all back there, close to the strength of the hills and the graves of our dead."

In these days Paul was very constantly with his mother; and by a thousand little attentions made himself indispensable to her.

It was a small thing, but costly to his feelings, since, for every one of these moments redolent of suffering and sadness, his own soul fiber, delicate and thin as a silk thread, must afterward pay in the reaction of a deep depression. To him echoes meant more than positive sounds, and the tears in his mother's voice, the unshed tears in her eyes, brought him a suffering so intense and genuine that when he went out the thought of returning to either of the stricken houses where she needed him was like returning to a jail. Then, too, there was the unexpressed fear which gnawed incessantly at his heart, that, in spite of his belief in Hamilton, business disaster might lie ahead. He wrote less often and with more effort to Loraine Haswell--and thought longingly of Marcia Terroll, who had forbidden him to see her.

Such a pregnant item of news as Hamilton Burton's accident could not long be kept from the Street and the public. On the morning following the occurrence it burst into print--and for a time the chorus of invective was silenced.

But the hands that had been raised to pull him down could not be stayed. He himself had never halted when the Gods of Chance had tossed into his lap a mighty advantage. At the first announcement that "Ursus Major" lay ill, perhaps mortally hurt, the trampled prices of securities began to revive like dusty blossoms under a shower. Day long came damp extras from the press heralding a bull day almost as wild and swift in its price recovery as yesterday's bear day had been terrific in its avalanche.

From post to post the deep voice of Len Haswell and other Burton lieutenants thundered in an effort to stem the altered tide--but they were generals of brigade without their field marshal, guessing blindly at a plan which had not been revealed by the master-tactician. Into the eyes of Jack Staples stole a glitter of premonitory triumph as he met them and beat them back. Burton millions were melting like hailstones falling on hot metal, and when the session ended Len Haswell turned away with an empty face. For two days he had almost forgotten, in his battle-lust, his own heart-ache. Now it was over and because he had followed Hamilton Burton with his own small fortunes as a camp-follower trails an army corps, he knew that he was wiped out and ruined. Hamilton might lose many millions, and "come back," but he and many like him were irretrievably done for.

One day when Hamilton had been ill for a week and had not yet emerged from the distorted land of delirium, Tom Burton strolled, as immaculate and well groomed as ever, into the National Union Club, and looked about for a bridge quorum of his cronies. The doctors held out hope and the father sought relaxation from anxiety. His face was flushed, for old Thomas Burton, too, had felt sorely the strain of these days, and had sought his own means of dulling apprehension's edge. His brain was not versatile in such matters.

General Penfrit occupied his customary chair by a Fifth-avenue window, and the newcomer smiled with pleasure to find him there. General Penfrit shared many interests with him, and was willing to share as many more, so long as Thomas Burton's bridge game continued to be of the contributory type.

Burton strolled over, swinging his stick, and nodded with a bland smile, but to his dismay the general glanced up and acknowledged the greeting without warmth. Perhaps his old friend was not feeling well today.

"I was wondering," suggested Burton, "whether we couldn't arrange a little rubber." He caught the eye of a waiter at the same moment and beckoned. "What will yours be, general?" he genially inquired.

"I don't believe I care to play." The voice was chilling at the start and became more icy with each added syllable, "and I won't have anything to drink."

Tom Burton stood looking down somewhat blankly.

"Nothing to drink?" he repeated in a perfectly warrantable astonishment. His ears must have tricked him.

The general rose stiffly. "With you--no," he spoke curtly, and took himself away with a waddle of studied dignity. For a full minute Hamilton Burton's father gazed vacantly out at the avenue, then he turned on his heel. Henry O'Horrissy was just entering the door and with him were two other members of a little group which had lunched and chatted and played bridge inseparably for several years. Each knew all the others' anecdotes and could laugh at the proper moments. They formed one of those small cliques of intimates into which this club resolved itself, and Tom Burton was of their valued brotherhood.

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen," accosted Burton. "How are you all today?"

With three silent nods the trio at the door turned and drifted aimlessly across to the billiard-room.

Tom Burton went and sat alone by a window. Slowly a brick-like flush spread and deepened on his full face. This

club life had become very important to him—even indispensable. There was nothing with which to replace it. He wheeled his chair so that he might be plainly seen from the door, and as man after man came in, with whom he had spent his time and his son's money, men who had been pleased to court the father of the great Hamilton Montagu Burton, he genially accosted them—and one after another they returned greetings of frigid formality.

Then he turned his chair with its back to the room and looked out and the stubborn pride died in his eyes and his face grew old and pathetic. There was no further room for doubt. He was tasting ostracism and being included in this wave of hatred for his son, which he had regarded as newspaper rubbish. He leaned forward with his gloved hands on his cane and once or twice under his fastidiously trimmed beard, his lips twitched painfully. Finally he rose, ordering his next cocktail over a hotel bar, and though the stubbornness of pride forced him back on the morrow to lunch at his accustomed club table, he lunched alone, and was grateful for the solicitous courtesy of the negro who served him.

One afternoon Paul made his way down Fifth avenue on foot.

The sky was unbelievably blue and a flashing brilliancy sparkled in all the splinters of color that embroidered themselves along the parquetry of the street. The avenue has, at times, a magic of its own and today it was a swiftly flowing stream of brilliancy and life and laughter. But this was a mood to which Paul Burton found no response. His heart was attuned to echoes of a more somber tone—and he was bound on a mission which was, for him, a bold one. He was disobeying orders which until now he had not ventured to disobey. Marcia Terroll had banished him from her presence. Since that day in her apartment he had seen less of her than before and for many weeks now nothing at all. Marcia, unlike Loraine Haswell, recognized that they could not meet without dangerous drifting, and that such drifting could end only in disaster, so at last she had forbidden his visiting her even occasionally and to all his arguments she had steadfastly shaken her head with gentle obduracy.

For a time they had met as they might have met had the interview in her apartment on the drizzly afternoon never occurred. She had torn that page out of their chronicles of acquaintanceship, and assumed that it had never been included. Her wit had sparkled for him and her individual charm had blossomed as though her life had never known a season other than spring and blossom-time. Sometimes he found himself wondering if that afternoon had been actual.

He discovered himself using quaint phrases of her invention as part of his own conversational equipment, and often he found himself applauded for some flash of repartee which he knew was only a quotation from her. But also he found himself incapable of that continuous self-restraint which she required of him under their agreement of a future basis. He had his moments when he could no more avoid feeling and acting and declaring himself her lover than he could avoid later regretting them, and, for this inability, he had been exiled.

"To you," she told him, "it means a minor thing—but it's not minor to me. I have had unhappiness enough without risking more. We must not see or write to each other." Paul knew nothing of what this decision cost her or of the many letters she had written to him—and destroyed unmailed.

Now he was utterly miserable and his heart was aching for companionship outside the two houses where the mildew of misery tainted even the sunshine that came through the windows. He craved the cheer and strength of a heart braver than his own, and in defiance of her orders he was going to see the woman in whose presence he should find these things; the woman whom he had not seen for months.

CHAPTER XXVI

As he reached Washington square it seemed that the quiet of the section held a sort of benediction, and such peace as hangs between old walls, where the fever of stress has passed and left in its wake a philosophy and a contentment.

But when he came to the house where he had visited her, he was told that she no longer lived there. With a sudden pang it occurred to him that once more she might have moved a step down the economic scale toward the furnished room in one of those dingy lodging-houses which she had dreaded; places where the heart sickens at the forlornness of its environment.

He inquired for the girl with whom Marcia had shared the little apartment, and to his relief learned that she still had her abode here and would receive him. As he opened the door, Dorothy Melliss was bending over her drawing-board by a north window, rushing through some fashion illustrations which must be delivered on the morrow. She greeted Paul with a nod and went on with her work, while he explained his mission.

Dorothy was a wholesome young person of clear complexion and straightforward eyes and she spoke with an independence of manner amounting to slanginess. She was one of those girls whom an unaided life in the city fosters. She could take care of herself--and did--but she knew life and looked it in the face--and dispensed with anything like a baby stare in doing so. Now she listened to Paul's talk, then suddenly shoved back her India-ink bottle and wiped her pen, while her pupils met his with directness.

"Before I answer any of your questions, Mr. Burton, I've got a few to ask you myself," she announced. "I might as well talk straight from the shoulder. Just how anxious you are to see Marcia isn't going to make such a great difference in my young life. Whether or not she wants you to find her--does make a great deal of difference."

"What do you mean, Miss Melliss?" Paul was genuinely puzzled.

"I mean that of course I know her address--or addresses--because they change every day. I also know that she gave me the most explicit orders not to tell you where she could be found."

"Oh!" he exclaimed in disappointment, relinquishing his inquiry at the first obstacle. "Then I suppose I may as well go."

"Hold on," she commanded tersely. "I'm Marcia Terroll's friend. I think I'm enough her friend to decide for myself whether I can help her most by obeying or disobeying her. Sit down for five minutes and listen to me. I feel like talking."

He obeyed, and the young woman's face flushed with her interest as she took a chair near him and lighted a cigarette. After that she sat for a few moments reflectively silent.

"I guess there isn't so much similarity between Marcia and me, but there's one thing--and it's a bond of kinship in a way." She looked at him unwaveringly. "We've both been on our own for some time in a town where there are more Don Juans than Walter Raleighs--and we're both straight. To the women of *your* protected set that wouldn't be so much to brag of--about as much as for a millionaire to boast that he'd never picked a pocket. None of those sheltered girls in your own world, where women nibble at life like bon-bons, have anything on Marcia Terroll. In brain and character and charm she has it over those female noncombatants like a tent."

"I know all that, Miss Melliss." His reply was vaguely apologetic.

"Maybe you do, but I'm not through yet. She was cut to a delicate pattern and meant for life's sunshine and God knows she's had plenty of shadow. She's kept a smile on her lips and a laugh in her eyes through things that would have crumpled up lots of those tender creatures you know. You don't guess what it means to that sort of woman--well, to see life from the angle we get on it, but Marcia knows. You came along and she--" The young woman broke off in sudden silence.

"She what?" Anxiety sounded through his question.

"Oh, she never told me anything. It's not her fashion to tell such things, but I have a pair of eyes myself. I figure that Marcia let herself in for a danger she thought she had put behind her. She allowed herself to have a dream." She paused and her gaze was almost accusing in its directness. "From the look in her eyes before she went away I guess she realized that it was a dream."

Miss Melliss had eyes of a brown softness, but just now they flashed hard as agate and her voice rose to a scornful indignation.

"As if we haven't enough to handle with the facts of Life, without hopeless dreams! I'm no anarchist railing at wealth and luxury ... but you men that want everything ... and give nothing--" She broke off and abruptly demanded, "Well, when you think about it, what do you call it to yourselves?"

"Where is she?" demanded Paul.

"She's out with a dinky, barnstorming company, playing one-night stands--on a route of tank-towns and whistling stations. It was all she could get. She's making early-morning jumps between shabby hotels with a bunch of cheap actors and cheaper actresses that are just about as congenial to her as a herd of goats." The voice vibrated with sincere feeling.

"Are you going to tell me where I can find her?"

The girl studied her cigarette, drew a puff upon it and exhaled a cloud of smoke before she answered. Then she spoke reflectively.

"I'm just wondering whether I am or not. If you're going to follow her up and make her dream again--only to wake up again, I certainly am not. If you're going to be any comfort to her I am, because God knows she needs some comfort. She is only going on her nerve."

"Please tell me," he urged very persuasively. At that moment it was in his mind to write a truthful letter to Loraine Haswell and go to Marcia with a proposal of marriage. He felt only his need of her--and her importance to himself. He failed to reckon on the thousand misgivings and indecisions which would assail him between the moment of impulse and that of execution. But his eyes were sincere and Dorothy believed them. She went to her desk and brought back a sheet of paper.

"That's the route for this week--and next," she said. "After that you must either find out for yourself or go without knowing."

That night with the holiday spirit of a lad let out of a cheerless school Paul Burton walked along the principal street of a small New England town where old-fashioned houses sprawled between stark elms. When he reached the Palace Theater, the performance had begun, so he hurriedly bought a ticket and found himself sitting near the front with many empty seats about him. It was a cheap "follow up" company with an old piece that had once been a Broadway hit. He had never seen Marcia act. Now he was seeing her under the most inauspicious circumstances--and he knew that only want of opportunity and the uncompromising plane on which she had pitched her dealings in managerial offices had balked her ambitions. She could act and was acting with a force, intelligence and finesse that were wasted here, and as he watched her suddenly their eyes met and across the blazing separation of the "foots" she recognized him. For just an instant her pupils dilated and she missed a cue. It looked as though she would "go up" in her lines, but before the prompter could come to her aid she had recovered herself and her performance went on unbroken. But during the following intermission the women who dressed near by could hear her humming a gay tune, and as she came out at her call they saw in her eyes a sparkle that had not been there before.

As Marcia sat in her dressing-room before the mirror which was fastened against a brick wall, the squalidness of the cubbyhole ceased to depress her. On the slab before her lay scattered the details of make-up, and crowded into one corner stood her open wardrobe trunk. A placard near a light-bulb read, "Please remember that YOU are here for a few days, but we are here all the time. Do not deface our home," and under that notice, probably tempted by it into irony, a former occupant had scrawled in huge letters "Oh, you home!"

But now the chilly little dressing-room was no longer a dingy cell. She had recognized Paul Burton's face out in front, and, as she changed for the next act, little snatches of song broke from her lips, and she smiled at herself in the glass until the small, glistening teeth flashed like those of a pleased child.

Fate gives no guarantee of responsibility for the targeting of the Love-God's darts. This whimsical deity seems to owe no duty to fitness or consistency. He may choose to make a strong and excellent character love one too weak to be worthy its thought and no higher power intervenes. After all, Marcia had met Paul when she was lonely and they had for a while comforted each other's unhappiness. When she had ordered him to stay away the damage was already done, and since then she had been infinitely more lonely--had craved more desperately companionship with someone of the world from which her poverty had so long exiled her, though its memories remained. Now he had disobeyed her and come to her. He had sought her out contrary to command and that must mean that he had found a new strength and would have something to say to her which a man may worthily say to a woman. He had so thoroughly understood her edict that his coming could have no other meaning. She could not know that he was still actuated solely by his own selfish craving for comfort, nor that he had occupied his time on the train countering and balancing considerations until his sudden determination had oozed miserably out of him. Although he could no longer awaken a throbbing of his

pulses with the thought of Loraine Haswell, neither could he fortify his mind to cut the tie and give her up.

When the curtain rang down on the last act the door-man brought in his card, and Marcia ran light-heartedly out to meet him.

"You see, I disobeyed you," he announced, and she sought to reply with great severity, but delight broke through that affectation and riddled it with smiles.

"Unless you are too tired," she suggested, "let's take a walk before we go back to that desolate morgue they call a hotel."

It was a cold and sparkling night and the old street, which was once a post road, twisted between the elms under a moon that threw the rambling houses into softened shapes and underscored them duskily with shadow. They had walked perhaps a half-mile when they came upon a building that had in its more prosperous years been a mansion of some pretense and dignity. It sat back in its generous yard, with a cheery light blazing at its lower windows, wearing an aspect of elderly and beneficent reminiscence. An electric bulb by the gate lighted a small swinging sign inscribed in antique type, "The Sign of the Tea-pot. Lunch, tea and dancing."

"Down-at-the-heels gentility gone into trade," smiled Marcia.

Paul Burton halted and listened, but the dancing had ended and the old house was silent.

"I wonder," he ventured, "if the tea-pot is still on duty."

"By this time," she laughed, "it would have tucked its head under its wing and gone to roost."

"Let's try it, none the less," he challenged, and with the spirit of two children on a lark they opened the creaking gate and traversed the brick walk, arm in arm.

In answer to their knock, which echoed through the place, there came after a time a pleasant-faced elderly woman to the door. For a few moments she reflected, then decided that, although it was a little late, she would undertake to produce some sort of a supper--if they would make allowances for its deficient quality.

The scene seemed set for adventure, even romance. In a large, pleasantly furnished room glowed a cheery fire, and as they waited they sat before it, falling silent, and Marcia's face continued to smile. She had learned to make the most of a pleasant moment while it lasted and to leave regrets until they forced themselves.

When they had finished an excellent supper and the woman had withdrawn they asked and received permission to linger a while before the inviting hearth.

Abruptly Marcia looked up and announced, "I forgive you your disobedience. I'm glad you came. You can't imagine how lonely it's been." Her small nose puckered fastidiously as she added, "The company is odious and I hate the play and the hotels provide unfinished road-beds to sleep on and I've been headachy and altogether miserable." Then she broke off and laughed again, "Which will be about enough Jeremiad for the present. Have you missed me?"

Paul Burton bent forward and studied the red tip of his cigar. It seemed to him that he had missed her more than he had ever missed anyone else. For the first time since the terrible day in the Street with its battalion of misfortunes, his heart felt at rest and his nerves quiet.

