

had to hold on to the iron railing for a moment. It was all I could do to get him home. If he sees Mr. McGowan now it will kill him; he can't pay him and he must tell him so, and it will all come out."

"But he will pay him, Corinne, when he gets well."

There came a pause. Then she said slowly as if each word was wrung from her heart:

"There is no money. Garry took the trust funds from the church."

"No money, Corinne! You don't mean you can't—Oh! Not Garry! No—not Garry!"

"Yes! I mean it. He expected to pay it back, but the people he is with in New York lied to him, and now it is all gone." There was no change in her voice.

She stood gazing into his face; not a tear in her eyes, no quiver of her lips. She had passed that stage; she was like a victim led to the stake in whom nothing but dull endurance is left.

Jack backed into a chair and sat with bowed head, his cheeks in his hands. Had the earth opened under him he could not have been more astounded. Garry Minott a defaulter! Garry a thief! Everything seemed to whirl about him—only the woman remained quiet—still standing—her calm, impassive eyes fixed on his bowed head; her dry, withering, soulless words still vibrating in the hushed room.

"When did this happen, Corinne—this taking of Mr. McGowan's money?" The words came between his closed fingers, as if he, too, would shut out some horrible shape.

"Some two weeks ago."

"When did you know of it?"

"Night before last, after you left him. I know he was in trouble, but I did not know it was as bad as this. If Mr. Breen had helped me everything would have been all right, for Garry sold out all the stock he had in the Warehouse Company, and this ten thousand dollars is all he owes." She shivered as she spoke, and her pale, tired eyes closed as if in pain. Nothing was said between them for a while, and neither of them stirred. During the silence the front door was heard to open, letting in the village doctor, who mounted the stairs, his footfalls reverberating in Garry's room overhead.

Jack raised his eyes at last and studied her closely. The frail body seemed more crumpled and forlorn in the depths of the chair, where she had sunk, than when she had been standing before him. The blonde hair, always so glossy, was dry as hemp; the small, upturned nose, once so piquant and sure, was thin and pinched—almost transparent; the washed-out, colorless eyes, which in her girlhood had flashed and sparkled so roughly, were half hidden under swollen lids. The arms were flat, the hands like bird claws. The white heat of a furnace of agony had shrivelled her poor body, drying up all the juices of its youth.

And yet with the scorching there had crept into the wan face, and into the tones of her tired, heart-broken voice, something Jack had never found in her as a girl, something of tenderness, unselfishness—of self-sacrifice for another, and with it there flamed up in his own heart a determination to help—to wipe everything to sponge the record, to re-establish the man who in a moment of agony had given way to an overpowering temptation and brought his wife to this condition. A lump rose in his throat, and a look of his old father shone out of his face—that look with which in the years gone by he had defied jury, district attorney, and public opinion for what he had considered merry. And money should be exercised now. Garry had had never done one dishonest act before, and never, God helping, should he be judged for this.

He, John Breen, let Garry be called a common thief! Garry whose every word in Corklesville had been for justice; Garry whom Morris loved, whose presence brought a cheery word of welcome from every room he entered! Let him be proclaimed a defaulter, insulted by ruffians like McGowan, and treated as a felon—brilliant, bold, forceful Garry! Never, if he had to go down, would his knees to Holker Morris, or any other man who could keep a dollar.

Corinne must have seen the new look in his face, for her own eyes brightened as she asked:

"Have you thought of something that can help him?"

Jack did not answer. His mind was too intent on finding some thread which would unravel the tangle.

"Does anybody else know of this, Corinne?" he asked at last in a low-pitched voice.

"Nobody."

"Nobody must," he exclaimed firmly. Then he added gently—"Why did you tell me?"

"He asked me to. It would all have come out in the end, and he didn't want you to see McGowan and not know the truth. Keep still—some one is knocking," she whispered, her fingers pressed to her lips in her fright. "I know it is McGowan, Jack. Shall I see him, or will you?"

"I will—you stay here."

Jack lifted himself erect and braced back his shoulders. He intended to be polite to McGowan, but he also intended to be firm, he also intended to refuse him any information or promise of any kind until the regular monthly meeting of the Church Board which would occur on Monday. This would give him time to act, and perhaps to save the situation, desperate as it looked.

With this in his mind he turned the key and threw wide the door. It was the doctor who stood outside. He seemed to be laboring under some excitement.

"I heard you were here, Mr. Breen—come upstairs."

Jack obeyed mechanically. Garry had evidently heard of his being downstairs and had some instructions to give, or some further confession to make. He would save him now from that humiliation; he would get his arms around him, as Corinne had done, and tell him he was still his friend and what he yet intended to do to pull him through, and that nothing which he had done had wrecked his affection for him.

As these thoughts rushed over him his pace quickened, mounting the stairs two steps at a time so that he might save his friend even a moment of additional suffering. The doctor touched Jack on the shoulder, made a sign for him to moderate his steps, and the two moved to where his patient lay.

Garry was on the bed, outside the covering, when they entered. He was lying on his back, his head and neck flat on a pillow, one foot resting on the floor. He was in his trousers and shirt; his coat and waistcoat lay where he had thrown them.

"Garry," began Jack in a low voice—"I just ran in to say that—"

The sick man did not move.

Jack stopped, and turned his head to the doctor.

"Asleep?" he whispered.

"No;—drugged. That's why I wanted you to see him before I called his wife. Is he accustomed to this sort of thing?" and he picked up a bottle from the table.

Jack took the phial in his hand; it was quite small, and had a glass stopper.

"What is it, doctor?"

"I don't know. Some preparation of chloral, I should think; smells and looks like it. I'll take it home and find out. If he's been taking this right along he may know how much he can stand, but if he's experimenting with it, he'll wake up some fine morning in the next world. What do you know about it?"

"Only what I have heard Mrs. Minott say," Jack whispered behind his hand. "He can't sleep without it, she told me. He's been under a terrible business strain lately and couldn't stand the pressure, I expect."

"Well, that's a pity better," returned the doctor, moving the apparently lifeless arm aside and placing his ear close to the patient's breast. For a moment he listened intently, then he drew up a chair and sat down beside him, his fingers on Garry's pulse.

"You don't think he's in danger, do you, doctor?" asked Jack, so anxious to go.

"No—he'll pull through. His breathing is bad, but his heart is doing fairly well. But he's got to stop this sort of thing." Here the old doctor's voice rose as he indicated a congested condition.

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