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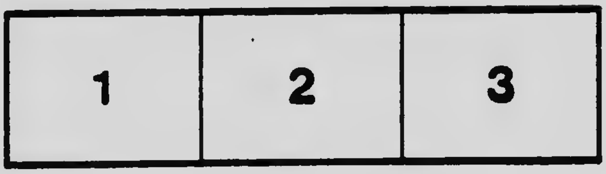

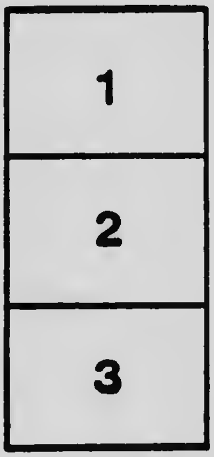

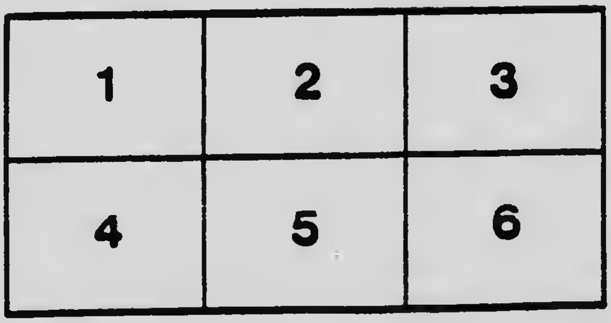

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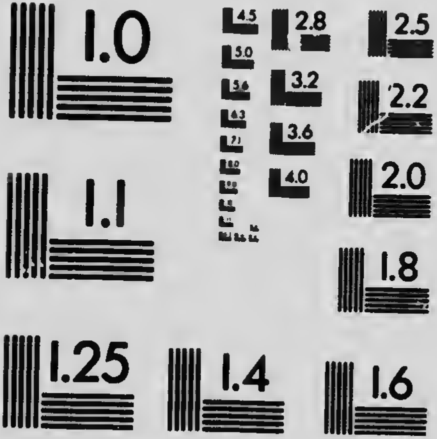
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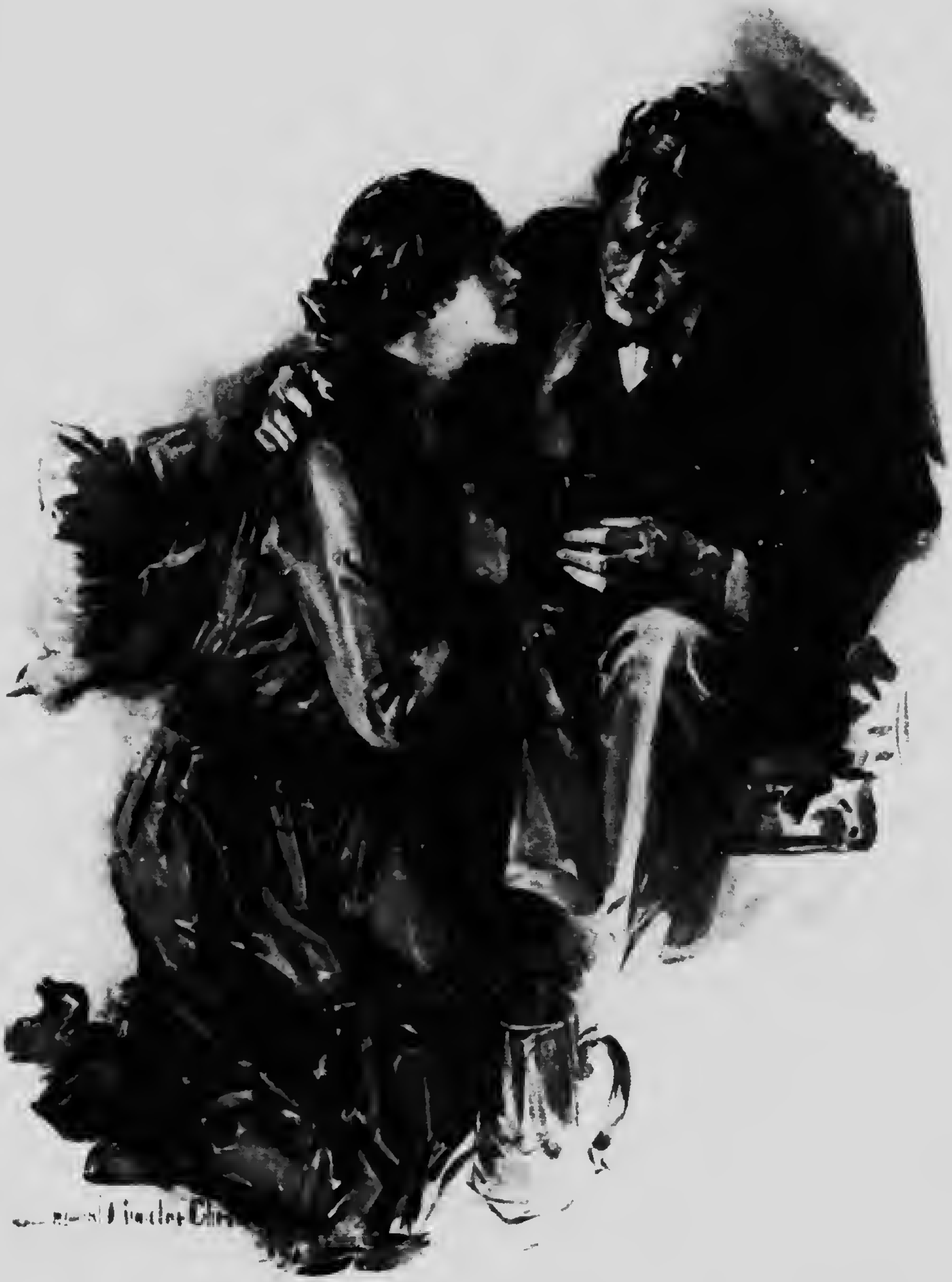

