

"If you follow me," he said, and now his voice expressed nothing save courtesy. "I will show you your apartments and furnish you with some clothing of—of—my son's."

"I thank you, judge."

They disappeared up the long stairway and shadows closed around them. Judge Graves knew this boy. Eight years ago he had been the friend of his father, the boy and his son intimates. Then had followed swiftly, disgrace, exposure, judgment, and death. His own son, a mere lad, had disappeared, and from that day no word had come to them from him. Each Thanksgiving, at their bountiful table, an extra chair was placed, and in it sat whoever chance might lead to their door—always with the hope that, one day, their own boy would return and claim it. Now fate, or circumstance, had brought this youth whose wrong-doing had been the downfall of the hopes of two families, and whose return to prison walls was the imperative duty of the judge who had sent him there.

Warmed, fed, and refreshed, the appearance of the newcomer surprised the little group gathered in the parlor. The judge had set himself a difficult task, and with firm, set lips he performed it.

"Now, my boy," he said kindly, when the young man finally stood before him, "I want you—for just this night and to-morrow—to forget the immediate past—to have one light spot for remembrance when you must return to your punishment. Take up the thread of your life where you dropped it. Remember only that you are the son of our old friend and the guest of this house. I can be merciful as well as just. You are safe here while you stay, and—" the judge's lips quivered, for he was very pitiful to his old friend's son under the influence of haunting memories and the Thanksgiving spirit that pervaded the house—"and I want you to enjoy a glimpse of our home life."

"You are very kind, sir."

All the evening, forgetting, as he was bidden, the past eight eventless years, he entered into the spirit of their home life, talked with them of friends and neighbors both families had known, and joined his voice in singing with the maiden who had been only a child when the calamity happened, who could but dimly realize, even now, the intricacies of this tragedy of her home and friends.

So the night passed. Morning dawned on a world of white. The young man wandered through the great rooms and into the dining-room of the judge's mansion, but the maiden was there before him.

"Good-morning," she greeted him kindly. "Wasn't it fortunate these came last night?" She indicated a great armful of tropic roses. "The snow is so deep and tracks unbroken, they could not have come to-day."

He gazed long and hungrily at the flowers, the winsome face above them, the laughing, saucy eyes.

"They are beautiful," he breathed. "Let me assist you." Then, remembering, he shrank away.

Touched by a quick intuition she understood. Separating the flowers she laid a fragrant armful near him.

"You may arrange these, Mr.—Mr.—I have forgotten your name."

"Up there," and the haunting sadness sprang into his eyes again, "I was just 941. It is so long since I have had a name I have almost forgotten it myself."

"But you are to forget that," she reminded him, "and remember only what came before to-day."

"I will." He bowed low. "My name shall be again—just for to-day—the honored one of my father—John Grahame. Afterward, 941, if you will," in a low tone.

She turned away with tears in her eyes. He was so boyish to have suffered so—sinned so. But for to-day—yes, she would be brave to-day, and keep up the delusion. All through the morning hours she led him merrily through the rooms of the great mansion from one treasure to another—entertaining him as he had never been entertained before. Once the judge's

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wife approached her husband cautiously.

"Do you think it right dear," she asked, anxiously, "to allow him so much freedom with our Alice? You know what he is, and where he has come from."

"It is only for the day. Afterward he must go back. He is the son of our old friend, and but for that one fault is still the gentleman."

With this reply the mother was fain to be content. Presently, when evening shadows began to fall far and wide over the snow-clad earth and day was drawing to a close, the feast of Thanksgiving Day was served. The young man entered the brilliantly lighted room with the judge's daughter, and stood for a moment regarding the long table with devouring eyes.

"It is so many years," he murmured, "since I have seen anything like it."

"There is our vacant chair." The girl indicated a chair at one side of the judge's place. "They have kept it always, for him—my brother. Do you know the story?"

"I knew him once. He was just my age. But that all happened after—after I went away. I knew he had gone—yes."

The words came hurriedly and a wave of embarrassment flooded his features. With downcast eyes the girl related the story to him.

"Father says he had roving blood in his veins from some long-buried Spanish ancestor. At any rate, he was always restless, ill at ease. And one day, silently, without message or written word to them, he just went away. And their belief is beautiful."

The girl turned to him with shining eyes. "They think he will come back some Thanksgiving Day—it was Thanksgiving when he went away—

just as silently and unannounced as he went. Until he does, the place is always set apart for him at Thanksgiving dinner, and if by chance any uninvited guest comes, why—he occupies it until my brother returns."

A sudden, swift pallor overspread the face of the young man, but the girl's eyes, busy with the glittering scene before them, did not observe it. At that moment the judge, and his wife entered, and dinner having been announced, they sat down. It was a real old-fashioned New England Thanksgiving dinner, served with courtesy, but without many modern accessories that have somehow robbed the revered custom of its fascination. There were turkeys, two of them, with all the fixings, and all the homely accompaniments that housewives have prepared for so many generations among the hills of New England. Always with the haunting sadness tugging at his heart-strings, the youth feasted, and his merry laughter denied the assertion that fought for precedence in his saddened eyes. Noting which, the judge brought forth his profoundest wisdom, his wittiest stories, and his brightest repartee for the entertainment of this strange guest, in the interest of whose brief happiness he seemed to struggle with pitiful intensity. When it was all over, the youth brushed away the vision so unreal and followed his host to the wide hall, where they stood once more in thoughtful silence on either side of the cheery fire of logs. The maiden forgetting for the moment the tragedy of it all, had called out a sweet "good-night" and followed her mother to the echoless rooms above.

"Well," the youth addressed the silent man opposite, "it is all over, I suppose."

"Yes," the monosyllable escaped the judge sadly.

"And to-morrow you return me to my keepers, to the worse than hell, where I have suffered eight long years that seemed an eternity, for the crime of another?"

"I must do my duty." The words were wrung from gray lips and the steadfast heart beneath them.

"You could not let me steal away silently as I came, carrying nothing with me but the memory of this Thanksgiving Day—this day of home-life that has been like a glimpse of heaven itself to me. Oh, sir," pleading eyes were raised to the relentless ones opposite, "you have shown me that you can be kind as well as just. Let mercy be stronger than justice for this once. I tell you I am innocent, but—brokenly—"my lips are sealed. For God's sake, believe me—let me go—out into the night and make for myself a new life away from here. I promise you—"

The judge raised his hand. "I cannot listen," he said, coldly, "for then I should be compounding a felony. You gave yourself a hostage to me, promising on your honor to return after this—this Thanksgiving Day was over. Now," sternly, for the lingering tenderness faded from his eyes and he was again the righteous judge, "let justice be done."

Moodyly the young man gazed into the glowing embers. When the last tones of the emotionless voice died away in far echoes he roused himself.

"Then let justice be done." He echoed the last words of the judge, passionately. "I would have spared you if I could. Listen," as the elder man waved him impatiently aside. "Let me tell you the story of this Thanksgiving Day as it has come to me."

Some compelling force in the eyes lifted now proudly, scornfully to his own, halted the words of denunciation that trembled on the judge's lips, and