He tossed the cigar away and took her hands in his. Deep in her eyes glowed a quiet tenderness and her breath quickened. The man seated himself on the arm of her deep chair, passing one arm about her and holding her two hands close to her breast. Her hat tilted back as he stooped to kiss her, but she did not appear to resent that disarrangement.

"I have missed you terribly," he said and the glow in her pupils heightened in brightness.

Marcia was content. After all, her dream was coming true. Here in this old room of an old house, where other generations had made courtly love, he would tell her that resolution had come to his heart, driving out weak vacillation, and resolution spelt her name. It was worth having been lonely for. Here were just the two of them in the light of a fire on a hearth--emblem of home.

On their two faces, close together, the blaze threw warm little dashes of its own color. Into the heart of Marcia Terroll stole belief once more, and the cheer of the glowing coals.

CHAPTER XXVII

FOR a while they were content to remain silent; and afterward the man said, "I've been needing you, Marcia."

The fingers that he held tightened a little on his own. Now she thought he would tell her that he had given his problem the test of bold reflection and could come to her with his mind made up--and the decision was that he needed her. In the hope her loneliness saw an opening vista of happiness, but his next words were not of that.

"You have read the papers?" he questioned. "You know what has happened?"

Of course she knew and her heart had been full of grief for him in these days of distress. Had she not written him--and torn up unmailed--a score of letters in which she had told him tenderly and unreservedly all she felt? But when she had seen him tonight she had forgotten that, remembering only that he had searched for her and found her and come to her.

Now that he spoke of misfortune to himself and his family she wanted to give him only sympathy and comfort and love--yet coming like a sudden, chilling draught, a conviction struck in upon her heart and left it shuddering--with all its tender new hopes shattered.

For as he spoke she realized with the finality of revelation that the Paul Burton of whom she thought in her dreams had not come at all; only the Paul Burton who, too weak to bear his own sorrows, came to share them with her. He had not come offering her strength and companionship in loneliness--but asking them for himself. He had not come to offer marriage. She had, in the face of the old warnings, dreamed again--falsely idealized once more--and his mission was to waken in her anew the dreary reality of her life. Yet that same maternal instinct which made her love a thing more of giving than of asking endowed him with a greater dearness, as she realized the truth.

"Yes, dear," she said in a low voice, "I know--and I've been thinking of you all the while."

Then for a quarter of an hour he recited his griefs and forgot hers. She was there near him; his arms were about her and she was comforting him. That, for him, was all that was necessary. But at the end of it all she rose and turned half from him and her face was pale.

"If there was a single thing I could do," she said from her heart, "I would do it at any cost--" Her voice questioned him tensely. "You know that, don't you, dear? You believe it."

"You are doing something now," he declared. "You are giving me your own strength."

To herself she said bitterly that to make a mistake once is an accident with which life may ambush the most wary, but to walk twice into the same snare stamps the victim as a fool. She was paying the price now of that folly. She was indeed giving him, as he enthusiastically declared, her own strength for his adversities, and he was accepting it, using it, burning it up with no thought of how little of that particular capital she had to squander in the sharing.

Even at that moment with his self-pitying voice in her ears, reciting his Iliad of reflected troubles, her mind found a whimsical parallel for his self-absorption. He was like some unheroic wanderer in desert places who had stumbled upon another equally unfortunate, but more stalwart of heart. He had greedily fallen upon the depleted water-supply, drinking deep and never pausing to consider that the tongue of the wayfarer who offered him a flask was more parched than his own. He was a minstrel and a troubadour who held himself immune from the need of meeting stress with combat. His mission in life was to sing and accept, and now it pleased him to sing sadly of himself.

Yet the one way she could not go on helping him was the particular way he elected to be helped. He chose to let himself drift and vacillate, and the aid that he asked of her was that she should drift near enough for him to have her companionship. He was like a wakeful child who required that she, too, should be sleepless that he might escape loneliness.

"And so," she said, forcing a smile, which concealed all that was in her heart, "you were lonely, and you came to me."

"Yes, dear." His voice was eager. "I had to see you. To stay in exile any longer was unendurable. I was thinking of you always, wanting you always, and so I came. You forgive me, don't you?"

Marcia laughed. "It's very nice to be wanted," she answered, "but sit over there across the hearth and light your cigar. It's gone out."

Paul looked down resentfully at the cigar and lifted his hand to toss it away, but the girl laid her fingers on his wrist

and laughed.

"No," she commanded. "Smoke it. Tobacco is soothing and I like the fragrance. It's a Romney panatella, isn't it?"

"How do you manage to remember details like that?" Paul inquired with boyish pleasure. "Other women don't carry in mind the brand of tobacco that a man prefers."

"I'm not other women," she reminded him lightly. "I have a genius for minute and trivial things. The others flatter you by burning incense to your music--and I remember that you take two lumps of sugar in your coffee and one slice of lemon in your tea and that you must have your Martini extra dry."

To herself she was saying, with a lump in her throat which waged war on the bright smile in her eyes, "I hoped that he might have come differently. I hoped that he might have made an end of vacillation. Now it's all going to be harder. I must send him away again--"

One hand which fell over the arm of her chair and which he could not see clutched its fingers convulsively, squeezing the handkerchief it held into a small wad of linen.

"You are wonderful, Marcia," he told her softly as he comfortably exhaled a cloud of blue smoke, and his delicate lips fell into a smile of contentment. His troubles were for the moment being assuaged in the effortless indolence of the lotus-eaters. He looked at her through half-closed lids, studying the face that smiled at him. Yes, she was giving him her strength. He would go back tomorrow appeased and soothed.

Then he suggested with the suddenness of a newly discovered thought: "But we've been talking about my troubles all the while. Tell me something about yourself. It must be proving a hard trip, isn't it? A bit of a trial at times?"

A hard trip! A bit of a trial at times! For an instant the smile died and the lips stiffened. She wanted to answer him with a stormy burst of words. She wanted to say that it had been sheer hell.

In the face of such callous complacency an indignant anger stirred deep in her breast. He had fled to her with his troubles, which after all were only the shadows of deeper troubles, of which other members of his household were bearing, unaided, the more direct brunt. He was asking her, whose life had known chapters of tragedy, to give him such sympathy as a woman has the right to give in exchange for a man's whole love. Had he no sense of fairness, even the fairness of good sportsmanship? But close on the heels of that realization came another which banished the wrath. God had chosen to paint him in soft and tender colors. God had given to his soul-pattern a certain beauty, and if there had gone into the design no bold strokes, he himself was no more to blame than he would have been for the failure to see, had he been born blind. His weakness doubtless carried its own penalty of suffering. Perhaps had the guidance been there, the wanted qualities might have been trained into him. Hamilton had seen that, but Hamilton's hand had not had the light touch for the delicacy of the task's beginnings.

Her mind flashed back to her girlhood. She was standing at the paddock fence of her grandfather's stock-farm in Kentucky.

Even in her childish heart there had been a mighty pride for the old gold and blue that were the colors of her grandfather's stables. They were silks that raced true to tradition, for no mere gambler's venturing, but for the gentleman's pride in his horse-flesh and his inherent love of sport. Much of the stamina that had kept her heart from breaking had been instilled in those lessons of the gallantry of the long struggle and the endurance of the home-stretch.

She remembered a certain chestnut colt whose name had gone down in turf history. She had known that colt from a weanling and to her he had not been an animal, but a personality.

Yet that splendid-hearted creature which could out-game his fields in a smothering drive when his heart was near bursting had been a disappointment in two-year-old form because he had seemed to sulk and falter and lack courage. Under the whip his speed died and his petulance cropped out. It had only been when a jockey was found whose soft touch of the reins nursed the head and held it up and encouraged, that the horse had come in to his own and made his name great. Might it not be so with a man as well as with a horse?

"Yes," she said, "it has been a bit of a trial, but it has been funny, too," and straightway she launched into a flow of anecdote that touched up with whimsical and delightful humor every bit of poor comedy that had tinged the days of the tour. And as she talked the man laughed with sheer delight and amusement.

But it was growing late, and Marcia was exhausted with the outflow of spirits. He might be comforted, but tomorrow she must again take up the dull thread of her routine. It would not be easier for tonight's disappointment; for the coming of the rescuing knight who upon arrival had only clamored mournfully for assistance.

After all she could only stand so much, and just now she felt that the margin of endurance was narrow. Yet there was to be said the most important thing of all, and the most trying.

"Paul," she began slowly, but in a voice of finality, "when you go back tomorrow, you mustn't come to see me again. At least not for a long while."

His face became a mask of tragic disappointment, and his voice was pleading.

"You are not going to reinstate your sentence of banishment, Marcia? You can't know what this evening has meant to me. A man must have in his life that comfort that only a woman like you can give. Surely you will give it."

"But, Paul," she said as gently as she would have argued with a child, "you must remember. There is a woman: a woman to whom you regard yourself pledged. Are you being very loyal to her? Are you being very loyal to either of us?"

To herself she added: "A woman whom I have never seen and whose battles I am called upon to fight."

"She's in Europe." Paul spoke rather sullenly, and though he said no more his voice intimated that so far as he was concerned she might remain there.

Marcia nodded her head. "She is there to get a divorce--so that she can marry you. No, Paul, you know why I sent you away in the first place. Since then nothing has changed--unless it is that I see more clearly the fatality of drifting. I can't do it."

"And you--" he spoke somewhat brokenly--"doesn't it mean anything to you?"

Suddenly and momentarily her self-restraint broke.

"Mean anything to me!" she exclaimed passionately as her eyes widened and her whole attitude relaxed into a posture of collapse in her chair. "Mean anything--!" Then suddenly she straightened up and passed a hand across her brow as though to brush away a cloud that rested there. In a composed voice she added: "It means so much that you must do as I say, not merely until you feel like disobeying again, but always." After a long silence she rose. "I must get up early," she said, remembering that tomorrow brought its program of a train journey, a matinee and an evening performance.

"Paul," said Marcia as they walked back, "I have to leave a call for seven and catch a train at eight-thirty. There's no use in your getting up. No, please don't, and please don't hunt me out again." At the door of the hotel she said enigmatically, "What a wonderful balance Nature might have struck between your brother's strength and your--winning personality. Good-night."

The Duke de Metuan's failure to rehabilitate his impaired fortunes with Burton gold had left a more durable scar upon his optimism than any of the similar scars of the past. Mary Burton had been such a splendid combination of charm and opulence that a marriage with her would have made a pleasure of necessity. The Duke in his earlier stages of disappointment had felt first the pangs of a lover, and only in secondary degree the chagrin of a depleted exchequer. Several months had found him inconsolable, and when desperation had closed upon him he had wedded an estimable lady whose wealth was less dazzling than Mary's, but ample none the less. Her personal paucity of allurements was a handicap which his philosophy ignored as much as possible. In private he sometimes made a fastidious grimace, and accepted the inevitable.

Yet the duke had long been an epicure in life's pleasures, and though he must yield to the demands of his creditors, much as a young prince must yield to the edicts of his chancellery in making a required marriage, he did so with mental reservations. He had no intention of permitting that necessity to cast a perpetual cloud over his days and nights.

He had found it possible to leave his estate in Andalusia, where his duchess elected to remain with an imaginary malady from which she derived much melancholy pleasure, and in Nice he had been overjoyed to meet a charming acquaintance in the person of Loraine Haswell.

Loraine, too, was willing to have these hours which hung heavy alleviated with companionship, and Nice is a place where hours lend themselves to the process of being lightened.

There was a waiter at one of the esplanade cafes where the tables look out over the whiteness of the sea-front and the sapphire of the bay, who regarded his grace and madame as his regular clients. He knew without telling what *hors*

d'oeuvres and vintages the dark gentleman affected and at what pastries the beautiful lady preferred to nibble. She nibbled decoratively between peals of soft laughter and snatches of small talk.

The garcon in question noted--and officially ignored--that the lady, who had at first worn a preoccupied, almost troubled, expression about her dark eyes, now smiled more often, and that into the black pupils of Carlos de Metuan there came frequently a glow which was akin to ardor.

In the same way he noticed that occasionally their hands met and lingered, as the lady formed the habit of losing her handkerchief and the gentleman habituated himself to its retrieving. A legal separation cannot be established in a day, and if one must remain away from one's friends at home, one may surely console oneself with friends abroad.

The duke was lavish in his entertainment. His wife's fortune permitted that, as well as his wife's ignorance of the disbursements, and of late Loraine's supply of money from America had arrived on a scale of diminuendo. Entertainment was welcome.

Half-jokingly and veiled in phrases which she was at liberty to construe as she wished, there had of late been an insidious vein of suggestion in the duke's conversation.

"Were I not married and were you not married and were I able to convince you with an eloquence which I lack, I think I might be happy," he informed her one night as he studied his cigarette end in the dark. Then he laughed and his hand sought hers as he added: "Yet, thank God a thousand times, we live in a day when friendship need not go shackled by dark-age absurdities." That had been the beginning.

"Friendship," she replied demurely, "has never had to be shackled, has it?"

He leaned forward and she caught the glint of his eyes and a flash of white teeth, as he answered:

"When friendship between man and woman is a feeble little fellow, he goes free, but when he grows very strong, then his lot was not so easy in other days. You understand me?"

"I'm sure I don't, but what matter?" she laughed. Carlos shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, what matter?" he murmured. "As long as we can be together, why should we seek names for our companionship? It is--what it is."

Yet Loraine, still sure of her future, spelling a congenial and luxurious life with Paul, understood what she pretended not to understand. The Duke de Metuan was not a riddle to her; not even a figure tinged with mystery. His wife was an unlovely invalid. Her sole value was monetary, and the duke's hints and thoughts had all to do with an arrangement wherein life should yield him the compensating delights which his family denied.

Loraine's fastidiousness rather shuddered at this idea, yet perhaps a certain sort of character disintegration had set in, with her first cutting loose the moorings of preconceived standards. Possibly it was working a more rapid atrophy than she knew. She told herself that, in her exile, Carlos made a rather diverting companion, and that since she understood his purpose she could with ease control the situation. He should amuse and no more. If his hints became less ambiguous than she found agreeable, she would send him packing, but meanwhile she would permit his luncheons and his motors to serve her. The food and roads about Nice are excellent--and expensive.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THERE is in the western hemisphere one town whose local news is national news and international news. Its celebrities wear names which the nation mouths over with gusto, and its own name was, until comparatively recently, New Amsterdam. The country closely followed the first-column stories with which the press sought to keep abreast of the affairs of Hamilton Montagu Burton. It was interesting reading, for it dealt with a late potentate of power untold; now an invalid whose brain slept like a child taking its forenoon nap while his millions, counted in scores and hundreds, went back to their sources as the sun draws water into the clouds to spill it out again elsewhere. A giant of untold might had kindled the fires that slept at the heart of a volcano--and then had fallen asleep upon the slopes down which the lava must flow!

While he slept, Ruin, spelling itself with a capital letter, had signaled out the one pedestaled figure which had laughed at ruin, and mocked its potency and bragged of a star which was above menace.

Hamilton Burton lay for weeks in insensibility and delirium and when, in returned consciousness, he realized his predicament he raved like a madman against restraint, counting the precious moments, which were being used against him, bleeding him of vital power. This very fretting against the inevitable burdened him with a waste of nerve and brain which should send him forth, depleted in strength and weakened in resistance, to meet his adversaries.

Nor had the forces aligned against him marked time. When again he took the field he must take it in a realm of altered and shrunken boundaries, and the roll-call of his allies would show many missing--and many gone over to the foe. But greater than all these things was the change in himself. The cloyed wolf who had gorged too deep of success was no longer the lean fighting beast with a ravenous light of conquest in his eyes. That Burton might have met even the present and triumphed. This was a wolf on the defensive, fating a pack which had turned upon his leadership. His weakened fangs were against the jaws of all the rest--and he came scarred and spent from days and nights of physical feebleness.

Paul sat beside Hamilton in his car as they drove down-town on that first day when the financier defied the edicts of his physicians.

"Hamilton," questioned the younger brother, voicing for the first time that deep anxiety which had been clamoring within him for weeks, "will you be able to drive back your assailants? The papers predict that your reign is broken and your ruin near at hand."

Hamilton raised his face and smiled. It was the old imperious smile, but the face over which it spread was thinner and gaunter and between the hollowed cheekbones the smile lost something of its wonted illumination--failed somewhat of its old convincing force.

"The papers have had their opportunity to prattle without check. Now I am back again--we shall see." He broke off and laughed, then he rushed on fiercely. "They call this St. Helena. They lie." In the weakness which was still upon him, he gasped a moment for breath. "When Napoleon left Elba the papers of Paris raved about the escape of the unspeakable tyrant. When he reached the borders of France they announced, without comment, the approach of Napoleon Bonaparte, but when he was near the gates they raised a paean of triumphal welcome to the Emperor, who had returned to make France more glorious than ever among nations! I shall soon be at their city gates, Paul, and, while my star shines, no mortal power can stop me or stay my progress."