In the subdued torment on his face there was a sudden flickering passage of absolute terror.
FRONTISPIECE. *See page* 175.

den

THE WOMAN GIVES

A STORY OF REGENERATION

BY

OWEN JOHNSON

ILLUSTRATED BY
HARRISON FISHER

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THE WOMAN GIVES

A STORY OF REGENERATION

BY
OWEN JOHNSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HOWARD CHANDLER CHRISTY

TORONTO
McCLELLAND, GOODCHILD, & STEWART
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THE WOMAN GIVES

TEAGAN'S ARCADE stood, and in the slow upward progress of the city it may still stand, at that intersection of Broadway and Columbus Avenue, where the grumbling subway and the roaring elevated meet at Lincoln Square. It covered a block, bisected by an arcade and rising six capacious stories in the form of an enormous H. On Broadway, the glass front was given over to shops and offices of all descriptions, while in the back stretches of the top stories, artists, sculptors, students, and illustrators had their studios alongside of mediums, dentists, curious business offices, and derelicts of all description.

The square was a churning meeting of contending human tides. The Italians had installed their fruit shops and their groceries; the French their florists and their delicatessen shops; the Jews their clothing bazaars; the Germans their jewelers and their shoe stores; the Irish their saloons and their restaurants, while from Healy's, one of the most remarkable meeting-grounds in the city, they dominated the neighborhood.

The Arcade, which had stood like a great glass barn, waiting the inevitable stone advance of reconstruction, looked down on this rushing stream of all nations, while occasionally from the mixed races outside, swimming on the current of the avenue, a bit of human débris was washed up and found its lodging. It was a bit of the Orient — the flotsam and jetsam of Hong Kong and Singapore in the heart of New York. It was a place where no questions were asked and no advice permitted; where if you found a man wandering in the long, drafty corridors you piloted him to his room and put him to bed and did not seek to reform him in the morning. This was its etiquette. There were the young and unafraid, who were coming up blithely, and the old and tired, who were going down, and it was understood that those who were bent on their own destruction should do it in their own chosen way — a place where souls in hunger and souls in despair met momentarily and passed.

In the whole city there was not such another incongruous gathering of activities. There was a vast billiard-parlor and a theater; a barber shop and shoe parlors; a telegraph station and an ice-cream-and-candy shop, thronged at the luncheon hour with crowds of school-boys; there was also a millinery shop and one for fancy goods; a clock maker, and two corner saloons. Above, in the lower lofts, every conceivable human oddity was assembled in a sort of mercantile crazy quilt. One read such signs as these:

WILLIE GOLDMARK
HIGH-ART CLOTHING

THE GREAT INTERNATIONAL NOVELTY CO

UNCLE PAUL'S PAWN SHOP
You Can Pawn Anything from a Shoe-string to a Locomotive

THE PATENT HORSESHOE CO.

THE ROYAL EUROPEAN HAIR-DRESSING PARLORS
Marcel-waving Taught in Ten Lessons

Besides this, there were offices for a dozen patent medicine cures; a notary public and public stenographers; while banjo lessons, instruction in illustration, commercial advertising and fancy dancing were offered on every floor.

Higher up, on the fifth and particularly on the sixth floor, where the lofts had been transformed into dwelling-rooms and studios, a queer collection had settled and clung tenaciously. For years, oppressed by the vastness and gloom of the reverberating corridors, they had gone on living solitary lives, barely nodding to each other, as though each had a secret to bury (which indeed was often true), and they might have continued thus indefinitely, had it not been for two events — the accident of King O'Leary's meeting Tootles, and the mystery of Dangerfield's coming to the corner studio — two unifying events that brought the little group of human stragglers on the sixth floor into a curious fraternity that persisted for several years, and was fated to affect several destinies profoundly.

