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sea, and the people everywhere," she replied in a low voice.

"The people, as I always say, can take care of themselves. My business is to take care of you. Let us have a light and I will draw down the blinds."

HE did so and took the easy chair opposite to her, stretching out his long legs with an air of enjoyment. It seemed to him for the moment as if he and she were in their own home.

"Now," he said, "let me argue you out of your anxiety. What social reason have you for fear?"

"I am afraid, in the words of the Litany, for all that travel by land or by water, for all sick persons, for all prisoners and captives."

"It seems to me that people travelling by land or water are not in much greater danger than those who stay at home; and, unless they have bronchitis, I don't suppose this fog will affect any sick persons, and as to the prisoners and captives, as a rule they are precious rascals, and if they have to stay within the prison walls instead of working outside, I don't pity them in the least."

"Do you consider them all rascals?"

"Pretty nearly."

"Oh," she exclaimed indignantly, "how can you be so hard? Do not all men frequently sin in thought, but because the law takes no cognizance of these thoughts—which are morally as bad as acts—they assume to be virtuous, and look on the men who have perhaps committed one sin, and one only, as pariahs. When I was at Princetown I saw the gangs of convicts, and so far from being afraid of them as 'precious rascals' my heart went out to them. I would gladly, if I could, have gone and talked to them, even the worst, if there had not been a single warder near. My only feeling was one of profound compassion, and I am sure they would have understood that I sympathized with them."

"I am afraid all people do not feel with you. Come, come, do you wish me to go to the police station and say, 'I thought I should like to knock one of my workmen down to-day; please imprison me;' whereas if I had done so, and injured him, I should have richly deserved to be locked up. I am not quite so sure about that, though," he added with a laugh, "for these workmen are very trying, and I really think a good thrashing would do some of them good, and Simpson agrees with me."

She smiled but he saw that her nervousness had not departed, her hands were shaking slightly as she held them on her lap. He went into his office and brought back some champagne.

"You are low, you want keeping up. I insist on your drinking this," he said offering her a glass.

She drank it without hesitation.

"Now eat a biscuit."

She obeyed him. He poured out a second glass when, greatly to his surprise, she took it from his hand and drank it all, for he had expected remonstrance.

"Thank you, she said, "now I will go home."

"You could not find your way. You would wander into the river. Whenever you must go I shall take you home, to the very door."

"You are very good. I do not think I could find my way alone, and I must be home. I will go now."

The fog was dense, the village lights glimmered feebly in the gloom, but they could not be seen a few yards off. Ronald carefully felt his way across the bridge, bidding Mary take his arm. He piloted her in safety down the street, but it was only by feeling from side to side that he could find the entrance to the lane.

"I should certainly have lost my way alone," she said.

"It was scarcely likely I should let you go alone."

"I have a favour to ask."

"It is granted."

"Supposing, mind I only say supposing, I have something pressing to detain me to-morrow, may I stop at home?"

"Why, of course you may. I thought you were going to ask me some great thing. Take as many days as you wish."

"It will be to-morrow or none. I will finish my work as soon as I can afterwards."

"Never mind the work. Will you, on your side, grant me a favour?"

"If I can."

"Have a fire to-night, and a brilliant light in your room," for they were now at the porch, and he saw that the sitting room was quite dark.

"I will do so. I will burn a light all night. I am very stupid I know but—"

"But you are only a girl after all, and not the strong minded heroine you strive to be. I think I am glad you are a little weak sometimes."

"I am weak very, very often, and if I am obliged to seem strong-minded I never feel so. Good-night, and thank you."

As she spoke there was a distant booming sound; she shook with fear.

"My dear Miss Williams, my dear girl," he said in agitation, holding both her hands firmly, "that is only a distant gun. Some ship perhaps saluting at Plymouth."

"Are you sure?"

"How can I be sure? But I am sure that it is not thunder or anything to frighten you; I don't like leaving you like this."

"But you must leave me; I am very sorry to be so silly, but I cannot help it."

"I know you can't. Have Mrs. Mason in to sit with you, promise me to take something substantial to eat, and go to bed early. I shall send Simpson round in the morning to know how you are if you do not come."

"I beg you not to do so. Only leave me alone. I will write if I am ill."

He went away much troubled, he was afraid some illness was coming on.

MARY WILLIAMS appeared punctually at her usual hour the next morning. The fog had lifted during the night, the sun was shining brightly. Her fright had apparently departed, but her hand was cold, and there was an air of suppressed excitement about her which Ronald noted at once.

"I am very glad to see you," he said. "Are you quite well?"

"I am quite well."

"Did you obey my instructions? What sort of a night did you spend?"

"I obeyed them as far as I could. I had a good fire, a brilliant light, and I drank some hot milk."

"And ate something?"

"People cannot always eat; it is impossible."

"And as a consequence you were awake all night. Confess."

"I cannot say I slept much. One cannot always sleep, you know. I got up before daybreak and watched the white mists rolling away from the hills and fields, and I listened to the noises you so much dislike, the lowing of the cows and the crowing of the cocks."

She paused, but it was evident she had more to say. Instead of going into her own office she remained standing in his. Since she had been a typist instead of a mill-hand she had given up the extreme plainness of her dress, she had resumed her dainty boots, and wore gloves which fitted exquisitely, but it seemed to him that she was in some way better dressed than usual this morning. She wore a navy-blue cloth skirt and jacket, elaborately braided with black, with a white waistcoat. The whole costume was very quiet, but Ronald's keen eyes saw that it was expensively made and suited her to perfection.

"Are you very busy, or may I speak to you for a little while?" she continued, speaking with some nervousness.

"I am never too busy to speak to you. Do sit down."

"I had a telegram this morning."

"Yes?"

"It was from—from my lover. He is coming to-day. May he begin work at once?"

She spoke with agitation, she was making a great effort. The news was a blow to him, he had almost persuaded himself that the man would never turn up.

"Do you want him to begin work the moment he sets foot in the place?"

"I do. I have a special reason for