But the Napoleon of the later phases was not the Napoleon of Austerlitz. Out of the great heart and brain some essential element had gone. Burton, too, had tasted defeat and knew its bitterness. He was going back to rally shrunken forces and lead a forlorn hope and his eyes were grimly defiant--where once they had been regnantly confident. Perhaps Hamilton Burton during those next few months was after all more worthy of admiration than he had been since a boy whose dreams burned city-ward. Feeling each day a day of adversity and giving no hint, he recognized, yet refused to admit, the dawn of defeat when defeat was far past its dawning. Upon the world of allied assailants that pressed him back--back--ever back on dwindling millions and then shrinking hundreds of thousands he turned a fierce and unsundering face. To himself he said even now that his star was infallible.

But in the privacy of his own bedroom, when no alien eye penetrated his solitude, his bitterness was epic and terrible. In the consistency of that egotism which had first made, then unmade him, there was no room for remorse; no possibility of self-accusation. If his star was to set it would set on his last terrific stand against the squares of the enemy, with the old guard about him... and when the end came, like another Antony, he would fall on his own sword.

And always to the sunken-eyed anxiety of his mother, and the puffy-eyed misgivings of his father and the quaking terror of his brother, he gave back laughing assurances of his unquenchable power. To them he treated as

technicalities, which he would casually brush aside. Federal prosecutions and Congressional investigations and the solid phalanx of financial interests that constantly drew their strangling cordons around him. He never admitted to others or to himself as a possibility the reckoning which was sure beyond question. Yet except for a detail of months--or weeks--he was as irremediably ruined as though already the tape of the stock-ticker had spelled out its unemotional announcement, "Hamilton Burton cannot meet his obligations." He had been wounded through the one vulnerable joint of his armor: his great self-pride and unquestioning assurance were struck to the quick of the heart. His day was done.

Since he had lost in dozens and scores of millions and could return to his preeminence only by mighty leaps, he plunged again in dozens and scores of millions, as befitted a mighty gambler. And in scores he lost and in scores again he plunged--to his ruinous and total undoing.

As the Burton fortunes were dwindling, Loraine Haswell, who had come now from the Riviera to Paris, found her state of mind reaching an anxiety that threatened first her composure, then almost her reason. She knew of her husband's ruin, and had written him a letter of condolence rather more human than any of her other communications to him had been of late.

But that the shattering of such a moderate financier as Len Haswell should foreshadow the total ruin of a money czar like Hamilton Burton and impoverish his parasite brother, was an idea too colossal to grasp in its entirety. Yet in the news from America it slowly dawned. In the Paris edition of the *Herald* it was convincingly chronicled, and the beautiful dark-haired woman who had thrown away her husband began to see that she had no reserve upon which to fall back. Had Len's modest fortune survived that tempest, it would have been easy to put back into port. A little contrition, a confession that she had tried living without him and found it impossible, would have won his forgiveness, because his heart had been too sore to calculate. But now Len was bankrupt and Paul would be likewise.

In these days Carlos de Metuan was no longer a speaker of veiled phrases. He was playing the role of the generous Platonic friend, watching her moods and seeking to comfort her.

There was no strain of iron in this woman's soul, and that suited his purpose. Just now he would gain more by merely standing by. Her increasing alarm would one day turn to panic and she would lose her head. For that day he could afford to wait.

Loraine was undergoing an agony, and when the time came which the duke regarded as the psychological moment, and he baldly offered her his proposition, she made a lovely picture of a woman in distress converted into a righteous fury.

She sent him away with blazing eyes and words that should have scorched, and he went with a shrug of the shoulders and smiled when he was out of sight. "It is not for long," he told himself.

In that cynical conviction Carlos de Metuan was correct. Loraine tried poverty and loneliness for a while in Paris, and because she was still a creature of rare beauty, several other men with greater or less degree of skilled language suggested similar solutions.

At last she met the duke again. He had been in Andalusia and had returned once more to Paris--alone. He was driving in a motor car and came upon her walking near the Arc de Triomphe. He halted the car and asked her to let him drive her home. At first she demurred, but in the end consented to let him drop her at her *pension*, provided he would promise to leave her immediately at her door.

"Assuredly," agreed the man gravely. "But in return, you will do me a favor also? You will let me call for you tonight and will dine with me?"

For a moment Loraine hesitated, then she slowly nodded her head.

Carlos de Metuan arrived promptly that evening.

Loraine had made her fight and regarded herself as a defeated martyr. The hour and a half before his coming she had not devoted to tears, but to beautifying herself. She met him radiant, and from her eyes and lips all the disfigurement of distress was banished. She laughed and chatted throughout dinner, and over the coffee, leaning forward a little, she asked, "Where do you mean to take me from here?"

"To a comedy perhaps, wherever you like."

There was a brief pause, then she looked up and put a second question. She put it with the best nonchalance that she could assume. It did not sound like unconditional surrender.

"And after that?"

Carlos de Metuan lighted a cigarette.

"I have leased for you a very good apartment not far from the Champs Elysees. I think you will find it comfortable."

For an instant the woman's eyes hardened.

"You appear to have taken matters rather much for granted, Carlos."

He shook his head and smiled.

"I merely hoped," he assured her.



CHAPTER XXIX

POSSIBLY some day a historian versed in the intricacies of high--and low--finance will record in detail, comprehensible and convincing to those who thirst for statistical minutiae, the last chapters of Hamilton Burton's history. Here it will only be set baldly down that the weeks, for him, went galloping toward and over the brink of things--until he found his affairs still reckoned in many millions, but all in the millions of liabilities.

He was pointed out derisively in those expensive hotels where once every head had bowed obsequiously at his coming. Then one night he went to his office, carrying a leather portfolio in his hand. He still walked with his head up and met the eye of every man who cared to gaze into his own. About his neck was turned up the collar of a sable-lined overcoat--relic of his days of splendor. As he walked down-town he met no one who knew him, and this suited his plans. Lower Broadway after nightfall is as murky and silent as upper Broadway is aflame and noisy. The steep buildings are like cemetery shafts, save where belated clerks work over their books and night watchmen guard their posts.

Burton's offices, still his under a long-term lease, were denuded of furniture and accessories--since the sheriff had already begun his confiscations here.

But tonight Hamilton Burton meant to use them for another, and a grimmer purpose--in fact a final one. The portfolio which he carried contained a dilapidated old blank book, such as one buys in a crossroads store, a volume of verse, and an automatic pistol, carefully loaded. When the now inevitable moment came which should leave his family roofless--he would not be there to see.

There is no saying what small matter may, at a given crisis, bring solace to a man who requires it. Now Hamilton Burton appeared to find the necessary comfort in the boast which he nursed to his heart, that his exit from the world, with which he had played ducks and drakes, was to be entirely voluntary and in no wise forced: that though he was closing life's door upon himself he was still crossing the Stygian threshold the captain of his soul.

His face was calm enough as he turned on the light and drew down the blinds of his private office. He had no knowledge of another tall figure, bearing abundant outward signs of adversity that, from the opposite side of the street, halted to glance up just as he showed himself there in the window.

Hamilton Burton deliberately unlocked the morocco brief-case with its gold clasp. First he took out the pistol and carefully examined it, nodding his head in satisfaction. Since there was no table left, he laid it on the window-sill near at hand. Next he withdrew the book of verses and after that the country-store note-book with its dog-eared and age-yellowed pages. These proceedings left the case empty save for a note directed, "Coroner's Agent, City."

In the days of his magnificence Hamilton Burton had regarded life-insurance as a poor man's buffer between his heirs and want.

For himself it had meant nothing and he had passed it by. Only since he had secretly half-admitted his vulnerability, had he thrown such an anchor to windward, and all his policies were new--too new to hold validity against self-destruction.

And yet the brain that had been so cool always, so logical, had of late assumed a dozen unaccountable eccentricities. Through his thoughts with the obstinacy of an obsession ran one refrain: "'Twas no foe-man's hand that slew him: 'twas his own that struck the blow."

Men must not think of him as one beaten and murdered. They must remember him as his own executioner. Surely the lawyers would find a way. Surely their cleverness would circumvent the restrictions framed by these gamblers on the chances of life and death.

He opened the poetry volume at a point where a page was turned down, then, standing by the electric light, boldly straight and without the air of a man who entertains fear of life or death, he read aloud and with excellent elocutionary effect ...

"I only loved one country in my life
And that was France: I saw her break her heart
Against the cruel squares: then the last order
Broke from my lips as coolly as a smile.
God! How they rode! All France was in that last
Charge; and France broke her heart for me...."

He paused and a deep melancholy spread over the features until the eyes might truly have been those of broken

dreams gazing seaward from the rocks of St. Helena. He glanced again at the pages and quoted softly.

"Ninette, Ninette, remember the Old Guard!"

After that he laid the book aside and turned the thumbed pages of the blank book. These were pages scrawled across in a boy's round hand. The man who had once been that boy stopped when he came to an entry written long ago by lamplight in an unheated attic, with frozen branches scraping the roof and the eaves.

"There is something in me," he read, "that tells me no man was ever greater than I've got it in me to be. John Hayes Hammond, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Frick were all poor boys...." He paused once more and let his eyes wander to the bottom of the page and dwell upon this addendum. "P. S. I sold them to Slivers Martin for ten dollars (\$10.00) and they only cost me seven--and he had to go after them."

As he held the book in his hand he was interrupted by a low knock on the door. Perhaps the night watch-man had come up with a question. Hastily laying the diary of his boyhood over the pistol so as to conceal it he opened the door--and Len Haswell entered.

The broker's ruin had been complete, and his dual troubles had evidently driven him to demoralization of another sort. His face wore a set such as artists give the features of Death--the pale implacability of doom. He loomed there gigantic and silent; strangely altered by his chalky pallor and the dark rings out of which his eyes burned. After a moment Hamilton Burton inquired coolly, "Well, Haswell?"

"You may recall," said the deep voice in a tone of menacing quiet, "that during the two days when you scattered ruin broadcast--and ruined yourself into the bargain--I led your forces on the floor of the Exchange."

"Perfectly," was the calm response. "I recall that you lost everything. So did I. We seem to be fellow-unfortunates."

"You say I lost everything." Haswell drew a step nearer and held out his two mighty hands. "You are mistaken. I still have these."

A trace of annoyance stole into the voice of the fallen Napoleon. It is disconcerting to be interrupted during one's last moments of life.

"And with them," he ironically questioned, "you mean to begin over and make an honest living?"

Haswell shook his head. His tone took on, in its level pitch of implacability, a quality indescribably horrifying, "No--an honest killing. I am going to kill you."

"That," suggested Burton, "will not be necessary. I am on the point of saving you the trouble--and personal danger. In my bag there is a note stating that fact--and my reasons."

Haswell held out a letter. "I am not complaining about my ruin in the Street," he patiently explained. "I knew that game and took my chances along with the rest. That isn't what has been driving me mad. I got this letter a week ago."

Hamilton glanced at the envelope.

"From Loraine," went on Len Haswell in a voice of even deadlier quiet. The voice and chalky face seemed twin notes of sound and color. "I wouldn't care to tell you what happened to her--after she pinned her faith on your promise to buy her freedom--from me--for your brother. She lost out all around, you see. I wouldn't care to tell you about that--and its consequences. But something's going to be paid on account--here--tonight."

After a moment Burton said slowly:

"I am through. I'm just ending it."

Once again the huge man shook his head. A strange and bitter smile twisted his lips.

"No," he persisted in that level intonation with which men sometimes speak from the scaffold. "No, that won't do. You see I've whetted my appetite on anticipation--ever since that letter came. I must have the pleasure of killing you with my own hands; of seeing the breath go out of your throat--afterward the suicide will be my own."

To lay down one's life of one's own volition is one thing. To permit another to take it in a fashion of his own arbitrary selection is quite another. Hamilton Burton had never been submissive. He meant to die as he had lived--"captain of his soul," and so he turned quietly toward the window ledge where he had laid the automatic pistol. Perhaps some clairvoyant sense, loaned by the closeness of death, gave Haswell an intimation of the other's intent. He reached the window first--at a bound--and stood before it. Then suddenly a hideous expression came into his eyes until out of them shone the horror-worship that had obsessed his soul; and the maniac's cunning for draining his greed of vengeance to

its dregs.

He had jostled aside the blank book containing the diary and seen the weapon, which he calmly slipped into his pocket. Then he raised the window as far as it would go.

"This is the twentieth floor," he commented with a ghastly significance. "I know because I walked up. I didn't want to be stopped--too soon. It won't take you so long to get down." As he spoke he jerked his head toward the raised blind and sash. "It's rather a symbolical finish for you, Burton--you must confess as much--an idol hurled down from his high place."

One quality Hamilton Burton possessed. If he was to die he would leave no satisfaction of final cowardice to comfort his assassin's self-destruction. He would attack--but a sudden thought stayed him.

"If we are to have a death struggle here," he asked with a strange composure, "will you give me a moment--for a matter that had no bearing on your determination?"

Haswell yet again shook his head with his executioner's smile as he sardonically inquired, "Time to get another gun?"

"No. To tear up a note to the coroner--unless you will be good enough to do it for me. If I am not to kill myself there is no advantage in an ante-mortem confession!"

"What difference does it make? To me it seems trivial."

"Just this--that my family will save my insurance out of the wreck."

"And Paul may once more sing golden songs to the wives of other men--not that I so much resent Paul. Without you he would have been harmless enough--but society's safer with him poor."

Hamilton Burton had caught a rift in the clouds and with this denial his calmness deserted him for passion. The old family love, strong even though he had himself so violated it, burst into flame in his heart. Once more he would fight for those he was leaving. Why had he never thought of the window himself? That might logically seem accidental, yet his brain had not served him well of late. It had been clouded and unresourceful--and he had invented no method of masking the authorship of his death. His enemy had suggested it--but first there must be a moment to destroy the confession which would rob his mother of the one asset which might be saved to her. With an oath he leaped upon his visitor, and fought tigerishly. But for all his superb physical fitness and strength it was like a child leaping upon a powerful gladiator.

With one mighty arm about his waist crushing him until his bones seemed to crack and one huge hand cutting off the gasp of his throat, his body was bent back in this gorilla embrace and a purple mist spread darkly before his eyes. He had just enough tremor of consciousness left to know that he hung limp and was being lifted and swung to and fro as one swings a sack which he means to toss into a cart.

A few moments later the giant stood panting from his exertion as he stretched out a steady hand for the pistol which lay on the window ledge.



CHAPTER XXX

IN a certain dictionary appears this substantive and this definition. "PARASITE (par'-a-sit), n. one who frequents the table of a rich man and gains his favor by flattery; a hanger-on; an animal or plant nourished by another to which it attaches itself. (Greek.)"

If the animal or plant to which these other animals or plants attach themselves goes first to its death, it is inevitable that its parasites must speedily follow. There is no longer anything upon which to feed.

Hamilton Burton was gone and his parasites were withering. His will provided a princely fortune for each member of his family--save his sister, for whom they would care. But a will presupposes an estate--here were only enormous liabilities and vanished assets.

This man's dream of power in a single hand--the hand that could produce--had held so firm that he had never made any provision for their independent fortunes while he lived and held at his finger ends the touch of Midas.

Now he was dead. The coroner said, after viewing the evidence, he had killed Haswell first and himself next--so they added to all the sins of his overcharged account the crowning infamy of murder.

Those men who gather and print news have their fingers on the pulse-beat of things and sometimes they develop an occult sense of prophecy.

On the night of Hamilton's death, as a certain city editor in Park row read the proof of the "day's story," he called one of his reporters to his desk and let him wait there while he himself rapidly penciled out the "Stud-horse head" which should, tomorrow morning, shock many breakfast-tables. Finally he glanced up, under a green eye-shade, and shifted his dead cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"Smitherton," he instructed, "from now on keep right after the Burton story."

Smitherton rolled a cigarette. "The follow-up tomorrow will be a big one, too," he prophesied.

"Sure, but I'm not only talking about the follow-up. As to that you handle the introduction and general. I'll have the various other ends covered. I refer to next week and next month and next year--"

The staff man raised his brows, and, with an impatient and wearied growl, his chief commented curtly: "Go, look up the word 'parasite' in the dictionary. Maybe after that research you'll understand better what I mean. There's copy in this for a long while. The branch is dead and the leaves will be dropping."

The stunned parents, the ashen-lipped brother and the sister, not yet recovered from her collapse, had months for realization; nightmare months during which hordes of creditors arose with legitimate, but wolf-like, hunger from everywhere, and courts adjudicated and the world learned that not a remnant of shredded fortune nor a ragged banknote would remain to the family which had dazzled New York since its Monte Cristo star rose on the horizon.