I

It was Christmas Eve in Lincoln Square. A fine snow was sifting out of the leaden night, coating the passers-by with silver but dissolving on the warm asphalt stretches in long, gleaming lakes where a thousand reflections quivered. From the glowing subway entrances, the holiday crowds surged up, laden with mysterious packages, scurrying home for the decking out of tinseled trees and the plotting of Christmas surprises. The shop windows flared through the crowds so brightly that they seemed to have brought up electric reinforcements. The restaurants were crowded with brilliant garlands gay with red berries and festal ribbons, while amid the turbulent traffic of the avenues, impudent little taxi-cabs went scooting merrily, with rich glimpses of heaped-up boxes inside.

At Healy's, under the strident elevated station, a few guests were entering the blazing dining-rooms, laughing and expectant. The tension of the city's nerves seemed everywhere relaxed. For one merry hour in the long, grinding year, united in the unselfish spirit of revelry, with the zest of secrets to be guarded and secrets to be discovered, the metropolitan crowd bumped good-humoredly on its way, gay with the democracy of good cheer.

King O'Leary left the throng at the bar at Healy's, whistling loudly to himself, flung a half-dollar to the blind news-dealer under the elevated steps, calling with gruff gusto, "Merry Christmas!" and, resuming his whistling, crossed the square to where Teagan's Arcade rose in shanty splendor, six stories above Broadway, filling the block with its flashing electric signs which hung against the night like so much cheap jewelry.

If King O'Leary continued to whistle with exaggerated gaiety, tricking himself into a set smile, it was because deep in his heart he felt the irresistible closing-in of his black hour. As he neared the glass descent into the rumbling underground, a flurried eruption of parcel-laden crowds whirled momentarily about him, wrapping him around with youth, laughter, and the aroma of friendship and affection. Home! He felt it so keenly; he saw so clearly rising before him a hundred visions of family groups gathered in the warmth of cozy houses, he felt so out of it, so socially excommunicated, that his pretense at gaiety flattened out. He shifted the soft-brimmed hat over his eyes, as though to shut out memories, turned up the collar of his coat, and, digging his great hands into capacious pockets, swung doggedly on. The world for this one night had run away from him. In the whole city he could think of no door where he could leave a present or imagine from what direction one might descend upon him. With the exception of the half-dollar flung to the blind news-dealer, and a few tips jingling in his pockets, his Christmas giving was over. Twice a year, in his happy-go-lucky existence, rolling down incredible avenues of life from Singapore to Nome, Alaska, meeting each day with unfailing zest, leader and boon companion through whatever crowds he passed — twice a year, at Christmas and on a certain day in mid-April, the secret of which lay buried in his memory, King O'Leary went down into the dark alleys of remembrance.

He entered the Arcade, which was like a warm, friendly furnace after the wet, shivering snow flurries, transparent shops on either side, and ahead the gleam of brass railings barring the entrance to the vaudeville theater, whose evening program shrieked at him from colored sheets of mystery and guaranteed thrills.

"Lord, but this is awful!" he said solemnly, gazing absent-mindedly into the glowing tonsorial parlors inscribed "Joey Shine." "Wish to the deuce I could think of some one to give a present to!"

All at once he perceived the manicurist, a tall, Amazonian young lady, with reddish hair coiled in amazing tangles, who was examining him with friendly curiosity. He came out of his abstraction, wondered where he had seen her, half smiled, and went slowly on his way to the elevator, an old-fashioned vehicle, which came settling down like an ancient barge.

"Merry Christmas, Mistah O'Leary!"

"Back to you, Sam!" he said, dropping a dollar in the box which was conspicuously advertised. And he added, "Up six."

"Thank you, sah; *thank you!*" said Sam, whose eyeballs rolled whitely at the magnificence of the tip.

The twin elevators in the Arcade were sleepy affairs, unoppressed by a sense of time, while the voyage upward was never guaranteed. They were large, open, cage-like affairs, littered with announcements: rooms to be sublet or to be shared; trousers pressed and old clothes bought; washing cheaply offered; instruction in typewriting and stenography; dental parlors; the future foretold and confidential advice given at reasonable rates by Madame Probasco on the fifth floor; while only temporarily reversed, a large sign announced:

OUT OF ORDER
TAKE OTHER ELEVATOR

Sam lingered a moment, humming sleepily, as though to coax forth another passenger from the shadows. This failing, he shuffled out for a languid survey of the Arcade.

"No hurry here," said O'Leary, yawning indifferently and settling into the cushioned chair which soothed the attendant in his weary hours.

Thus encouraged, Sam lounged away for a final reconnoitering, slouched back, vacillated a moment on one foot, and had his hand on the sliding gate, when out of the dusk came a hallo in a high, nasal English accent.

"I say there, Sassafras, my man, hold him in!"

