

curities. I could get no help from the banks. But there was then in my hands one resource. I held in trust Julian Carteret's fortune, amounting to £70,000. I took it from the funds and transferred it—in fact, invested it—invested it, Rose, in my own business, and by its help sailed safely through the storm without loss or danger to my ward by the investment." He kept repeating the word investment as if it comforted him—it did. "The same position is before me again. Unless I can succeed within ten-days or so in raising very considerable sums of money, too large for you to understand, the danger will become a disaster, and I shall be a bankrupt. All—all"—he spread his hands before him—"all will be lost."

"All? Including Julian's money?"

"Including Julian's money. He will be a beggar. I shall be a beggar. You will be a beggar. All these things will be sold. All the people whom I employ—the thousands of people—will be turned destitute into the streets, because I shall not even be able to pay their wages."

She stared at him blankly. All beggars together? And Julian too?

"If you marry this idle and helpless lover of yours, who cannot dig and is ashamed to beg, you will have a life of absolute poverty and privation, aggravated by the reproaches of your husband on me as the author of your misfortunes. You will, when you come to our senses, remember that my misery, Reuben Gower's misery, the misery of all the thousands turned upon the world, is your own doing—your own."

"Mine—mine?" She was very pale and trembling. "How is it mine?"

"Yes; all of your own selfish determination to have your own way—in what you thought the pleasant way."

"But how—how can I help it?"

"By marrying John Gower. See these papers. You do not understand their significance, and I have no time or the heart to explain them. But they are his, and by consenting to marry him you give them to me. On these papers, which contain the particulars of a great invention, I can raise enough to tide over the storm and make you all rich again. This is not a doubtful matter, Rose: if it were I would not ask you to accept this young engineer, rough and rude as he is. It is a certainty—a certainty. You understand me clearly? I repeat it, so that

there shall be no mistake possible. John Gower offers to make me a sharer in this invention, which will be put into practice at once at my own works. His conditions are a half-partnership in the works and—your hand. Now you understand. Accept, and all will be well. Refuse, and the misery that will follow is your own doing. I give you these papers, Rose. I shall return in ten minutes. If you put them back upon the table, I shall never reproach you, but that act will make us all beggars. If you give them to me, you will give yourself to John Gower."

He placed in her hand the packet of plans, and left her alone in the room.

The windows looked out upon the gardens. It was half-past nine in the morning, a beautiful morning, thought Rose; all sorts of impertinent things which had no business in her brain at the time crowding across her mind, and then she began to try and think.

To think—but how? How could she understand all in a moment the thing her uncle had put before her in its cold and naked horror? Ruin? Was such a thing possible to such a man? Had he known so long that it was coming? Had he, actually knowing it, made those speeches about the duties of wealth, men? Her brain reeled.

She had to make a decision. Stay! let her fix her mind on one thing—only one thing. What should it be? Sir Jacob ruined, her uncle and herself walking out of the grand house, and going to live—where? In some miserable hiding-place on the charity of their old friends: Rose's ideas of a great man's bankruptcy and its consequences were elementary. Then Julian ruined too. And what would he—that helpless, indolent man of the world—find to do? Reuben Gower—faithful Reuben, who loved her so much, and had worked so well for her uncle—he would be ruined as well. And then all the poor people—the factory hands, the navvies on the railways, the clerks in the offices, from low to high—all to be driven out into the streets, ruined, without pay for work done, and without work to do!

As she stood, the papers in her hand, trying to think what ought to be done, a shadow darkened the window, and she looked up.

The windows of the study were glass doors, which opened into the garden. One