While the wolves were picking the remains of the estate to its naked bones, old Thomas Burton still went occasionally to his place in the club and gazed out of the Fifth-avenue window. He wore a band of crepe around his sleeve, and a defiant glint in his eyes, and since he was left much to himself, he drank alone. He was no longer the same portly and immaculately fashionable man. His flesh had shrunk until his clothes hung upon him in misfit. His face was seamed and his hair instead of being gray and smooth was white and stringy. But no pride is so inflexible as acquired pride, so he came to the club where he was snubbed, because, "By Gad, sir, I have the right to come here. I am Thomas Standish Burton, and I will not permit myself to be driven away--even though adversities have befallen me!"

He reflected upon "pursuits to which a gentleman of my age may, with fitting dignity, apply himself," and his ideas were random and impractical, but after a sufficient number of toddies they appeared to himself feasible and meritorious. One day when he called for his first afternoon drink the negro waiter shuffled uncomfortably, and said, "I'm sorry, sir, but I was told I couldn't serve you."

"Why?" demanded the member, stiffening with indignation.

"Your name, sir, is posted on the suspended-credit list. That's my orders, sir."

Tom Burton rose and stalked very stiffly, though no longer with his old time cock-sureness, for the last time out of the National Union Club, and spent the afternoon in the rear room of a saloon further east.

Paul, whose plight was as pitiable as that of a pet pomeranian turned out of a perfumed and cushioned boudoir to

hold his own among foraging street curs, for a while bore up with an artificial courage. Under the long strain of successive anxieties his mother had broken in body and mind, and Paul was with her much, though sometimes she did not recognize him, but called him Hamilton and begged him not to leave the mountains, lest life in a new world should hold worse things than poverty.

Hamilton's dream-palace, with all its splendid plunder of art treasures, had gone under the hammer in satisfaction of a court judgment. Next went the house which his parents had occupied, and before that all the servants had gone--save one. Yamuro's passion of devotion to Hamilton had descended in a lesser degree to Paul and with the grave courtesy of the Samurai he waved aside all discussion of wages. Had he not saved much money for a Japanese boy who needed little? Already he could open a small shop and sell kimonos and jade trinkets and embroideries ... but that could wait until such time as his usefulness ended here.

The final day came, and the shrunken household effects were removed to a small apartment in Greenwich Village, so it was time for Paul to say good-bye to Yamuro. It was Yamuro who had found the flat and haggled explosively over the terms of the lease. It had been Yamuro, too, who had gone with Mary, when she carried her mother's jewels from place to place, offering them for sale. The faithful little attendant knew that what was salvaged from such bargaining must be the last resort and sole capital of this shattered family. As the lady with the pale, but lovely, face looking out from the shadow of her mourning veil went from dealer to dealer, he followed a step behind her, watchful of eye, guarding her remnant of treasure against possible mischance.

Now he stood with Paul in the room which the musician would not again occupy, and Paul's eyes suddenly filled with tears while the son of a race called stoical turned away and occupied himself with a lump in his throat.

"Yamuro," began the musician in an unsteady voice, "you aren't a servant, you are a friend; good-bye and God bless you."

The Jap caught the extended palm in his own two hands and bent over it. He was not weeping and he was not talking, but he stood with his head lowered until only the wiry black hair was visible, and in his throat rose guttural and incoherent noises like groans.

"I can't show my appreciation as I'd like," said Paul. "The day for that is gone, but there are some clothes that I didn't pack. I left them for you--" Even in an hour which called for defense of every penny, Paul was still the impractical man whose open heart and affectionate nature called for expression. "And this--" he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a watch upon which any pawnbroker would have advanced a goodly sum--"this was Hamilton's." His voice broke as he held it out. "I think he would like you to have it. His will left you twenty thousand dollars--but--well, you know."

Yamuro straightened up. He raised both hands in a gesture of protest and his words came fast and vehemently.

"No, no! Thanks ver' mutch--no--no! You great artist--you not un'stand making money. You need. Mother--sister--father all need. No--please!"

He halted; then in a deep embarrassment, went on. "Me got money in bank. Me not want be impert'nent, but--" He paused, seeking a disguised and delicate fashion of volunteering aid and looked appealingly into the other's face for assistance.

Fresh tears welled into Paul's eyes. "I understand you, Yamuro," he said, laying a hand on the stocky shoulder. "No, Yamuro, you have done enough--God bless you!" He could not trust himself further and so he turned abruptly and left the room.

These rooms in the twisting by-ways of picturesque old Greenwich Village seemed mean and tawdry to their new tenants, but they were very good as compared with what Mary knew must follow. The pitiful store of money which her last-stand financiering had raked together would not be renewed when spent, nor would it last long. It was only that they might have a temporary refuge in which to think out the future that the girl had chosen these quarters.

Then very shortly came the day when the house that had been the home of the elder Burtons also went under the hammer, and an unconquerable magnetism drew Paul to the spot though he knew the place would be filled with people who, to him, must seem pillagers. He had nerved himself to ask a thing for which he had been longing ever since those doors had closed upon him. In that house was the Pagan temple which his brother had built for his shrine of dreams and the organ which might have graced a cathedral. If they would allow him ten minutes there alone--ten minutes to finger the keys for the last time--at least he meant to ask it. It was a much changed man who presented himself diffidently at a house to which the public had been invited by the commissioner's advertisement. His clothes were already beginning to indicate his deteriorated condition though, thanks to Mary's care, they were scrupulously neat. The things to be sold this morning could find purchasers only among the very rich, and for that precise reason the

occasion had attracted a horde of people who came as they might have gone to a fire or to a museum. Paul Burton found it easy enough to meet these eyes. It was when he encountered the gaze of old associates that he shrunk and trembled.

The sale had not yet begun and the crowds were drifting hither and thither, bent on preliminary inspection, jostling arms with the men from the detective agencies assigned to the occasion.

Paul found the person who seemed vested with authority and to him put his request. The individual looked at this pale young man and recognized him. There was a pathos in his face that could hardly be denied--and there was no reason for denying him.

"Certainly, Mr. Burton," he agreed. "I'll instruct the door-man not to let any one else in--unless you have friends you'd like to take with you."

Paul shook his head. "I'd rather be alone," he said. But as the two elbowed their way through the crowd he found himself face to face with a dark-haired, deep-eyed woman in fashionable and becoming mourning, upon whose fingers sparkled a number of rings. The musician halted in his tracks and turned desperately pale. He had heard that Loraine Haswell had returned from Europe--and he had heard vague rumors which had deeply shocked him. If they were based on truth it seemed improbable that she would care to risk meeting any of her old associates. Yet when his eyes encountered hers he found her laughing gaily, and he realized that, whatever else had happened to Loraine Haswell, she had lost none of her beauty.

"Loraine!" he exclaimed, his voice betraying his excitement, and she responded calmly, but with no emotion, "Good-morning, Mr. Burton." It was as though they had parted yesterday, but also as though they had never met, save casually, before that parting; as though their lives had never touched more intimately than in the brushing contact of passers-by. To Paul it seemed very cruel and he was about to pass on when she stopped him.

"Mr. Burton," she suggested, in a cautiously guarded voice, "I wish you would send back my letters. I'm stopping at the Plaza."

The man was silent for a moment, then he said simply:

"I have already burned them."

She searched his eyes for a moment, and, seeming satisfied of their truthfulness, smiled. "That will do just as well. Thank you. How silly we were to write them, weren't we?"

Paul hurried after his guide, who had been deferentially waiting a few steps distant, but at the entrance of the music-room he halted again--and this time his cheeks blanched with a greater astonishment. There, standing within arm's reach, was Marcia Terroll, though her face was averted and she did not see him.

"What brings you here?" he asked in a low voice, and as she turned to face him her hands went spasmodically to her breast.

"I didn't know that you would be here," she said faintly, but she did not tell him that she had come in response to the same instinct which draws pilgrims to shrines hallowed by association; because this had been the temple of his art.

"They have promised," Paul told her, "to let me have fifteen minutes in there undisturbed--to play my organ for the last time." His eyes met hers and he added in an earnest undertone, "Won't you go with me, Marcia?"

The woman's lashes glistened with a sudden moisture. "Are you sure you wouldn't rather be--quite alone? Isn't it rather sacred to you?"

"That is why I want you," he eagerly declared. "It will be something to remember afterward."

They went in, and for a moment the girl stood there gasping at the magnificence of this place, of which she had read descriptions, but which she had never seen. Then her eyes flooded and, with a sense of revelation, she forgave him every frailty and fault--even the isolated horror of longing she had been carrying in her heart. So sensitive a soul as his could not have been expected to stand out Spartan-bold against the voluptuary blandishments of such surroundings--and such a life. He looked at her for a long while and once, unseen by her, he put out his arms, but caught them back again with a swift gesture and shook his head. Now he knew in all bitterness what Loraine Haswell and his own cowardice had cost him--and it was too late.

Loraine Haswell and his own cowardice! He had not fully realized it before, but from that episode when he fled to Hamilton from his lunch with her had sprung the root of every succeeding chapter of tragedy--and for her he had lost

Marcia! Then he led her to a place of vantage and went to the keyboard.

Never had Paul Burton played like that before, for as the music swelled and pealed through the place, his heart was singing its swan song. In a moment of manhood beyond his moral stature he had drawn back arms that were hungry for her--and he now knew, too late, that there was no one else who counted. But the organ was not so repressive, and as she listened she knew that the tragedy was not hers alone. While his fingers strayed to the improvising of his yearning and despair the woman sat spellbound, and finally he swung into that tritest of time-worn airs, "Home, Sweet Home."

A gasp came into Marcia's throat.

As Paul Burton left his seat and came down to her, his face was drawn and he said bluntly, "*She* is here today."

She did not have to ask details or if it was ended. The music had told her everything. In a sudden gust of feeling and wrath against this woman who had stood between her and happiness, she wanted to say bitter things--but she only nodded.

"Now that matters have turned out as they have," the man spoke deliberately, but tensely, "I sha'n't see you again. Now that I'm a bankrupt and it's all over, Marcia, I want you to know that I love you--that I love you without doubt or hesitation. In this world and whatever other worlds there are, there is only you ... you whom I lost because the coward *must* lose every good thing life holds." He broke off and asked very humbly, "Just in farewell--may I kiss you--once more?"

With a torrent of sobs she came into his arms. "From the first," she declared, "I've been just yours. I've never thought of myself except as yours. Take me! Poverty doesn't frighten me. I've known it too long--it's almost like an old friend. Let's fight our way back together."

There are moments which turn mice into lions and make heroes of the craven. Unfortunately they are apt to be ephemeral. Paul Burton shook his head as he looked into her eyes, and answered with an unwonted resolution.

"No," he said bitterly, "not now. Now I'm a bum."

"You needn't be. You are young. You have genius. We can win out yet--and win out big--and win out together."

His lips twisted in a pallid smile of self-derision.

"At all events for once I know myself. If I ever become a man, God knows I'll come to you. But I haven't done it yet. I mustn't know where you are, dear. I'm strong enough--just now, but in some dark, weak moment I'll come hurrying to you, if I can find you--before I've proved myself."

"I'm going out--on the road--this afternoon," she spoke slowly. "I'm going to wait, and for the first time, I'm really hoping."

In the weeks that followed Paul made a resolute attempt to keep his promise. For a while he played the piano in a restaurant, but his frail constitution had been shattered by these late months and sickness intervened. Mary, too, with her thoughts painfully bent upon the rapid shrinkage of the little bank account, endlessly sought employment. Because she was beautiful, and because even through these dark and hopeless days she had brought with her a regal poise of her lovely head, everyone to whom she applied gave audience--and little else.

In appraising her business assets, she itemized her knowledge of several languages, her excellent education and her willingness to work. She was countered by the reminders that she did not know stenography, could not use a typewriter and had no prior experience. Many business men listened and took her address, but as the days wore on she discovered that the only ones who ever referred again to those memoranda were such as remembered her beauty, and insisted on discussing the possibilities in cafes over a supper party for two.

One item of regularity Mary found time for, between her exhausting journeys of tracking down advertisements. She went often to the cemetery where Jefferson Edwardes slept, and her single extravagance was the purchase of a few inexpensive flowers to carry with her.

On one of these occasions she happened upon a burial in a lot near that she had just visited. The deceased had been a person of sufficient consequence to warrant newspaper attention, and Mary, in passing the spot from which the carriages were starting away, halted reverently. As she went on again, someone overtook her and touched her arm. Turning her head she recognized Smitherton. He had been the most courteous and considerate of the newspaper men

with whom her family's late affairs had compelled her to have repeated meetings.

The reporter looked her straightforwardly in the eyes and inquired bluntly, "You were in the office yesterday, looking for employment, weren't you?"

"Yes," she said. "They offered me a position--if I would write a 'heart-interest' story of my life--signing it and concealing nothing."

The young man nodded. "I know and I saw your eyes as you refused. I'm not talking as a reporter now, but as a human being. You won't make any mistake by trusting me, Miss Burton. Is it so bad as all that with you? Hunting a job?"

The girl had by this time attained a certain reliance in her own abilities of human appraisement. She believed what young Smitherton said and she answered with equal frankness.

"It is so bad that we face sheer starvation, that's all."

After a keen glance at her he observed quietly: "At this moment you are not overfed."

"N--no." A faint amusement lighted her pupils as she answered, "I'm not--well, exactly gorged."

"Now I want to talk to you, and you needn't hesitate about telling me things." There was a frank boyishness about this young man, and his manner reminded her of Edwardes. She thought his eyes had something of that same straight fearlessness and honesty. "You are going with me from here to a little restaurant I know, near by, and you are going to hear me out. I know that you're going through sheer hell, and I know a game scrapper when I meet one whether it be a man or woman. This business teaches a fellow several things."

In the end she went.

CHAPTER XXXI

AN hour later she felt as if she had known Smitherton for a long while and could rely upon him. Then he lighted a cigar and said slowly: "I have taken all this time and said nothing useful. I did it deliberately--because what comes next will sound so cruel that I wouldn't say it if the reason wasn't sufficient. I'm going to hurt you--but only as the dentist or surgeon might hurt you. Shall I go on?"

She looked at him across the table and since cowardice had no place in her composition braced herself and nodded her acquiescence.

"You don't get much help from your brother. It's not his fault, perhaps, but it's true. You get none at all from your father. Your mother is in a condition of mental derangement. It's up to you. You've walked your feet sore seeking honest employment--and you've met with failure and affront. Now I'm coming to it and I'm going to put it plain. In this town of New York there is just one opening for you. One thing will bring you handsome returns: nurses for your mother--comfort for your father--but it will be an ordeal. You must capitalize your beauty and the publicity that attaches to your name."

Mary Burton's lovely face grew paler, and, fearing interruption, the man rushed on. "I don't mean in the way the Sunday editor suggested. I mean the stage. I eke out my revenue in Park row with some press-agent work, and I happen to know what I'm talking about. Mary Burton is one of the most advertised names in the city. To a manager it would be worth whatever it cost."

"But"--her voice faltered--"but I can't act. I've been in amateur things of course, but--"

"You don't have to know how to act." His voice rose ironically. "Few stars do--besides, I'm talking about vaudeville. The highest-priced vaudeville headliner in America boasts that she can neither act, sing nor dance."

He paused for a moment, then, as she said nothing, proceeded gravely: "Think that over, Miss Burton. New York pays for names and what New York pays for the rest of the country accepts--at more than face value. I can see to it that your contract is carefully drawn--and you needn't fear the usual unpleasant features of visiting managers. They will come to you. It's not what you would prefer--but if other things fail telephone me."

It was a small restaurant, very plain but neat, and at this hour of the late afternoon the man from Park row and the woman who had once been the toast of capitals from the Irish Sea to Suez sat across one of its small tables undisturbed by other patrons. Only a waiter stood across the room and a cat rubbed against his ankles.

In her mourning she made a wonderfully appealing picture, as she gazed down at her plate, even though her lowered lashes half-masked the mismated beauty of her eyes. Suffering had laid a veil of transparent pallor over the brilliant vividness of her coloring--a coloring that her lover had once likened to the gorgeousness of the Mosque of Omar. Yet, by this, her beauty was rather enhanced than lessened as though Nature, the master-painter, had retouched a picture already wondrous, softening its colors with a tone more spiritual. Both face and figure had lost something of roundness and the hand that lay on the table was slenderer of finger and wrist, but Mary Burton had not been robbed of her beauty, and when she spoke, very low and hesitantly, one realized that out of her voice no single golden note was missing. She might still be truthfully advertised as one of the world's rare beauties.

"I know," she said softly, "that you make that suggestion in true kindness--and I know how great my need is. If I am to save my mother and father from starvation, I must do something, and yet--" She paused and shuddered. "Maybe it's all foolish and over-fastidious, but your suggestion sets every nerve in me on edge. It's not very different after all from your Sunday editor's suggestion--except in the spirit of its making."