Sam began laughing immediately, in a thin, treble, body-shaking laugh,

"He-he-he, Mr. Kidder; I sartainly knew you was coming — yassah!"

A young fellow, barely five feet six, with the figure of a jockey, hopped into the car, and, seizing the regulator, rattled off:

"Cast away there! Smartly now, my man, smartly! Take in your spinnaker! Ship the maintop-gallant sheets! Douse the poop-deck! Stand by the battens!"

In response to this rapid salvo, the elevator began to budge, creaking and protesting, rising at about the rate of six inches a second.

"Do you think we can make it?" said Kidder, with assumed alarm. "How's the old scow to-night, mate?"

"Why, most surprisin' well — yassah, most surprisin'."

"It's a stormy night, and there's a bad reef above the fourth. Well, mate, we're in the hands of Providence. It's will be done!"

All at once, seeming to perceive King O'Leary for the first time, he inquired anxiously:

"Excuse me, sir, does my presence at the helm cause you any anxiety?"

"Not here," said King O'Leary, who, in his amusement, had been tricked out of his glumness.

"What floor can I serve you, sir?"

"The sixth will be about right for me."

"Then we sink or swim, survive or perish, together!"

He was dapperly dressed, and though his yellowish checks were evidently ready-made, they were squeezed in at the waist and hoisted over the ankles in the latest style. He had the hatchet face of the clever Yankee, alert, sharply defined, with a high-bridged and rather bold English nose.

" Youngster looks like a pocket edition of the Duke of Wellington," thought King O'Leary, registering his favorable impressions, and, before the other's infectious spirits, he began to recover his natural zest.

Tootles — to give Mr. St. George Kidder at once his workaday name — meanwhile had been examining his companion with the impressionable eye of the artist. He saw the bulky body of a man approaching middle age, yet full of rough, brawny substance and weather-tried endurance. The great half-moon of a mouth was now turning up in its usual indomitable attitude toward life under the broad-spaced, jovial nose set between full cheeks breaking into dimples. Underneath wisps of tawny hair, rather Mephistophelian, were clear-blue eyes, brilliant and sharp as a brigand's. The whole had a combination of companionable good humor, and instant aggression when necessary.

" Rather a rough nun in case of a scrap, I should fancy," thought Tootles, who had his own way of expressing things. " However, he has a sense of humor — of *my* humor — which is distinctly in his favor."

Suddenly he exclaimed aloud:

" Whoa there! All hands on deck stand by the lifeboats! "

The elevator, having drifted gradually past one dark floor after the other, had now come to a jolting stop between the third and the fourth, and began to churn up and down in a manner distinctly alarming.

" Sassafras, you're feeding Tessie too much red meat," said Tootles, shifting his metaphors as Sam came to the rescue.

Another moment of joggling and bucking, and the elevator, as though too weary to continue its exertions, suddenly glided up and to a rest at the sixth floor.

"Whew! My eyes and whiskers!" exclaimed Tootles, springing out.

He turned with an air of grave solicitude.

"Sassafras, I do believe I forgot to pay the chauffeur. Small change, you know, is such a nuisance. I'm going to let you be my banker for a couple of days. Give him a liberal tip. And I say, when the florist comes in the morning with my *boutonniére,* attend to that, too, will you? Oh, yes, if Mrs. Van Astorbilt calls again this evening, tell her I have gone to the country — but discreetly, Sassafras, discreetly, in your best manner. Remember — she is a woman, like your mother."

The sparkling elevator sagged out of sight, burying in the cavernous shaft the body-shaking peals of laughter, leaving O'Leary and Tootles moving down the spacious, murky corridor of the sixth floor back. There was a moment of silence, each rather watching the other out of the corner of his eye, and then Tootles heaved a prodigious sigh.

"Say, this is a hell of a place on Christmas eve, isn't it?"

"Why, boy, I didn't know it hit you that way," said King O'Leary, surprised.

"It sure does. 'Christmas comes but once a year, when it comes it brings good cheer!' Yes, it does! Wish I could sleep it over. Ugh! Well, anyhow!"

He stopped at the door which bore the inscription:

No Models Wanted.

King O'Leary reluctantly continued farther up the bare hallway to his room.

"I say, over there!"

O'Leary turned, looking back at Tootles, who stood dimly revealed in the light of the half-open door, his head on one side, scratching his ear, as though, by some instinct, he had divined the shadow over the other man's heart.

"Well, son, what is it?"

"Merry Christmas, and all that sort of thing, you know!"

"Oh, sure — back to you. Merry Christmas?" said the other, as though trying it on his ear, and a loud guffaw followed. "Yes, it'll be a merry Christmas — I think — NOT!"

