

your Uncle Benny, and he was trying to hurt me with you."

SHE bent toward him, her lips parted, but now she did not speak. She never had really known Henry until this moment, she felt; she had thought of him always as strong, almost brutal, fighting down fiercely, mercilessly, his opponents and welcoming contest for the joy of overwhelming others by his own decisive strength and power. And she had been almost ready to marry that man for his strength and dominance from those qualities; and now she knew that he was merciful too—indeed, more than merciful. In the very contest where she had thought of him as most selfish and regardless of another, she had most completely misapprehended.

"I ought to have seen!" she rebuked herself to him. "Surely, I should have seen that was it!" Her hand, in the reproach of her feeling, reached toward him across the table; he caught it and held it in his large, strong hand which, in its touch, was very tender too. She had never allowed any such demonstration as this before; but now she let her hand remain in his.

"How could you see?" he defended her. "He never showed to you the side he showed to me and—in these last years, anyway—never to me the side he showed to you. But after what has happened this week, you can understand now; and you can see why I have to distrust the young fellow who's come to claim Ben Corvet's place."

"Claim!" Constance repeated; she drew her hand quietly away from his now. "Why, Henry, I did not know he claimed anything; he didn't even know when he came here—"

"He seems, like Ben Corvet," Henry said slowly, "to have the characteristic of showing one side to you, another to me, Connie. With you, of course, he claimed nothing; but at the office—Your father showed him this morning the instruments of transfer that Ben seems to have left conveying to him all Ben had—his other properties and his interest in Corvet, Sherrill, and Spearman. I very naturally objected to the execution of those transfers, without considerable examination, in view of Corvet's mental condition and of the fact that they put the controlling stock of Corvet, Sherrill, and Spearman in the hands of a youth no one ever had heard of—and one who, by his own story, never had seen a ship until yesterday. And when I didn't dismiss my business with a dozen men this morning to take him into the company, he claimed occasion to see me alone to threaten me."

"Threaten you, Henry? How? With what?"

"I couldn't quite make out myself, but that was his tone; he demanded an 'explanation' of exactly what, he didn't make clear. He has been given by Ben, apparently, the technical control of Corvet, Sherrill, and Spearman. His idea, if I oppose him, evidently is to turn me out and take the management himself."

Constance leaned back, confused. "He—Alan Conrad?" she questioned. "He can't have done that, Henry! Oh, he can't have meant that!"

"Maybe he didn't; I said I couldn't make out what he did mean," Spearman said. "Things have come upon him with rather a rush, of course;

and you couldn't expect a country boy to get so many things straight. He's acting, I suppose, only in the way one might expect a boy to act who had been brought up in poverty on a Kansas prairie and was suddenly handed the possible possession of a good many millions of dollars. It's better to believe that he's only lost his head. I haven't had opportunity to tell your father these things yet; but I wanted you to understand why Conrad will hardly consider me a friend."

"I'll understand you now, Henry," she promised.

He gazed at her and started to speak; then, as though postponing it on account of the place, he glanced around and took out his watch.

"You must go back?" she asked.

"No; I'm not going back to the office this afternoon, Connie; but I must call up your father."

He excused himself and went into the nearest telephone booth.

## CHAPTER IX.

### Violence.

AT half-past three, Alan left the office. Sherrill had told him an hour earlier that Spearman had telephoned he would not be able to get back for a conference that afternoon; and Alan was certain now that in Spearman's absence Sherrill would do nothing further with respect to his affairs.

He halted on the ground floor of the office building and bought copies of each of the afternoon papers. A line completely across the pink page of one announced "Millionaire Ship Owner Missing!" The other three papers, printed at the same hour, did not display the story prominently; and even the one which did failed to make it the most conspicuous sensation. A line of larger and blacker type told of a change in the battle line on the west front and, where the margin might have been, was the bulletin of some sensation in a local divorce suit. Alan was some time in finding the small print which went with the millionaire ship owner heading; and when he found it, he discovered that most of the space was devoted to the description of Corvet's share in the development of shipping on the lakes and the peculiarity of his past life instead of any definite announcement concerning his fate.

The other papers printed almost identical items under small head-type at the bottom of their first pages; these items stated that Benjamin Corvet, the senior but inactive partner of the great shipping firm of Corvet, Sherrill, and Spearman, whose "disappearance" had been made the subject of sensational rumor, "is believed by his partner, Mr. Henry Spearman, to have simply gone away for a rest," and that no anxiety was felt concerning him. Alan found no mention of himself nor any of the circumstances connected with Corvet's disappearance of which Sherrill had told him.

Alan threw the papers away. There was a car line two block west, Sherrill had said, which would take him within a short distance of the house on Astor Street; but that neighborhood of fashion where the Sherrills—and now Alan himself—lived was less than a half hour's walk from the downtown district and, in the present turmoil of his thoughts, he wanted to be moving.

SPEARMAN, he reflected as he walked north along the avenue, plainly had dictated the paragraphs he just had read in the papers. Sherrill, Alan knew, had desired to keep the circumstances regarding Corvet from becoming public; and without Sherrill's agreement concealment would have been impossible, but it was Spearman who had checked the suspicions of outsiders and determined what they must believe; and, by so doing, he had made it impossible for Alan to enroll aid from the newspapers or the police. Alan did not know whether he might have found it expedient to seek publicity; but now he had not a single proof of anything he could tell. For Sherrill, naturally, had retained the papers Corvet had left. Alan could not hope to obtain credence from Sherrill and, without Sherrill's aid, he could not obtain credence from any one else.

Was there, then, no one whom Alan could tell of his encounter with Spearman in Corvet's house, with probability of receiving belief? Alan had not been thinking directly of Constance Sherrill, as he walked swiftly north to the Drive; but she was, in a way, present in all his thoughts. She had shown interest in him, or at least in the position he was in, and sympathy; he had even begun to tell her about these things when he had spoken to her of some event in Cor-

vet's house which had given him the name "Miwaka," and he had asked her if it was a ship. And there could be no possible consequent peril to her in telling her; the peril, if there was any, would be only to himself.

His step quickened. As he approached the Sherrill house, he saw standing at the curb an open roadster with a liveried chauffeur; he had seen that roadster, he recognized with a little start, in front of the office building that morning when Constance had taken him down-town. He turned into the walk and rang the bell.

The servant who opened the door knew him and seemed to accept his right of entry to the house, for he drew back for Alan to enter. Alan went into the hall and waited for the servant to follow. "Is Miss Sherrill in?" he asked.

"I'll see, sir." The man disappeared. Alan, waiting, did not hear Constance's voice in reply to the announcement of the servant, but Spearman's vigorous tones. The servant returned. "Miss Sherrill will see you in a minute, sir."

Through the wide doorway to the drawing-room, Alan could see the smaller, portiered entrance to the room beyond—Sherrill's study. The curtains parted, and Constance and Spearman came into this inner doorway; they stood an instant there in talk. As Constance started away,

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