"Still, there is a difference," he assured her. "The footlights are between and they give a sense of separation--and protection. Was Herron--the Sunday man--particularly obnoxious? He's not human, you know--he's just an efficient machine."

The fingers of the hand that lay on the table trembled a little and Mary's eyes as they met his were clouded with distress.

"I hadn't supposed such things could be," she said. "He was very impersonal about it all--and he grew enthusiastic as he outlined what he wanted." Her words came slowly in a detached voice, though as she spoke her delicate features responded to the shiver of disgust that ran through her shoulders and at times her lips quivered. "He wanted me to write it all--telling about every man abroad, especially with a title, who had ever--been nice to me. He wanted pictures of me; all sorts of pictures, in evening-gowns, in polo togs--in bathing-suits. He wanted a chapter on how much my clothes used to cost--all my clothes. He said the women would 'eat that up.'" She stopped and a wan smile crept into

her eyes, as she added, "I am using his words, Mr. Smitherton. But I could stand that. I sat through it. I couldn't afford to lose any chance if it was a chance I might decently take. But it was when he wanted his picture, too, Jefferson's--"

She had to stop there for a moment and a mist came to her eyes which she resolutely kept from overflowing in actual tears as she went on. "It was when he wanted me to write down all his words and publish his letters that I realized I couldn't fight even starvation that way."

"The damned brute!" muttered Smitherton. "The unspeakable beast!"

"To do him justice," admitted the girl generously, "I think he forgot, in visualizing those pages which the women would 'eat up,' that it was actually me he was talking to--it was just outlining work to a reporter. He said something about 'sob-stuff,' too. To me, Mr. Smitherton, he spoke of all these terrible, hideous things, that I lie awake remembering, as 'sob-stuff'--and I knew that the worst of them were times that made sobs impossible--when even tears wouldn't come."

"I had no idea it had been that bad." Smitherton's sympathy was genuine and spontaneous.

"It was worse even," she went on. "He spoke of that--that afternoon when I read the ticker tape--and knew what had happened. He said that, properly colored, that would make a--a great scene. He said it had drama." Her voice choked, then she added: "So you see your suggestion will be a hard one for me to take. I should feel like--like Godiva riding through the streets. And yet for her own people Judith went to the tent of Holofernes. That wasn't easy, either."

They rose from the table and went out, and the girl held out her hand. "Please don't think that I am unappreciative," she pleaded. "I know how kind you have been--and I don't know how much longer I can hold out. You said I could trust you, and now I know it, too. If--" her voice broke, but her chin came up--"if I'm driven to it, I'll let you know--and be very grateful."

"Don't let any one else talk to you," he cautioned. "Remember that this is the capital of sharks. Now I'm going to call a taxi, and take you home."

But she shook her head. "It's good of you," she said and her cheeks flushed. "But I'd rather you didn't. I'm going by the people's chariot--the subway." She was not yet quite able to conquer the old pride that remained from the old life. She shrank from showing him the meanness of her quarters; she who had reigned and been toasted and lived in the exclusive aloofness of the favored few, and who now faced starvation. So he parted from her at the nearest kiosk of the underground.

It would be a pleasant thing to paint the rehabilitation of Paul Burton, showing how the underlying qualities of manhood rose in adversity as they had never risen in opulence, and how love transformed him from a weakling into a hero. But veracity intervenes. In childhood his character had lacked stamina, and in manhood a hot-house atmosphere had stifled even what had been there in the beginning. For a short time after he had seen Marcia Terroll he fought the world and his own terrible weakness with such a resolution that he utterly burned up and consumed what spirit of combat was left within him. Perhaps the recording angel, counting not only results but handicaps, wrote on the great ledger of human balances a generous merit mark for even that brief struggle.

Paul was like a weak swimmer in a strong undertow. He battled hard and if he could not battle long it was because the measure of his strength was not a matter of his own choosing. For a while he held a position as organist in a church--and during those days he brought home the only revenue which came in. But that did not last. The truth must be told. Paul's fastidious spirit sickened at the sordid and tawdry, and when he discovered one day, through the unkind offices of a vagabond violinist, that it was possible to reconstruct a dream world, even in the midst of want and poverty, his hunger for tranquillity triumphed over his resolve. With a hypodermic needle he picked the lock--and threw open the gate of dreams. To himself he said that it was only a temporary indulgence, to be put aside when he had conquered the agonies of that sleeplessness which had of late tortured him. Mary, deprived of his aid, fought on alone, with all the fighting courage of the Burton blood at its best--and fought hopelessly.

Elizabeth Burton could not be left alone. Her mind had crumbled into such pitiful decay that her care chained the daughter in a rigorous confinement. Now even the opportunity for seeking employment was denied her.

The ruin of the Burton family was as total and complete as if fate were bent on tallying measure for measure their past magnificence. The quarters which Yamuro had chosen were given up and lodgings taken of a far meaner sort.

If Mary needed a final twisting of the knife in her wounded life it came when there stood between them and the

streets a single asset, and she went to realize on that, haggling with a pawnbroker over her engagement ring.

Marcia Terroll came back to town for a brief stay between engagements and stopped with Dorothy Melliss at their old rooms. She had not dared to ask any question about Paul, and the other girl would have refrained from volunteering information had she possessed it. Indeed, it would have been unlikely that Dorothy would know anything of the submerged Burtons in this city where lives may run out parallel spans almost door to door, and never touch. But one evening as Marcia was crossing the square, just after the lights began to glow, a human derelict sidled up to her and accosted her with a mumbled petition for alms. The man was old and his clothes though neatly patched were threadbare and worn. His face, too, was seamed and his breath was alcoholic.

"Madam," he said in a low voice as he fell into step with her, "I was not always so unfortunate, nor am I responsible for my adversities. Could you--"

With a shudder of disgust Marcia quickened her pace, and the man, fearful of the eye of police authority, dropped back. But Miss Terroll could never bring herself without a struggle to ignore the plea of old age. It struck her, too, that despite his panhandler's manner this man was yet in a fashion different.

There was evidently someone who sought to keep him neatly mended up, for her woman's eye had caught that detail in a glance. Through his inebriety lurked a ghost-like suggestion of past gentility. She turned impulsively back, beckoning to him as she searched her purse. In it were two quarters and one of them she gave him.

"God bless you, madam," he began with a grotesque echo of the ancient pompousness. "God knows I had never anticipated such a necessity."

As she hurried on, he removed his hat and bowed with an attempt at stateliness which held a pathos of burlesque.

Marcia Terroll was spared the hurt of knowing that the panhandler with whom she had divided the contents of her pocketbook, and whom she had thus enabled to buy five greatly desired glasses of beer, was the father of the man she loved.

So, though Mary Burton did not know it, this was the way old Tom eked out the very scant pin-money she could spare him for his own method of drugging his sorrows.

CHAPTER XXXII

AN old year was dying and a young year was about to be born. Along the blazing stretch of Broadway from Thirtieth street to Columbus circle seethed and sounded the noisy saturnalia of New Year's Eve.

The street that never sleeps was tonight a human spill-way, churning in freshet. Between its walls went up the clamor of human throats raised in talk, in shouts, in song, in laughter and in contest with the blaring of toy horns, the racket of rattlers and all those discordances that seek to swell pandemonium to the bursting of ear-drums. Theaters were disgorging their "big-night" audiences and pedestrians moved in a congested mass which battalions of traffic officers herded slowly as dogs herd crowded sheep.

An endless procession was this, in which human entities were molecules, that crept, elbowing, jamming, laughing along. Holly-wreathed windows bore, in additional decoration, placards announcing, "This cafe is open all night." For this was the city's wild occasion of suspended laws, when two edicts only hold in the favored points of rendezvous, "Nothing but wine," and, "Everything goes."

Vendors of paper caps, false mustaches, confetti, balloons and all the noise-swelling devices ever bred of deviltry, hawked their wares along the curbs, and the furs of women glittered with atoms of colored paper.

Within the restaurants and cabarets was added to the outer din a popping of corks, a fanfare of orchestras and the songs of supper guests at tables and dancers on the floors.

Already a sequence of wild scenes telescoped themselves along the White Way, but the evening was yet young and would ripen toward fulfilment as the hours progressed. Its Bacchanalian zenith would be reached after the million lights of these gilded places had died--like the snuffing of a single candle--into the five minutes of darkness which heralds the changing year.

Along the uproarious sidewalks, pressing ragged shoulders to the richness of ermine and seal, drifted many hopeless derelicts, but tonight was to be a night of forgetting them, of forgetting everything save that it was a "large evening" and that life held only the present clarion of gaiety. The tragedy under this thin crust must be ignored. Mirth must be crowned; laughter must be enthroned; glasses must sparkle and clink and such individuals as elected to remain sober must look indulgently and smilingly on scenes which, at another time, would require a blush. To blush on Broadway on New Year's Eve would be a misdemeanor. It doesn't happen.

One splinter of human drift which was carried along on the tide gazed about out of a chalky face--morphia-stamped. This chip on the churning eddy bore the name of Paul Burton. He had of course no business there. For him there was no reasonable prospect of a happy new year. There still remained a roof--of a sort--to cover him when he went home, which was not so often as it should be, and he still wore a suit of decent cut, though of a past fashion, but in its pockets there was no jingle of coins. Passively Paul had been drawn into the maelstrom of the marching crowds, yet he was not of its membership. He could not turn in at any of the doors that blazed with light and invitation. But he had certain dreams which vaguely recompensed him--and in his pockets was a hypodermic needle.

At Longacre square, where the swirl and eddy of human currents met and became a cauldron and whirlpool, he was held up at a crossing, while the crowd shrunk back on itself, waiting the raised hand of the traffic policeman.

Finding himself jostled, he glanced languidly over his shoulder. The needle makes for such languidness at times between its moments of dreaming and its moments of jumping nerves.

Several men in evening-dress and fur coats surrounded him, and he knew them all. The face of Norvil Thayre was laughing into his, and he recognized that an evening well started had painted its flush on the cheeks of each of them.

"My word, Burton!" laughed the Englishman. "I haven't seen you since the war of the Roses. How goes it, lad?" Then, even in his heightened gaiety of mood, Thayre recognized the want and distress which had left their impress and pallor on this face, and his eyes sobered. With the other rules of the season he felt that forgetfulness of the past accorded, so he hastened to add, "You know these fellows. Fall in and hike along with us. We have a table reserved at Kenley's and it's close to the platform. I dare say we sha'n't miss many tricks."

A deep embarrassment flooded the face of the outcast. He, who had once numbered these men among his associates, felt sensitively the pinched poverty of his present condition and its contrast with their Persian-lamb collars, otter-lined coats and their white shirt fronts of evening-dress.

"Thank you," he said gravely, "I'm afraid I can't. Your party is made up and--and--"

But as he stammered to a pause Thayre slapped him heartily on the back, and the others, with voices of more advanced inebriety, made it a chorus of insistence.

"'Twill do you no harm, my lad," declared the Englishman. "'A little nonsense now and then--' You know the old saw. A bite of mixed grill and a beaker of bubbles will buck you up, no end."

The musician hesitated, deeply tempted. To sit at table with white damask and clear glass, and once more to eat such things as they serve at Kenley's! The idea could not be lightly dismissed. Besides he felt suddenly giddy and weak. He frequently felt so these days, and if he accepted he could rest quietly until the vertigo passed.

"I say--of course," Thayre leaned forward and explained in a lowered voice, "you go as my guest. I'm giving the party tonight."

Ten minutes later, retrieved from the street, Paul Burton sat near the edge of the cabaret platform in a cafe where every table had been reserved long in advance, and from whose doors many eager applicants were being turned away.

Nearby, too, was the space reserved for dancing, and as Paul drank his first glass of champagne the bubbles rose and raced merrily through his thin blood, lifting him out of his squalid reality into an echo world of irresponsibility. The crowds on the floor were swirling to a delirious dance tune while above their heads shot up the white arms of women and the black arms of men, to keep dozens of multi-colored toy balloons afloat over them.

Like glass balls on a fountain-spray, red and blue and purple spheres drifted up and down, and confetti showered, and dancers snatched paper caps from the heads of strangers, and crowned themselves therewith.

Wilder groups danced, not in pairs, but in trios and quartettes with arms locked around shoulders--and it wanted a half-hour of the changing year.

Thin ribbons of bright paper volleyed rocket-wise from table to table and fell in festoons from overhead wires. Dancers forced their way through showers of breaking strands, and swayed rhythmically on, trailing broken shreds of kaleidoscopic color.

Like punctuations of sound came the popping of balloons and corks.

Paul Burton's hosts had arrived at the stage of mellow exhilaration, but over Paul himself, as his eyes met the great clock which was to herald the eventful moment, fell a sudden shadow of black depression. Another year to face! He thought of what he had promised to do with this one--and of what he had done! Those last moments in his music-room rose to his memory and they carried a penalty which slugged his heart into an intensity of shame and misery. Paul Burton, sitting there with this thin semblance of merriment around him, saw himself once again very clearly for what he was.

Thayre leaned over. "I say, men," he suggested with the enthusiasm of a new and bright idea sparkling in his eyes, "let's call the head waiter and have Burton play for us. The management will be jolly well pleased when they know they're getting the greatest instrumentalist in New York."

Paul protested, but Thayre was a man of quick action, and a moment later the waiter had brought the head waiter, and the head waiter had gone for the manager.

Such patrons as these the manager had every wish to oblige, and he was by no means unwilling to utilise such an artist as Paul Burton when the lights came on again and his patrons rose to their feet for the national anthem.

"Of course," cautioned Thayre, "Mr. Burton doesn't want his name announced," and even to that restriction, limiting the value of his extemporaneous "feature," the manager reluctantly acceded.

To live for music and to have no instrument with which to express one's emotions means a tortured privation of the spirit. Paul Burton, as he took his seat at the piano, forgot that it was New Year's eve on Broadway, forgot the lights, the confetti and the toy balloons. He remembered only that here were keys which unlocked his dream-world of music, and when he began to play the clamor of the place slowly and quite unconsciously subsided, and quiet came--not at once, but as a delirium may soften slowly into sleep under the stroke of a soothing hand.

When from an outlying table a woman, grown louder of laughter than she realized, interrupted this quiet, a score of faces turned angrily in her direction, rebuking her with their glances.

But the music went on and the great crowd which had a few moments before been abandoning itself to noise and riot now found itself listening--listening in a sort of rapt trance--with its many gazes converging on a slender young man. His pallid face and cameo features seemed exalted and his eyes burned strangely under the dark locks that fell across

his forehead.

They did not hear the first peal of the midnight clock, until the sudden darkness which that stroke heralded reminded them of the hour.

The place which had blazed with light was now as black as some sea-floor cavern, and that should have been the signal for a hundred horns and rattlers and shouts of greeting, and the reaching of hands to meet and grasp other hands across the tables. But in Kenley's it was quiet except for those peals of music that came from the platform. At last the strains ended in silence, and a deep breath passed among the tables as though from one composite pair of lungs. Then once more the instrument spoke--spoke with a grotesque inappropriateness for a night that was not to end till morning--for the notes that sounded across the place were the opening bars of, "Home, Sweet Home."

There were only a few bars--and after that a loud crash as though a number of hands had simultaneously fallen, with violence, upon the keys--and then the lights blazed again from all the opalescent chandeliers and all the wall brackets.

Instantly from tables near the center two young women, in paper caps, leaped up from their seats and kissed the men and women of their party. A wave of greetings swept the place.

Across one end of the room gleamed a huge electric sign, "Happy New Year"--and lying hunched forward with his face on the keyboard of the instrument sagged the unmoving figure of Paul Burton.

At once the lights went out again, leaving the place dark, and the voice of the manager was heard from the platform, a little strained in tone as he sought to conceal the tragedy which, should it become known, would end the night's profit for his establishment.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he lied resourcefully, "I hope you will all keep your seats and indulge the management for a few moments. A fuse has burned out, but it will at once be remedied. Our pianist, I will add, has suffered a fainting spell, but is in no danger."

When the lights came on again, the figure at the piano was no longer there. Just back of the platform was a door used by the cabaret performers, and through this he had been borne.

But the faintness which had come upon Paul Burton was the faintness of death, and there were those among the merry-makers who could not forget the grotesque attitude of which they had caught a glimpse, and who found subsequent merry-making impossible.

"Notify the coroner," ordered the policeman who had come in from the corner through a service entrance. "This is a case for him."

The manager bent an ear toward the outer door and recognized that there had been no resumption of the saturnalian chorus between his walls. "Mr. Thayre," he commented bitterly to the guest who had followed into the private room, "your friend there has put New Year's eve on the blink for my place--this thing costs me thousands."