King O'Leary turned the lock and flung open the door on the dim solitude of his room. Then he threw on the electric light, and each bare detail came suddenly out — a cot with the cover still turned down, a wash-stand, and an upright piano with an armchair before it, turned sideways, so that he could avail himself of the height of the arm when he played. In one corner was a low hair trunk, reenforced with leather of the make sailors were wont to use.

He closed the door, whistling gloomily, went over to the piano and struck a few aimless chords.

"Anywhere else in civilization, Vladivostok, Valparaiso, or Honolulu, a white man could speak to another on such a night as this; but in this God-forsaken wilderness, I suppose they'd think I was after the watch."

He turned again to the keyboard, and, playing by ear, with a truly sensitive touch, ran into the *Feuer Motif* of "Die Walküre."

"God, that's great — that is great!" he said solemnly. "That is it — earth, fire, and water!"

He tried another start —shut the piano viciously and rose.

"Damn New York!" he said, with his nose to the curtainless window, peering out at the opposite side of the court, with its chilly, bare outline. "Damn New York for an unfriendly stuck-up port, anyhow! Dozens of poor devils sitting around nursing their misery and afraid to say hello to another human being. Danged if I don't try it!" he said, all at once, and, slapping on his hat, he went out of his room and up to the corner studio, near which a dozen boxes were piled.

"I'll try each in turn," he said grimly, and knocked.

But a moment's pounding convinced him that the studio was unoccupied, and he turned to the opposite room, which lay next to his, and rapped on it as though to summon forth a spirit.

The door was presently opened, and the figure of a young woman appeared.

"My name's King O'Leary," he said desperately, taking off his hat. "I'm looking for some mortal being, man, woman or child, who's as plumb lonely as I am, to go out and help me through this night. I'm not a thug or a pickpocket, and I'm not fresh. Anywhere else on this blessed globe except here, people would understand me. Well, how about it? I suppose you think I'm crazy?"

She stood a little defensively, her hands behind her back in an attitude which seemed to bar the way into the studio, which lay behind, warm and inviting with the charm her feminine touch had laid over its crude outlines, as the spreading ivy softens the ugliness of a ruin. Her hat and coat were on a near-by chair, as though she were preparing to go out. Though she stood against the light, he was struck with the oddity of her appearance — a certain defiant, youthful erectness in her body, the depth of darkness that lay over her, in the black of her hair, which was braided and coiled about her forehead, and the brown oval of the face — brown as an Indian's. He could not see the eyes for the moment.

"You're in the room next to me, aren't you — the one who was playing?" she said, in a matter-of-fact tone, and her voice was gutturally pleasant, so different from the high-pitched excitement of the New Yorker that he stared at her in surprise.

"Yes; I'm just about twenty miles away," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, I suppose I'm letting myself in for a throw-down, but here goes. Honestly, I mean what I say. I'm stranded here — don't know a soul. I'm just craving for some one to talk to. Fact. If you're in the same box and can size a man up for what he is, why —" he added, in an embarrassed rush, aware by the white gleam of her teeth that the girl was watching him, amused at his embarrassment —"I say, what do you do to a man who has the nerve to knock on your door and ask you to go out to dinner?"

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, yes; that's what I expected. Well, I meant it all right," he said ruefully.

"That's not what I mean," she said. "I'm sorry, but I'm going out to dinner."

As she said this she seemed to relax, as though satisfied of the sincerity of his appeal, and, turning, for the first time the light fell clear across her face. What the color of her eyes was in the daytime he did not know, only now, in the darkness and the artificial light, there was something luminous and deep and full, and yet they struck him as a sort of barrier held against those who sought to read deeper. These eyes looked straight into his, quiet, restrained — not quite the eyes of a young girl nor yet the eyes of a woman. The whole swift impression on him was of some one quite unlike the rest, an inflexibility of purpose, something decisive in look and attitude and, at the same time, something withheld — a flash of elfin wildness cruelly mastered.

"I beg your pardon," he said, conscious that he had looked too intently; and he added, in blunt tribute: "Yes, of course, you would be going somewhere."

"I'm sorry," she said; and this time she smiled, a smile like the woman, curiously devoid of coquetry and yet at the same time haunting the imagination.

"Do you mean you would have come?" he said eagerly.

"Of course," she said, as though this were the most natural thing in the world.

"Lord, this looks human!" he said, hungrily glancing into the studio. "Wish you could see the cell I'm in." He hesitated a moment and then said abruptly, "I'd like — well, just to get the feeling of it — can I step in — just a moment?"

She hesitated in turn and studied his face intently.

"Just a minute, then," she said, but she remained by the open door.

King O'Leary strode into the room over the grateful softness underneath.

"Rugs!" he said ecstatically, and he put his head back as though to inhale the welcome odor of a home. "Lord, I can just smell it!" he said. "It just warms you up — makes you feel real."

He stood, hat in hand, his face glowing, surveying the blending shades of gray and green, the subdued glow of the table-lights, the grateful touches of warm colors here and there, and the easel covered with a cloak of mellow golden velvet that was in itself calming to look at.

"You're an artist?" he said.

"Yes."

She made no move to question him, watching him with a quiet sense of dignity that seemed to accord him what he needed and no more. He turned regretfully from his contemplation.

"You're sure about dinner?"

"Yes."

He wanted to shake hands, but her attitude did not seem to permit it. He made a last attempt.

"Say, if I annoy you with my pounding — just rap on the wall and shut me up."

"I like it."

"Really — anything in particular?"

"No; I like it all."

"I'm glad of that." He hesitated again, moved toward the door. "I'm sorry about that dinner."

She nodded, and he thought she was still watching him with her disconcerting amusement.

"Good luck!"

The door closed, leaving King O'Leary, who had met women, good, bad, and indifferent, in many climes and held his own with Irish audacity, so thoroughly perplexed that he stood staring at the warm light playing on the glass of the door a long moment before he squared his shoulders and advanced to the next test.

II

TOOTLES shared the studio, which was a curiosity in itself, and a sort of refuge for indigent artists, transient reporters and just plain-a-day human beings, with Mr. Flick Wilder, who numbered among his activities (without tarrying overlong in any) journalism, all grades of publicity and press-work, advance agent, and odd theatrical jobs, special stories, and occasionally minor editorial positions, briefly held. As he aspired to a liberal position in the literary world — and by liberal, he understood a position in which he should originate the ideas that others were laboriously to execute — he had decided to take up as a steady profession (steady being used in a relative sense) the occupation of joke-smith, or joke-cracker, as he himself termed it, as one which necessitated only a trifling expense in the shape of a note-book, developed the memory, and made the companionship of witty associates a lucrative necessity. He pounded out the pun ordinary by the dozen for the comic weeklies at fifty cents an item. He dressed up anecdotes skimmed from current journalism, and fitted them to celebrities, a process which he termed "developing the property." He seasoned English humor with the pepper of American wit. He tagged an inscription to a cartoon and supplied ideas for others *ad libitum,* and occasionally, by astutely padding two lines into a paragraph or a paragraph into a section, realized the colossal sum of five dollars. Daily contemplation of all things in their humorous possibilities had settled upon him a fixed gravity, a sort of distant look in the eyes, of seeking to determine whether the last man had uttered anything of value, and where others broke into laughter, he resorted to his note-book. He had seen many sides of New York in the periodic lapses which kept him constantly in search of a new profession. He had even been a dog-catcher during a week of financial stringency, when he was seeking to earn his fare from Chattanooga back to the metropolis, but he never referred to this except in moments of full confession. He had a play and a novel which he intended to complete. In tribute to this literary productivity, he liked to refer to himself as "Literature," while addressing Tootles as "Art."

Their association had come about six months previously, in a quite accidental manner. Tootles, who was of extravagant tastes, was immersed in a fit of hard work, in an effort to catch up with the rent, which, though only thirty dollars a month, was beyond his powers of concentration. He was at his easel, finishing up a series of commercial sketches depicting certain Olympian young men, beautiful as men are not, lolling on the seashore in the new spring styles of Wimpfheimer & Goldfinch's twenty-five-dollar suits — a degradation which he endured against the day when the galleries of the world should contend for his masterpieces, on the practical theory that it not only kept the landlord in good humor but gave the artist himself exceptional opportunities in the matter of his own wardrobe.

The door was open, and he was aware that something unusual was taking place along the hall — from the intermittent sounds which rolled down, of loud and angry conversation — when there abruptly entered the room, and by the same token his own immediate existence, Mr. Flick Wilder, a sandy-haired, freckled Westerner, with a watery eye and an impudent tilt to his nose, a heavy, thirsty underlip, about thirty, of middle height but so abnormally thin that he appeared back-bone *et præterea nihil.*

" Hello, kid!" said Mr. Wilder, with a friendly though suspiciously enthusiastic greeting.

" Hello, you human hatpin," Tootles immediately retorted. " What's your line of goods?"

" Did I hear you ask me in?" said Wilder affably.

" No agents need apply," said Tootles, in warning. " However, can you lend me five?"

From long contact, he had adopted a defensive formula: In case of doubt, touch the other man first.

" I can," said the other, accepting this as an invitation to enter.

Tootles eyed him through the narrowing slits of his eyes and repeated sternly,

" Come now; what's your line of goods?"

" I have a camel," said the other, in an easy, matter-of-fact tone.

" A *what?*"

" A camel."

" I don't want any toys."

" It's a real camel."

" Thanks. I'm only interested in getting goats," said Tootles sarcastically.

Whereupon, to his amazement, his visitor immediately drew out a memorandum-book, reflected a moment, nodded, and jotted down a note. Then he said:

" Want you to ride it."

" Oh, you do, eh?"

" And if ten dollars means anything to you, kiddo — look this over."