"Who's the dead man?" demanded the officer bluntly, and when Thayre replied with two words, "Paul Burton," he gave a long, low whistle of astonishment. The name of Burton was not yet forgotten in New York.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MARY Burton was returning from a Sixth-avenue delicatessen shop with the bottle of milk and box of crackers which constituted the marketing for tomorrow morning's breakfast. She felt very faint and unspeakably sick at heart. There was no longer even a trivial thing with which to interest the pawnbroker. She had had little sleep for many nights and her temples throbbed with pain. She had been trying to think out some way to mend their misfortunes, and each day brought her nearer the point where the grinding struggle must end in starvation.

"If it were only myself," she said bitterly as she turned the corner under the superstructure of the Elevated, and shivered in the cutting wind of the blizzard which was sweeping the city, "it would be simple." She paused a moment later and halted against the wall of Jefferson Market Court where a brick abutment broke the force of the bluster. Mary was not so warmly clad as this rigorous weather warranted. The last thing she had taken to the sign of the three balls was a heavy cloak.

"For me," she said to herself as she bent her head into the smother of wind-driven snow, "life ended there in that office--when he died. If I had just myself to consider I don't think God would blame me much for ending it."

But it was not only herself she had to consider. The doctors told her that her mother's tenuous life strand might snap at any time in sudden death or might stretch indefinitely in helplessness and dethroned reason. Even in the mean lodgings they occupied other tenants were sometimes prone to the drawing of lines, and Mary knew that the landlord did not regard it as helpful to his business to have "a crazy lady in the house. Some guests objected." So when she began falling into arrears she did not delude herself with false hopes of charitable indulgence. Her father, too, though he had dropped down the scale of life to a forlorn old man who loafed his hours away in saloons until he was turned out, was still her father and while breath remained in his disreputable body his stomach required food as well as drink.

The girl went in at the dark door of the house, which was not greatly different from a tenement, and climbed the double flight of stairs. From a place by the window her mother looked up from her chair where she sat incessantly rocking. She held in her lap an old blank book and her expression was vacant.

"I've just been reading Ham's diary," she querulously announced. Mary shuddered. Of late her mother was always reading that old record of boyhood ambitions, which to her was always new since no memory--save those of other years--outlasted the hour.

"Ham thinks he's going to be a great man some day and I hope he's right. He's a good boy and a dutiful son and--"

But the daughter was not listening. Her eyes had encountered an envelope on the dresser mirror, and, as she tore the end of it, she felt a premonition of its contents.

"How about some money on account?" questioned the writer. "Unless I get some by tomorrow, I want my rooms vacated."

So the ultimatum had come. Mary Burton stood before the mirror for a moment and out of her body all the strength seemed to flow. Her knees shook, and her hands grew moist and chilly. Lest her sudden weakness be apparent to her mother she turned and went wearily into the other room. There she sat on the edge of her bed and tried to think.

"Tomorrow!" She dully repeated. "Tomorrow we are put out--then a public asylum for my mother--and the street or the almshouse for my father." Even now she was not thinking of herself. If it came to that she still believed God would not resent her opening for herself the single door of escape.

But these two old and helpless people! To Mary they were desperate burdens, but perhaps that only made her love them the more, and fight for them the more loyally.

For a long while she sat there in silence, then she rose with a red spot burning on each cheek and put on her hat again. At the lower landing she encountered the landlord. He was not a prepossessing man at best, and his face just now did not indicate that he was at his best.

"You got my note?" he inquired bluntly, and the girl nodded.

"I think," she faltered, "probably I can do something about the rent tomorrow."

"Thinking isn't going to satisfy me," he announced. "Tomorrow's the limit of my patience."

Mary suddenly remembered that to telephone costs a nickel, and that she had none with her. For a moment she stood on the sidewalk before climbing the two flights again to raid the little supply of her purse. The endless anxiety

and the unbroken strain of these calamitous months had weakened her to the point of realizing that the stairs were steep. Then she remembered that the Italian woman at the delicatessen shop was her friend, and would trust her for the five cents. She fought her way along to the store through a wind which threatened to sweep her off her feet and which cut her like whiplashes.

Her trembling fingers made a task of turning the pages of the directory and finding the number of a newspaper on Park row, but at last she succeeded.

"Is Mr. Smitherton there?" she asked, and the curt direction came back, "Hold the wire."

Smitherton was sitting at a desk littered with newspaper clippings and sheaves of copy-paper. His shirt-sleeves were rolled to the elbow and the light of his desk bulb shone on his ruffled hair as the "copy-kid" called out to him with that insouciant freshness which stamps his kind.

"Dame wants you on the wire. Got a voice like a million-dollars worth of peaches an' cream." Mary with the receiver to her ear heard the subtle compliment of those mixed metaphors.

Smitherton finished pasting a clipping into the blank place in a type-written page and rose slowly.

"Well?" he inquired shortly. "What is it? This is Smitherton."

At once he recognized the voice which replied, and recognized that it came faintly and full of indecision.

"This is Mary Burton, Mr. Smitherton. Do you--do you think you could still find me work in vaudeville?"

"Oh!" The reporter's office brusqueness fell away, and his tone changed. He knew that this was the girl's last stand, and that she had not admitted its necessity until every other effort had failed, every path of escape closed. "I don't think, Miss Burton," he assured her, "I am certain."

"Do you think--" the voice was even fainter--"it would be possible to get just a little money--some sort of advance--soon--tomorrow?"

"Leave that to me," he confidently commanded. "Just give me your address--and I'll be at your place in the morning."

Mary slept little that night. Against her windows screamed and whined the wind, driving a swish of fine, hard snow in its breath. From two rivers came the dull groaning of the fog horns. But the storm which kept her eyes hot and sleepless was one within her own breast.

Over and over again she told herself that the work for which she was volunteering was in no wise disgraceful. Probably many women who were her superiors were doing it with willingness, even with warrantable pride. It would mean for her mother, as the reporter had reminded her, comfort and competent nursing. Perhaps, in surroundings of greater ease, her father might even yet rehabilitate himself into a manlier old age. Save to serve them her own life was already lived out.

But the shudder of disgust would return despite her efforts at its banishment and shake her like a chill. In her case it was not vaudeville--and it was only lying to herself to call it so. No manager was considering the payment of a salary to her for anything she could legitimately do. It was what Smitherton had described it, capitalizing the publicity of a misfortune so sweeping as to possess a morbid public interest. In whatever generosity of terms her contract was drawn its essential meaning would be that in ten-and a hundred-fold it would come back to the management for that one reason. It would so come because people would flock in vulgar curiosity to see the woman who had reigned in exclusive sets of society from which they were themselves barred; whose brother had reigned as a magnificent dictator of dollars. They would come because they had heard of this beauty, and had glutted themselves with column upon column of yellow and sensational news recording untold opulence, and afterward of tragedy building on tragedy to this climax; herself standing there on exhibition in the pillory of their gaze.

Seats would be filled and applicants turned away from the box-office, because a large part of the American public differs in no wise from that of Rome when it gathered in the circus to see a captive princess thrown to the beasts--or claimed as a captor's slave. Her value could be based only on pandering to the mob spirit of gloating over the fall of the great.

They would warm over and republish all the sensational details which time had cooled. The story she had refused to write, others would not refuse to write--neither would they refuse to "color" certain scenes into "drama."

The girl, lying in her bed, pressed her fore-arms against her eyes and struggled to shut out the pictures that rose as horrors in her mind--but they passed and repassed with fiendish pertinacity. Nightmare shapes leered at her from

gargoyle features.

To any human being a situation is what it seems to be.

Had she actually, like the Lady Godiva, been called upon to ride the length of Broadway, clad only in her beautiful hair, and placarded "Burton's Sister and Edwardes' Fiancee," it could have meant to her delicacy of feeling no greater trial, no more truly the denuding of herself to the public gaze.

Had all this realization not been so keen and so poignant Mary Burton would not have fought so long against the idea which seemed to open the only way.

Were there just herself she would, before considering such desecration of every sacred memory, have preferred to stuff with paper the crannies of that wind-rattled window and to turn on the gas. In comparison this would have been easy.

Easy! Suddenly the idea became a soul-clutching temptation. It offered escape from the horror of decision and action; escape, too, from the haunting of memory. The woman sat up in bed and her eyes gazed feverishly ahead through the dark. She trembled violently and the plan invitingly unfolded. Some unseen devil's advocate was urging her, for the instant half-persuading her, insinuating and luring. Often as a very little girl she had slept in a room as bare as this and listened contentedly to the rattle of storm-shaken shutters. She had cuddled, a warm, soft shape, under the blankets, and sunk sweetly, dreamily into unconsciousness and happy dreams. It was so easy! There, in a drawer where she had thrust it, with abhorrence for the emblem of a contemptible weakness, was Paul's hypodermic needle. This very night she could again drift, unresisting, into sleep, and while she slept the gas-jet could flow free.

The room was cold. Sitting upright in her bed, she shivered. Then, as she realized how seriously she had yielded for a panic-ridden moment to the temptation of turning her back on life's need of courage, the shiver grew from a shudder of the flesh to a shudder of the soul. She lay down again and hid her face in the pillow.

From the next room she heard the heavy snore of her father and the gentler sleeping breath of her mother. Personal preferences and prejudices belonged to the past.

Very well--she still had the flaming Burton courage. She would do this hateful thing, and when she gazed on the eyes that glutted their curiosity with staring, she would meet them serenely and give them no sign that she was being tortured.

And this thing Mary Burton did--did with that calm dignity which is vouchsafed to those whose souls are of heroic quality.

It was only when the day's work of rehearsal ended and she was locked again in her own room that she sat dry-eyed and wretched, remembering a dozen things which made her shudder. But as she walked along the streets she kept her eyes to the front, because she could not tell from what wall one of those blazing "three sheets" might confront her. They were advertising her as Mary Hamilton Burton--that the value of those two names might doubly pique the curiosity of the morbid.

Also, she avoided as a pestilence the newspapers, and what they might contain.

Abey Lewis did not at all understand her, though he had handled a variety of people during his long career as a purveyor of "refined vaudeville" to the public. He confessed as much to Mr. Smitherton, with whom, as Miss Burton's business manager, he came into constant association.

"I don't get her at all, Mr. Smitherton," he querulously complained. "I've known most of the big-time artists that have come along in vodeville, and she ain't like none of them I ever seen. I've made a lot of head-liners, but this girl acts like it gives her a pain to talk to me. She don't seem to take no interest in her act."

The business manager chewed irritably on his cigar. They were sitting in the darkened theater while Mary Burton was being rehearsed in the short and dramatic sketch which Smitherton had secured for her.

"Has it occurred to you, Lewis," he suggested, with a certain coolness of manner, "that you wouldn't be paying Miss Burton the salary you are if she was like anybody else you've known? Haven't you considered the fact that this lady is going to pack your place to capacity because of her difference?"

"Maybe so. Maybe she's a big novelty, and I ain't kicking," assented the other. "But it does seem to me she ought to be more grateful--for the chance she's getting. She's a knock-out all right! Them eyes ought to get the folks going--I wish she'd use 'em more."

The two sat silent for a while with the empty chairs around them, then Mr. Abey Lewis raised the megaphone with which he was directing and spoke to the stage.

"Daughter," he instructed, "you ain't quite got the psychology of the part yet." Mary Burton came down toward the front of the stage, with her fore-arm raised across her face to shut off the glare of the "foots," as she listened. Mr. Lewis rose and walked thoughtfully down the aisle toward her. It was Mr. Lewis' intent to handle very delicately this new headliner whom he failed to comprehend, and of whom he stood in secret awe.

"Now you see, daughter," he went on, "this act gives you a great chance for emotion, and I know, when you get the right angle on it, you'll eat it up. You've just got wise there, where I broke in, to the fact that your husband's a criminal. You ain't never suspected he was a crook before. Now that calls for emotion.... Put more color into it.... Pound it a little harder. When George ends his long speech and pauses, that brings you across, see? It cues your reception of the news. It throws a bomb under you. In times like them women get more hysterical. They ain't quiet in grief, like men, so just cut loose a little more. Give us a nice little scream."

For once Mary Burton almost smiled, as she hearkened to this wise dissertation on emotion, but she only bowed her head in assent, as the director added: "Take the scene up again at George's entrance."

When he sat down beside Smitherton, Abey Lewis shook his head. "I ain't sure we didn't make a mistake in giving her a straight dramatic sketch," he said dubiously. "She ain't got no emotion. She needs more pep. Now if she had an act with lots of changes of costume--something that would show her off better, it might go bigger."

Smitherton growled.

"Yes, and then you wouldn't have her at all," he retorted. "Get it through your head that this whole thing is distasteful to Miss Burton. It's bad enough as it is, without asking her to do a diving Venus."

"She won't ever be an actor," commented Mr. Lewis, sagely, "but what the hell's the difference? It's the name that's going to carry this act--and it's going to be a knock-out."



CHAPTER XXXIV

THE day of the ordeal arrived. Mary could not remember any occasion to which she had gone with such a sense of terror and misgiving, but this neither Mr. Lewis nor any of his subordinates suspected. It had pleased the management to call a morning rehearsal, so Mary had not been able to go home before her matinee debut. Tomorrow, if all went well, she could remove her parents to a greater comfort, so it was her affair to see that all went well.

Her mother had been less well than usual during these last few days and Mary had impressed upon old Tom Burton the necessity of remaining on watch during her own absence. But, out of the advance she had received, Old Tom had drawn a small allowance, and it was remarkable how greatly the manner of bartenders had changed for the better in the brief space of a few days. By forenoon Thomas Standish Burton was more than tipsy, and by two o'clock as he emerged from a side door his step was so unsteady that he found the slippery footing a matter requiring studious attention. Once he would have fallen had a policeman not caught his arm.

"I thank you, sir," acknowledged the old man, "I am deeply gra'fle, sir."

"You're deeply loaded," replied the officer. "I ought to run you in for your own protection."

"I'm sure--" Burton's eyes were watery and his voice thick--"you wouldn't do that. M' wife's sick an'--"

"Well, get on back to her, and--if you want good advice--when you get indoors, stay in." With a kindly tolerance the policeman assisted the pedestrian across the street and watched him tack along until he was lost to sight.

It was a bad day for uncertain feet and legs. The town lay locked in a grip of ice which sheeted streets and sidewalks with a treacherous danger. Horses struggled with hooves that shot outward, and children slid merrily and the elderly picked their way with a guarded caution.

Old Tom Burton made the trip back to the lodging-house and up the double flight of stairs in safety. One leg was a little painful, for in that fine irony, which sometimes seems to prove Life a cynical humorist, Thomas Standish Burton had been endowed with a single relic of wealth and epicureanism--he suffered from gout. So, as he climbed, he laboriously favored the crippled foot.

Then he opened the door of his wife's room and entered. But after one step he stood still, then he brushed a sleeve across his eyes to see more clearly. Elizabeth Burton lay, full length, on the floor near her chair--and she seemed unconscious. The old man hurried over to her and succeeded in lifting her weight to the bed. She must have suffered a heart-attack and fallen as she tried to cross the room alone. A great fear seized upon his heart and in some degree sobered him. He listened for the heart-beat and clasped shaking fingers to a wrist that at first seemed pulseless. But at last he found a faint flutter of life in the body he had thought lifeless--so faint and wavering a flutter that it seemed only a whispered echo of a departed vitality.

For a while he stood stupefied, then he thought of Mary. Of course, he must send word to Mary. Perhaps, too, life could still be coaxed back, if a doctor came quickly enough. Down the stairs he hobbled with a speed that drove him into a sort of frantic and clumsy gallop. On the first floor he knocked on the landlord's door and implored him to call a physician at once, while he himself went out to the telephone.

The nearest instrument was in a saloon and hither the old man hurried. Mary had given him the number of the stage 'phone, and he called it. Despite the coldness of the afternoon, perspiration burst out and beaded his forehead as he waited--only to hear the exasperating voice of the operator announce, "Busy." Three times this was repeated and while he waited, pacing frenziedly back and forth, he sought, after each successive failure, to allay the jump and tremor of his shocked nerves with whiskey, and he poured generously.

At last he had the theater number and was told that Miss Burton could not answer just then, but a message would be delivered.

"Tell her to come home at once," he shouted wildly into the receiver. "Her mother's dying."

"Wait," came the somewhat startled reply. Then after a moment a new and truculent voice sounded in his ear.

"What is this," it demanded, "a bum joke you're trying to put over, or what? Come home at once!--Don't you know a packed house is waiting to see Miss Burton in her act? What do ye mean, come home at once?"

"But I tell you--"

"Go tell it somewhere else." Thomas Burton did not know that it was Abey Lewis himself who spoke. "I don't believe

you--you're trying to string somebody--and if the Queen of China was dying she couldn't come now anyways."

Slowly Abey Lewis turned from the receiver he had abruptly hung up and beckoned the subordinate who had first taken the message.