Whereupon he took two five-dollar bills from a sizeable roll and flaunted them conspicuously on the table. The aspect of ready money had always a convincing effect upon Tootles. Still, the thing was too absurd. He looked at Wilder, and then went to the door and looked out suddenly, suspecting a hoax. He came back warily, forgetting his English accent, which he had laboriously imitated in admiration of a certain vaudeville hero.

"Say, what kind of a game is this?"

"Money talks, doesn't it?"

"A camel!"

"You don't believe I've got a camel, do you?" said Wilder, with a hypnotic stare. "Come here."

They went to the window and craned out. Below, in the street, surrounded by a swarm of newsboys, was indubitably a camel. Up to this moment, Tootles had remained incredulous. Now he began to feel a rising excitement. He scented trouble, and if there was anything he went to naturally, with enthusiasm, it was trouble. He liked to be in it, and he particularly liked to lead others therein.

"How about the cops," he said, at once.

Wilder exhibited a permit.

"It's a publicity dodge — see!" he explained. "New show at Coney. If I can make Times Square at five o'clock, a bunch of the boys are primed up for a big story."

"Why don't you ride him yourself," said Tootles, in a last objection.

"I can't. I'm too sober," said Flick, with a discouraged shake of his head, as though to convey the idea that the day had been too short.

They descended to the sidewalk.

"How'll I get up?" said Tootles, craning his neck.

This was a puzzler. Wilder reflected.

"I had a trained slave who could make him kneel," he explained, "but I lost Abu over on Ninth Avenue — the drunken rascal!"

Finally they maneuvered Elsie against the side of a truck, and Tootles scrambled into place, amid the jeers of the neighborhood. Wilder placed himself courageously at the head, with the leading-strap, and they started. Unfortunately it was only four o'clock, and he did not wish to reach his rendezvous before five, and, in a luckless moment, decided to cross the park and explore the East Side. This, too, might have resulted without accident, had not Flick, whose sense of geography was becoming misty, happened to remember Abu, and stopped at each saloon to conduct a personal search, despite the frantic remonstrances of Tootles, who did not relish these moments of lonely and lofty splendor. Elsie, the camel, however, was of a sociable, man-loving nature, and no harm might have come, had not Wilder, whose sobriety was perceptibly being cured, remembered, as a humane man with an investigating turn of mind, that Elsie must be getting thirsty, and offered her a can of foaming beer.

The consequence was that the camel suddenly awoke and assumed the direction of the party, heading due east (with an instinct, perhaps [illegible]ward the fatherland) at an accelerated pace, despite [illegible]es' objurgations and Flick's frantic efforts to head her off. The rest was a painful memory — a weird, reeling flight of excited tenements, balking horses, swearing policemen, and a sudden entangling plunge into an Italian wedding, in which camel, bride, coupés, and guests became fantastically intermingled, while Tootles, hanging to the top of a providential lamp-post, saw Flick, Elsie, the policemen and wedding-party rolling away in a whirling mist.

A week later, Flick Wilder reappeared, having beaten his way back from Buffalo, where he had landed, he knew not how and asked shelter, while he made certain cautious inquiries as to the fate of Elsie and the propriety of a public reappearance.

From this hectic beginning, they became fast chums. Tootles, who never touched a drop, unconsciously exercised a sobering influence over Mr. Flick Wilder, gradually leading him into the paths of ambition while following him through a series of incredible escapades. Lonely, each in his own struggling beginning, they found a divine measure of comradeship in their exuberant youth, dreaming away at night under the stars that came down to them through the open skylight; Tootles of fame and masterpieces; Flick of more worldly ambitions, of rolling down the avenue, not on camels but in glaring limousines of being saluted obsequiously by precipitate head waiters conducting him through luxurious restaurants where beautiful women with diamonds in their hair sent him imploring glances. But as these dreams, though immensely satisfying to the inner needs, had the one serious defect of not being discountable, the rent loomed over them like the sword of Damocles, compelling them, much as the outer world called to their curiosity and love of adventure, to the cruel necessity of doing a certain amount of work — menial, brutalizing periods, which set upon them in the closing week of the month, with consequent scurrying to editorial offices.

During the free, happy weeks, Tootles dreamed and dabbled at painting, executing lurid portraits of Belle Shaler and Pansy Hartmann, models who roomed together down the hall, and who, under promise of possessing these treasures of art, agreed to sit for him at special rates, payable at some radiant future date. Occasionally Tootles wandered into the studios of artists in the Sixty-seventh Street district for such crumbs of knowledge as they good-humoredly threw him. The truth is, he had unusual talent but too much youth. Occasionally, too, Flick Wilder, impressed with his serious view of life, would get out his copybooks, sharpen his pencil and prepare to think.