"Don't mention this to anybody," directed the chief tersely. "Do you get me? The girl mustn't hear it--and if any telegrams or messages come, you bring 'em to me, first, see?" Then to the stage door-man he gave a similar command, and looked at his watch. It was two forty-five. Mary's act, held for the latter part of the bill, was not due for an hour. For just a moment Mr. Lewis considered the advisability of advancing it on the program. That might be safer--but also it would mar the climacteric effect and so offend his sense of artistic fitness. He thought that, after all, he had safeguarded matters well enough.

But Old Tom Burton had rushed out of the saloon and was hastening at his awkward gallop to the Eighth-street station of the elevated. He was going to tell Mary in person and to bring her home.

Around the turn of the rails he saw a train coming, and, urged by his obsession of haste, he strove for a greater speed. The top steps were slippery, and Old Tom was giddy and his legs uncertain. His foot shot sideways without warning, and his body went hurtling backward. He clutched desperately for the hand-rail and missed it. Down the long flight of iron-edged stairs, in a bundle of ragged old humanity, he rolled limply, and lay shapeless on the pavement. At once, a rush of feet brought a little crowd, and the same policeman who had helped him home earlier bent over him.

"Who is he?" asked someone, and the officer shook his head.

"Search me," he said. "He smells like a booze-barrel. I ought to have locked him up the first time."

An ambulance came with much clanging of its gong, and when they examined him at Bellevue, searching his pockets, they found some letters and Mary's memorandum. So they learned his identity, and sent a telephone message to the theater--to be followed a half-hour later by a second announcing that life was extinct.

But while old Thomas was making his dash for the top of the stairs at the elevated, the landlord, followed by a physician, tapped on the door of the room Thomas Burton had left--and, receiving no response, the pair went in. Swiftly the doctor labored, and as the powerful hypodermic worked, the old woman rallied a little and her lids wavered and opened. Her eyes wandered about the place and she spoke with a feeble voice.

"Who are you?"

"I am the doctor, but you mustn't try to talk," came the grave reply.

"Where are my children--my boys and my girl?" Elizabeth Burton's face suddenly became a face of terror and her eyes dilated. "Where are my children?" she once more demanded.

"There is no one here just now." The doctor spoke as soothingly as he could. "You mustn't talk."

A spark of returned sanity crept into the dying woman's pupils and she groaned. "No one here! I remember," she said while she shook with a sudden realization. "I remember--they're all gone." Her gaze traveled around the squalid room, and realized what that meant, too. "Am I dying?" she inquired. The physician murmured something evasive, and from her thin lips broke a low, smothered outcry. "Yes," she said, striving to rise and falling back, "I'm dying--alone--abandoned--by myself--in this attic."

Then her eyes closed. The physician bent over the bed with his fingers on the pulse, and then bent his ear to the breast.

"We have nothing more to do here," he announced briefly, "except to notify her daughter and the coroner. Have you the young woman's 'phone number?"

The landlord nodded.

All of these scraps of information were received by Mr. Abey Lewis. He had taken his place near the 'phone and stood sentinel there. But when the second communication arrived he procured a pair of clippers from the stage carpenter and quietly cut the connecting wire close to the wall where it would not show. He was taking no imprudent chances.

Smitherton reached the theater early and stood for a while at the elbow of the ticket-taker, watching the throngs

crowd in. But at the commencement of the performance he went inside and sat near the back of the house. It was only when he knew that Mary's act was due in a few minutes that he went behind. She might want just a word or smile of encouragement at the final moment.

For Mary this had been a morning and afternoon of soul-trying torture and she had been sustained only by the knowledge that she was doing what she was doing not for herself--but for those helpless ones whom she loved.

As the moment drew nearer, she strained more tightly that elastic and strong thread of courage which had so far held. As an antidote to the increased loathing she fixed her mind on one supporting thought and tried to hold it focused there. Tomorrow she could begin looking for better quarters, and then the two old people should return, not to the lavish wealth of former times, but to its more essential comfort.

She heard the orchestra tuning for the overture, and shivered. She felt much more like a victim waiting her turn to be thrown to the lions than a young woman about to make her debut as a "headliner." To herself she kept repeating under her breath, "Tomorrow they will be comfortable again." She did not know that already they were comfortable without her assistance and that her ordeal was pitifully wasted.

Her fortitude wavered momentarily as she looked at her watch--wavered, but held, and at last she found herself on the stage with no concise recollection of how she had reached it, beyond a shadowy memory of Smitherton's smiling face in the wings. The curtain rose, and the public--part of it was the rabble--fed its eyes on the beauty they had paid to see--the beauty of a fallen royalty.

There are times when vaudeville galleries are not excessively polite. This was such a time. For a few moments Mary Burton had the stage to herself, and her acting was in dumb-show. This was the author's device for allowing the audience a full realization of her remarkable beauty--and to the device the audience responded.

From high up among the hoodlums Mary caught, quite distinctly, long low whistles of very sensual admiration and such critical epigrams as "Wow!" "Oi-yoi!"... "Me for that!" and "*Some* girl!"

She felt for an instant that she was standing there wrapped in a blaze of shame, bound to a stake of vulgar heckling. Then suddenly a scornful fire mounted through her arteries and with that serene and regal dignity that added majesty to her beauty she went on as though this stage were her rightful throne and those people out there were gazing up at her from a ground level.

The act ran twenty-five minutes, during which time Mr. Lewis and Mr. Smitherton stood together in the wings. Mr. Lewis rubbed his hands.

"I ask you, Smitherton," he inquired, "could we have arranged it better if we was running the world ... first-page stories again tomorrow in every paper in town. We'll have to hire the Hippodrome."

"First-page stories, what do you mean?"

Lewis looked at the young man and enlightened. "Oh, I forgot you didn't know the latest. Well, the girl's mother is dead and the old man's just followed suit in a pauper's cot in Bellevue. How's that for heart-interest? You're a reporter. I ask you, will they feature that on Park row? Will they give us space for *that* I ask you?"

"And she went on ... my God!"

"Oh, of course I ain't told her yet," Mr. Lewis hastened to add. "She might have gone up."

Smitherton caught him violently by the arm and backed him farther against the wall. His own face was suddenly pale. "You withheld the news and let her go on? You did that?"

But the vaudeville manager only gazed blankly back into those indignant eyes and his face was full of perplexity.

"For God's sake, Smitherton, what are you pulling all this tragedy stuff about? Ain't you her manager? Did you want the whole act queered? Wasn't the old woman nutty and the old man a bum, and weren't they dead-weight for her to carry? Didn't they have to die sometime--and could they ever have picked a luckier time to do it? I ask you now, could they?"

"Great God!" exclaimed the reporter. But the manager went on.

"I call it a miracle of luck. God's good to some folks! Here that girl gets all her troubles settled at a single stroke--and tomorrow she's the biggest headliner on Broadway ... and you, the feller that ought to be out hustling her business interests, stand there gaping like you was sore because she didn't fliver. I don't get you."

Mr. Lewis's voice was freighted with disgust, then, seeing that the climax had been reached on the stage, he turned away and signaled to ring down. "Take all the curtains you can get out of it," he instructed the stage-manager--as he once more rubbed his hands.

Smitherton stood silent, seeing the curtain descend, then rise and fall time after time to a thunder of applause. He saw Mary Burton, with all her distaste masked behind the regal tranquillity of her splendid eyes and her cruelly wasted courage, bowing, not like an actress, but like an empress. Then she passed them and closed the door of her dressing-room.

Smitherton heard Lewis' voice once more, accompanied by something like a sigh. "Now comes the tough part," said the manager. "I've got to go and break it to her. Of course, just at first she ain't likely to see the lucky side of it."

The reporter stopped him.

"To hell with you!" he cried out fiercely. "I'll tell her myself--and if you interrupt me or say a word to her--I'm going to hurt you."

He went slowly to the door, but the manager had followed him with some excitement, and with no realization that his voice was loud, as he prompted.

"Put it to her tactful. Remind her that she's made on Broadway, and, now that the old man and old woman are both dead, she's free."

The dressing-room door suddenly opened, and they saw the girl standing there unsteadily, but as they approached she took a backward step and leaned against the wall.

Her eyes had slowly widened, as they had widened before under the sickening and staggering blows of tragedy. Her lips moved to speak, but for a while could shape no words. From her shaken bosom came a long and pitiful moan, which was not loud, and then her voice returned, and she said, "I heard you. They are--gone."

Smitherton knew that words could hardly help. He closed the door again and turned aside. Even Lewis moved away and stood silent.

But a few minutes later the dressing-room door once more swung outward and they saw her at the threshold. She had thrown a cloak around her. The deadly pallor of her cheeks was grotesquely heightened by the remnants of rouge which her shaking fingers had failed to completely remove. Her eyes were wide and staring, gazing into the future or the past ... into eternity it might have been.

Mr. Abey Lewis laid a hand on her arm.

"Miss Burton," he suggested, "you ain't quite got the paint off yet. It needs a little more cold cream, still." But Mary did not hear him. She heard nothing; saw nothing of these surroundings which stood for the pitifully wasted crucifixion of all her instincts of delicacy.

"This evening at eight," the manager reminded her. "Don't forget--and maybe you'll feel better then."

For a moment she halted. She had reached the stage-door, other performers were leaving the theater. She gazed back into the face of Mr. Abey Lewis, and said blankly, "This evening--what is this evening?"

They sought to stop her, but there was something in those wide eyes that petrified them all. For the time Mr. Lewis remained as one hypnotized. The door-man was gazing at her with an expression of awe and wonderment.

Mary herself stood there with the cloak falling open so that the convulsive throbbing of her throat was laid bare. The two marvelous and mismated eyes looked at them all and did not see them. The sister of Hamilton Burton, the woman whom two continents had toasted, was seeing other things. "Let me pass," she commanded, and they stood aside and saw her go out into the gathering night and the blizzard.

Smitherton rushed after her.

"Let me at least put you in a taxi," he pleaded, but she shook her head.

"You can do only one thing now," she said. "For God's sake, leave me alone."

Though he knew she was in no condition to be left to herself, the spell of those eyes was upon him, too. It was impossible to disobey. He stood there and saw her turn the corner, buffeted by the wind, and disappear.

Then he became conscious of a newsboy's shrieking: "Last 'dition--All 'bout the Burton trad-egy!"

PART III

THE MOUNTAIN TOP
THE STORY THAT WAS

CHAPTER XXXV

IT was a June day with the sparkle and lilt of summer's brightest and tunefulest mood in the sky and a softness and warmth in the air. The most distant peaks of the mountains slept in a quiet and purple glory and their nearer slopes still held a forest-freshness undulled by heat and sunburn.

Deep in the woods of the White Mountains the wild flowers were springing joyously and the birds were pouring out the fulness of life and joy and love from trilling throats.

The waters of Lake Forsaken were like a mirror holding in their still bosom all the vivid color which summer paints into its first and sweetest days while an after-note of spring's youth still lingers. The blue of the sky was broken only by white cloud-sails that rode high and buoyant in the upper air currents, like galleons of dreams, and all these things were given back in reflection from depths where the bass leaped and the sun shimmered. On the lake's farther margin a red-brown shape came down with careful feet gingerly lifted and set down, to raise its antlered head. But the gentle eyes were not charged with fear, for this was a season of security and truce with mankind.

If the world held trouble anywhere, no shadow of its passing riffled or marred the landscape here. And yet in this smile and song of nature, there must be a certain disregard for human affairs, because the movement which held the deer's gaze, as he stood there at the water's edge, looking across the width of Lake Forsaken, was the movement of human beings trailing along the road in a funeral cortege.

The road along which it traveled was no longer a deeply scarred trail, rutted through its clay surface by the hauling of lumber. It was metaled and smooth. There were many changes in the character of things hereabouts--all changes which attested that the curse of decay and hopeless sterility had been lifted. Off through a rift in the hills loomed the white concrete abutment of an aqueduct--and through the valley wound a railroad. A man might have walked many miles and come upon few deserted habitations, preyed upon by the twin vandals Time and Decay and staring blankly out through unglazed windows. What had once been a land of abandoned farms, a battle-ground where poverty had fought and defeated humanity, was now a land redeemed. Honest thrift and substantial comfort had crowned it with reclamation.

The church to which the hearse was making its way had also changed in aspect. The tumbledown building had become a more worthy house of worship, unelaborate, but renewed. Its belfry stood upright and on the Sabbath spoke out in the music of its chimes. Graves where once the headstones had teetered in neglect lay now in rows of ordered care, and those who slept in them no longer slept among the briars of over-grown thickets.

About the building, waiting for the coming of a new tenant in the acre of the dead, were gathered a score or more of neighbors, because the body which was to be laid to rest today had been, in life, the member of a family which they delighted to honor and respect.

Along the stone wall which skirted the road, and under the wild apple trees, were hitched the wagons and buggies that had brought them from many miles around, across the hills. Some of them came from houses far back where roads narrowed and grew precipitous.

Yet even among those who stood waiting in the churchyard near the reminder of an open grave, the lyric tunefulness of this June morning refused to surrender unconditionally to sadness. Off between the fence and the rising slope of the nearest hill a ripple ran across a yellow field of buckwheat and from a fence-post a golden-breasted lark sang merrily.

Those who had arrived earliest gossiped of such commonplace matters as make the round of life where small things take the place of large excitement, and their faces were not gloomy faces. Young men and girls among them were strolling apart, and the smiles in their eyes told that to them death was an incident, but June and love a nearer fact--a thing closer to their youth.

Then around the turn came the procession which they awaited--a hearse, followed by several buck-boards and buggies.

At the open gate it halted and the pall-bearers lifted down the casket from its place, and bore it to the spot which had been prepared for its reception. There were no formal designs from the shop of any florist, but from every neighborhood garden had come contributions out of that wealth which this golden month was squandering in blossom. Roses and peonies and a brave display of those varied flowers that go in rows about old-fashioned gardens had been gathered and brought by sympathetic hands.

But it was chiefly upon the woman who came here to bury the last of her dead that the bared heads turned eyes of reverent interest. At her side walked a young farmer, whose tanned face and curling hair and straight-gazing gray eyes proclaimed a robust and simple manhood.

The girl herself was well worth looking at, even had she not claimed interest by reason of her bereavement. She walked straight and lithe and upright with the free grace of some wild thing, as though she shared with the deer which had looked across the lake the untrammelled strength of the hills. She was slender, but the fine lines of her figure were rounded to the fullness of perfect health, and the color of her cheeks, though now paler than their wont, was like that of delicate rose-leaves, and her lips were the curved petals of a deeper blossom. Her hair, under a black mourning hat, tangled in the meshes of its heavy coils the glint of sunlight on amber and brightened now and then into a hint of burnished copper, but the features which must have challenged the gaze of any observer not dead to a sense of color and beauty were the marvelous and mismatched eyes. One was a rich brown like illuminated agate with a fleck or two of jet across the iris, while its twin was of a colorful violet and deeply vivid. Now, of course, the heavy lashes were wet with tears, but the gorgeous beauty of the eyes was not dimmed.

She stood there by the open grave and the masses of simple flowers, with summer and June and green hills and blue skies at her back; and, of all their loveliness, she might have been a living impersonation.

The preacher whose duty it was to give a rendering of the burial rites had grown old in this pastorate, and to him all these people were his children. He had been with many of them at baptism, he had married them and buried their dead; they were his flock, and they listened to his words as to one ripe in wisdom and sainted in his life.

He looked about the little burial ground and his eyes took on an earnest light and his voice a deep thrill as he spoke.

"If," said he, "there is anywhere a spot which is hallowed ground it is this spot where we are now laying to her eternal rest what yesterday was mortal of Elizabeth Burton. She is, save her daughter, the last of the name to be taken; and in that greater life to which she goes, she will be reunited with those who loved her and who went before.

"She will share with them--" the preacher paused for a moment then went on--"the glory of reward which, I think, God loves best to bestow upon those who, with steadfast unselfishness, have lived simple lives and left their fellows better for having lived. I do not know how God measures the deeds of men, or with what degrees of reward he fixes their place in Paradise; but I feel that I stand on holy ground as my eyes wander here and fall upon these graves where the Burtons sleep. I know that once this was a land of want and misery; a country of abandoned farms. Today I look about me, and, under skies that seem to sing, I see a land redeemed. It was not redeemed by great wealth from without, but by resolution and dauntless effort from within. I have spoken of the headstones that mark these graves, but the Burtons have a nobler monument. The roads and schools and the aqueduct--all the things that transformed the land are memorials to the man who lies just there beyond this grave where today we place his mother. On that slab we find only the dates of birth and death and the name of Hamilton Burton; but when I look at it, I seem to read a nobler epitaph in letters of bronze which no weather can dim or tarnish. I seem to read--'Here lies one who put aside a blazing dream to cast his lot into a life of humbler duty.' If he who makes two blades of grass grow where one had grown before has done a noble thing, then surely he who has turned a land of want into a land of independence and made crops grow where none grew before has won his place near the throne."

Again the aged pastor paused and his eyes grew misty. With bared heads bent and a stillness broken only by the rustle of the breeze through the trees and the song of a bird, his listeners stood attentive, and he resumed.

"I need not tell you, for you know, what the energy and loyal steadfastness of Hamilton Burton have done for these hills. What they were when he came to manhood and what they are now is the answer to that--an answer which needs no further eulogium. But there is a thing, which you may not know, for I think--once his hard decision was made--he never spoke of that again. Yet now I wish to speak of it. It is a thing which should put the name of Hamilton Burton among those of the great--the humble great. In his boyhood heart blazed a mighty vision. In his brain burned a hunger for conquest. The man who dwelt so simply here among us, working a regeneration, and who died among us, still young, was gifted with a power which he might have put to more selfish uses. Standing in the wintry loneliness of a mountain snowstorm, his eyes could see visions of mighty things and his soul could dream unmeasured dreams. His heart beat responsively to an inward voice which assured him that he might equal and surpass the greatness of Destiny's greatest sons. He fretted for a larger world, knowing that in it he could conquer. In Hamilton Burton dwelt the soul of a Napoleon or a Caesar ... he might have built an empire."

The voice had grown fervent as it rose with its words, then the speaker let it fall again to quieter tones.

"And these roads and schools and this aqueduct and these redeemed acres are the monument to the sacrifice which turned its back on such a dream as that. Hamilton Burton wrestled with his soul's hunger and conquered it. He elected to remain here, fighting at the head of his own community for his own land, and finding contentment in the realization

that he had done his duty. At one time--for his forcefulness was great--he had persuaded his family to countenance his great adventure--and then he dreamed. It seemed to him that he had looked ahead, and the whole great panorama of the life which lay before him, should he take that turning of the road, passed in review. Hamilton Burton did not take it. *He remained here.* His work was the work of the sons of Martha.

"As in the thronged and the lightened ways, so in the dark and the desert they stand,
Wary and watchful all their days, that their brethren's days may be long in the land.'

"If Hamilton Burton put aside such ambitions as most of us never know in our dreams, and chose the humbler combat of a simple life, close to God's immortal granite, you have all been sharers in the benefit of his decision.

"And as it was with him, so in a lesser way it was with those others who sleep here close beside him.

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.
Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast,
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood."

In the pause which followed a low breath of reverent surprise ran through the crowd that stood about the speaker. They had lived day by day with Hamilton Burton until his death, and none of them had, in the shoulder-touch of life, ever suspected those deeper things of which now for the first time they heard. They were hearing it all from lips which were to them as the lips of a prophet. But the preacher was not through.

"And there was Paul. You all knew him and loved him. A nature was given him at birth almost too delicate for a world of hard affairs, but fragrant with a tenderness of love for his fellow-men. He was attuned to harmony and his heart was that of a troubadour.

"Here in this little place of our worship, his fingers on the keys have often led us nearer to God's presence than could the poor and broken messages I tried to preach to you. For the other world was always close to Paul Burton and there was a magic in his minstrelsy, which was a gift from God. I sometimes wonder if in a less simple world he could have been so happy or if his life would have been so unmarred, away from the songs of birds and the lilt of mountain breezes. But among us he, too, lived and died--because Hamilton Burton turned his back on the lure of the mirage his dreaming eyes had seen. Even now when Paul has gone, those chimes, which you put there above our church in memory of him, seem to sing of the things for which he stood. When their notes peal out on the Sabbath and go softly across the valley, I like to imagine that, through the nobler music which immortal ears may hear, he still catches their echo.

"There, close together, stand two more headstones, and beneath them sleep the father and the aunt of these men. Thomas Burton, too, lived out a life of stalwart worth. To all men, his fearless character and unshakable integrity were precepts. He went his way and looked into every eye that met his own. In the activities that have wrought these changes, he was always the first and last to work with tireless zeal. When the railroad came it was through his untiring effort. He held the determination with fighting Burton courage that adversity should not drive him from the land his forefathers had conquered.

"In wondering what things would have befallen all these people had a lad's ambition led them into a different life, I find myself treading paths of doubt. Perhaps noble achievements might have resulted--but I know that in remaining here they have made our land to blossom and to me it seems enough. I can, for some reason, no more think of Thomas Burton transplanted without hurt than I can think of some great patriarch of the forest, which has buffeted storms and hail for decades, being uprooted and planted anew in a trim garden and a different clime. Then he died, too--

"And as he trod that day to God, so walked he from his birth,
In simpleness and gentleness and honor and clean mirth."

The speaker talked deliberately. At times his voice mounted into a sort of oratorical fire. At times it fell until his listeners bent forward that they might miss none of his words. Now and again he would stop altogether and his eyes would turn to the blue skies, and when they did a devout and intense light glowed in their pupils. His hearers were simple and easily touched and an occasional sob came from the women.

"I said that Hamilton Burton died young," he resumed. "He died almost a boy with a boy's youthful heart beating in his bosom. If he could so bring out of desolation a land like this, while yet he was hardly a man in years, who can say that his dream of power was all a dream? If he who never left these hills and never saw the world beyond save as he saw it in the exaltation of his flaming imagination, could do such things, what man can say that with maturity and opportunity he might not have become a Caesar? But the feet of these people never trod beyond the nearer ways of a simple life. Hamilton Burton burned to go out and try the eagle's wings of his life. He had won the acquiescence of his family. He did not go. None of them went. They lived here and died here and they fought discontent, and to my mind they were conquerors of the earth."

Once more there was a pause and after it came other words.

"I suppose that they all dreamed. After the stress of that hurricane of powerful personality, with which the boy had won them to his heart's desire, these people could never have again lived their simple lives without dreams coming--and doubts. To say, 'God knows best,' meant to repress the disturbing thoughts that must have often arisen.

"In these hills boys become men, and one boy became something more. This was a family of beautiful and devoted love. The brothers were what God meant brothers to be, friends whose hearts were linked. For every member of this little group of one blood, all the others felt a mighty bond of affection. And here they stayed." The four words might have been the text, and through the talk it ran with the insistence of a refrain, until it sank into the brain of every man and every woman who listened.

"Here they stayed, and if each one of them thought often of what may have been given up by that decision, no one of them said so.

"Perhaps Paul, with the golden pattern of his dreams, may often have mused upon what the outer world could have given him. Perhaps he thought of himself as swaying audiences with his fingers on the keys and dreamed of lips that parted and eyes that grew misty--because they listened to the voices he could send pealing to their hearts. But he stayed here and the audiences that sat spellbound were those little neighborhood audiences, who stood a long way off from a full understanding of his soul's ethereal web and woof.

"Perhaps Thomas Burton, whose hands were calloused with toil, sometimes permitted himself to think, at the end of his day's labors, of the ease and comfort which might have come to him, had his son's great ambition actually drawn him into mighty battles and victories instead of only beckoning him.

"Perhaps the woman, who must have felt that her children were not ordinary children, may have shed a tear at times, because she was denied the triumph of beholding their triumph. *But they stayed*--and if their peaceful lives were troubled with misgivings, at least they knew that this was certain and that doubtful--and that, while they might miss much of achievement, they also missed much of peril, for none can say what a journey means along an untried road. Who knows what an epic their lives might have spelled--or what tragedy? But they stayed.

"And now we are gathered to do homage by the grave of the woman whose quiet life ran its course with theirs--the woman who bore these children and taught them, at her knee, those lessons which made them benefactors--and although we stand in the presence of death, it seems to me that we stand, too, in the presence and the glory of that life which is above death--and we stand on hallowed ground."

He ended, and about him was the solemnity of simple hearts, stirred and responsive, and over him was the serenity of June, and the warmth of the earth pregnant with fruitfulness.

When it was over, the crowd scattered to their vehicles and the wheels clattered over the metaled roads, but in the burial ground, when all the rest were gone, two figures tarried.

For a moment the minister also stayed after the crowd had left. He went over to the girl and spoke softly, with a hand laid tenderly on her shoulder.

"My daughter," he said simply, "you, too, have conquered. Every woman has something of restless yearning in her eyes at some time. To a woman with great charm and beauty the world sings a siren song. I saw this thing in your eyes--and soul. I saw it come and go--and I knew that you had won your fight, and won through to life's sweetest benison. You have love. These lives are ended, but yours is beginning." Then he, too, turned away, and only the girl and young man were left.

Mary's beautiful eyes were bright with tears, and, as she stood there slim and straight, her companion came close and his arm slipped about her. For a moment she seemed unconscious of his presence, then she turned and her eyes looked steadfastly into his, and as they looked they smiled through their mistiness.

"Mary"--the man's voice was earnest and very tender--"Mary, I know that now you're thinking about other things and they're very sacred things. Besides, my heart is overflowing and words don't give it enough power of expression. Since I fell in love with you life has been all poetry to me--but not a poetry of words.... You are thinking of them--" He paused and his sober eyes took in the headstones, lingering for a moment on this newest grave upon which the flowers were banked. They were fine eyes, for in them dwelt an intrinsic honesty and courage, and, though it was a moment of deep gravity, the little wrinkles that ran out from them were assurances that they were often laughing eyes. This man seemed to fit into the picture of the hills with the appropriateness of the native-born. In his free-flung shoulders and broad chest was the health of the open, but on one finger he wore a heavily carved ring from which glowed the cool light of a large emerald, and in his scarf was a black pearl, which hardly seemed characteristic of native wear. Then he went on:

"But, after all, Mary, they lived good lives and died good deaths, and--" he hesitated, then said slowly--"and, after all, it's June, and you and I are young. Can't it always be June for us, dear?"

A bird from a great oak lifted its voice. It was a happy bird and would tolerate no sadness. It caroled to its mate and to the sky and through her tears Mary Burton smiled and the gorgeous vividness of her face was illuminated.

"While we've got each other," she said, "I guess it can be June."

Suddenly she put out her slender, but strong, young hands and caught his two arms, and stood there looking at him.

"Once, dear," she said, "when I was a very little girl, I used to dream of going out and seeing all the wonderful things beyond those hills. I used to dream of having rich men and titled men come to me and make love. I used to cry because I thought I was ugly--and then I met you by the roadside--and you were my fairy prince--but I didn't guess you were going to be my own--for always."

Jefferson Edwardes smiled and into his eyes came a fervent glow.

"I can see you now," he said, "as you stood that first day I ever saw you, when I told you that your beauty would be the beauty of gorgeousness--when I warned you that the only thing you need ever fear was--the loss of your simplicity. The woods were flaming at your back, but your loveliness outblazed their color, and then you were a thin little girl--a trifle chippendale in plan."

In spite of her sadness a smile came to her lips.

"And you were fighting your fight for life--with only an even chance. Suppose--" she shuddered--"suppose you had lost it!"

"I had too much to live for," he assured her. "I couldn't lose it. You and your hills gave me life and a dream, and you and your hills laid their claim upon me. How could I lose?"

"I've lain awake at night," said Mary Burton, as her long lashes drooped with the confession of her heart. "I've lain awake at night wondering if--now that you don't have to stay--if your own world won't call you back--away from me. I've thought of all it holds for you--and how little these mountains hold. I've wondered if your heart didn't ache for foreign lands and wonderful cities--and all those things. If it does, dear--" she paused and said very seriously--"you mustn't let me keep you here. I belong here, but you--" The words fell into a faint note and died away unfinished.

"How little these hills hold for me," he exclaimed in a dismayed voice, "when they hold you!" Then he laughed and told her as his eyes dwelt steadfastly and with worship on her face, "I belong here no less than you. This has been the land of my salvation and of my love. For me it is enough. I have traded the unrest of cities for the tranquillity of the hills and the clamor of unhappy streets for the echoes of the woods, and the woods sing of you as the streets could never sing. I have traded at a splendid profit, dear."

"And you won't tire of it--and of me?"

"I wish life could be long enough to give me a fair test of that," he smiled, and then he added in a serious voice, "It is in the cities that men and women grow tired. It is under artifice that the soul wearies. That life I knew, and left with the bitterness of exile--but that was long ago. When I go into it now, it shall be only for the joy of coming back here again--of coming home."

The girl looked up into his face, and the breeze fluttered a tendril of curl against her temple.

"You were the first person who ever called me pretty." Through the sadness of her face came a glimmer of shy merriment. "You said I was--as beautiful as starlight on water."

"Mary, Mary!" The lover caught her slender figure in his strong arms and held her so close that her breath came fragrantly against his tanned cheek. "You *are* as beautiful as starlight on water, and to me you're more beautiful. You're the sun and moon and stars and music--you're everything that's fine and splendid!"

"For your sake," she said shyly, "I wish I were much more beautiful."

Even the near shadow of death cannot banish the god of love. Mary Burton felt the arms of the man she loved about her, and her eyes as she looked into his face unmasked their secrets until he could read her soul and its message. For the moment they had forgotten all else. Then, quite abruptly, her expression changed and became rapt, almost frightened.

Slowly she straightened up and her pupils dilated as though they were seeing something invisible to other eyes. Her lips parted and she drew away from his grasp and stood gazing ahead. Then she brushed one arm across her forehead. With instant alarm Edwardes caught her shoulders. "What is it?" he demanded. "Is anything wrong?"

She shook her head and spoke wonderingly with a far-away, detached sort of utterance. "I don't know what it was--I guess I was a little faint." But she still stood with an awed and bewildered fixity upon her face and after a little while, he asked slowly:

"Did you ever seem to see and hear something as though it had come out of a different life; as though you were living it over again?"

He smiled and shook his head. "I've often heard of such things," he reassured. She had been nursing her mother through a long illness; perhaps, he thought, the strain had left her nervous.

"It was as real as if it had truly happened," she assured him as she put up both hands and pressed her fingers against her temples. "You were standing there--right where you are standing now, and you smiled--like you smiled at me that day in the road.... There were little wrinkles around your eyes."

"That is all real enough," he laughed. "I was and am doing all those things."

"Yes, I know, but--" Once more she shook her head and her voice carried the detached tone of a trance-like vagueness--"but somehow it was all different. You were you--and I was I--and yet we were in another life ... we didn't seem to belong here ... and there seemed to be some terrible danger hanging over us."

"Did we seem to talk?" he asked her.

"Yes." The girl's words came very low but with a tense emphasis. "You said, '*Maybe there's some land beyond the stars where every mistake we make here can be remedied ... where we can take up our marred lives and live them afresh as we have dreamed them. Perhaps in that other world we can go back to the turning of the road where we lost our ways and choose the other path.*' You said that and then after a moment you smiled again."

"It's strange," said the young man. He unconsciously took off his hat, baring the curly hair over the tanned face. He was very wholesome and honest and strong, and the girl's eyes lighted into a smile of pride and love.

"Yes," she said. "It was you and me--in some other life. I don't know what it means--but somehow it seems to--to guarantee everything."

They turned and walked together to the last buggy hitched against the stone wall under the wild apple trees.

After a while she demanded--"After you got well--why did you stay here?" and as promptly as an echo came his answer--

"Because *you* stayed."

The moon was up early that night and it flooded the mountains with a glory of silver mists. The shoulders of the peaks stood out in blue barriers, strong, abiding, beautiful. In the valleys it was all a nocturne of dove grays and dreamlike softness. The stars, too, shone down in a million splinters of happy light, but the radiance of the moon paled them.

The vines which covered the walls of the Burton house hung out their lacy tendrils and through the windows came the soft glow of lamplight.

There was nothing dreary or poverty-stricken about the old farm-house now. From its front, where every shutter, by day, shone in the healthy trim of fresh paint, to the gate upon the road went rows of flowers, nodding their bright heads above the waving grass. The barns at the back stood substantial and in repair, and now out beyond the road, Lake Forsaken mirrored the stars and broke in light when a fish leaped under the moon.

Mary Burton and her lover walked down to the gate, and he said simply:

"Now, dear, there is nothing more to hold you here. If you still long to see beyond the sky-line, I can take you wherever you want to go."

But she wheeled and laid a hand in protest on his arm.

"No!" she exclaimed tensely. "No, this is where I belong." After a moment she went on. "Life holds enough for me here. This is home to me. I don't want anything else."

"I am glad. It's what I hoped to hear you say," he responded. "I don't think somehow I could be as happy anywhere else, but the world's a big place and you--you have the right to the best it holds--anywhere."

"Once, dear, you know," she told him gravely, "we threshed that out and we had almost made up our minds to leave here. We were almost whipped--and Ham had his dreams. He wanted to go out and try life in a bigger world--and you recognized his power. I wanted it all, too--but we stayed. I don't know what would have happened if we hadn't, but I do know--" she looked up into his face and smiled; into her eyes came a regal serenity--"I do know that I don't have to go out and hunt for life--life has come to me, and I'm happy."

The man caught her to him and she clasped her hands behind his head. Before them was June and starlight and youth and life--and love. He bent his head and pressed his lips to hers and felt her heart beat against his own.

In the mirror of Lake Forsaken, back of her, gleamed the splintered light of a thousand stars, and in his heart gleamed a million.

"As beautiful as starlight on water," he whispered.