The studio was a capacious one, arranged in compromise between Flick's yearning for splendor and Tootles' feeling for the decorative in art. At first glance, it looked like a theatrical storehouse, from which parentage most of its furnishings had found their way, so that one versed in dramatic necrology would have fancied himself on the reef of last season's plays. The studio was lit by two windows on the street and a great, slanting skylight overhead. On one side was a huge back drop depicting a sunset in the Grand Cañon, while on the other was a bucolic view of southern plantations, secured from a broken-down troupe of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," for a price between two and three dollars. The introduction of these novel effects in mural decoration, a relic of Flick Wilder's friendship with a convivial property-man, was at first strenuously opposed by Tootles, who, however, ceded his position when Flick pertinently pointed out, first, that the bare walls were in a shocking state and could not be replastered unless one month's rent could be guaranteed in advance, and, second, that the scenery would serve as invaluable backgrounds for the production of Wimpfheimer & Goldfinch's pastorales.

In a back corner, four property spears, from a popular failure of "Julius Cæsar," upheld a yellowish-green silk curtain which, when parted, disclosed two bunks, one above the other, for greater economy of space — Tootles occupying the more exposed position in deference to Flick's uncertain habits.

The opposite corner by the windows was consecrated to Art, paint-boxes, easel, and canvases; while the home of Literature was a damaged roll-top desk from the first act of a deceased melodrama, with easy refuge at hand in a second-hand easy chair and a divan with the front spring still in good order. Another sofa and a hanging couch burned with pipe-ashes were known as the guest-rooms, while the studio was artfully divided into zones by three pseudo-Japanese screens, red, yellow, and violet, which swore at everything else and at themselves. Behind one was the bathroom, so-called as a compliment to the presence of a wash-basin and running water. A second screen, with memories of "Zaza," concealed the culinary preparations when, indeed, there was anything in the larder to conceal; while behind a third was a wardrobe containing Tootles' multiple suits, which had come to him in part payment (dress suits excepted) of his services to the house of Wimpfheimer & Goldfinch.

All the electric bulbs were concealed in varicolored globes representing several varieties of the fish and animal kingdom and capable of flooding the studio with red, blue, or green tints, while perched in the high, dusky corners of the ceiling were two cast-iron owls so wired that Flick, from his couch, could cause four yellowish eyes to spring out of the darkness. Finally, the pride of the floor, where it dominated gorgeously the collection of vagrant mats, was a genuine if moldy bear-rug, with which Flick had unaccountably made his appearance one night, insisting that it had attacked him without warning. Tootles was considerably worried, but a closer inspection of the animal convinced him that Flick ha[illegible] probably rescued it from an ash-can than carried it [illegible] any act of grand larceny. Consequently he set to work with enthusiasm to restore it to some of its original ferocity, and with the aid of odd scraps of furs succeeded in reconstructing a semblance of a body, but one of such unusual colors that it might have passed as a specie of the Go-to-fro — that mythological animal which has the left leg shorter than the right in order that it may run around a hill the faster.

In the hallway was a large sign inscribed:

PEDDLERS, BOOK AGENTS AND CREDITORS
CROSS THIS LINE AT THEIR PERIL.
SAVAGE DOG ON PREMISES

Around the studio others signs announced:

GUESTS STAYING FOR BREAKFAST
PROVIDE THEIR OWN COFFEE
AND
WILL BE CHARGED FOR
THE USE OF THE TOWEL.

By the door, a practical inspiration of Tootles, was a collection-box bearing a large placard:

KIDDER & WILDER'S 25c LODGINGS
FOR TRANSIENT BACHELORS ONLY
This is Not a Carnegie Foundation
Come Once and Be Our Guest
Come Again and Contribute
Come Often, the Rent is High.

III

FLICK WILDER was stretched on his back on the shadowy couch, hands under his head, legs crossed, and one foot pointed toward the skylight, against which the reflections of the opposite hotel cast a blurred glamour.

"Hello; you here?" said Tootles, in surprise.

"Mostly."

"Sober?"

"Alas!"

"What are you mooning there on your back for?" said Tootles, turning on the pink and yellow lights.

"I'm laughing over a new joke," said Wilder, in anything but an hilarious tone.

"Good Lord, Flick," said Tootles, stopping short: "don't tell me you are in the glums, too?"

"Who're you talking to?" said Wilder, as though the question deserved no answer.

"Fellow down the hall."

"The high-life gink who is moving into the corner studio?"

"No; O'Leary — fellow next to Lady Vere De Vere," said Tootles, thus characterizing Miss Inga Sonderson, who had impressed him with her haughty aloofness.

"Oh!" Wilder slowly drew himself up and looked inquiringly at Tootles. "What time?"

"Dinner-time, naturally."

"Art," said Wilder severely, "there are some sacred words which you ought to respect."

"I was just thinking how lovely it would be to sit down before a large, juicy beefsteak," said Tootles incorrigibly.

"You know the kind, browned on the outside, rare inside, melting in the mouth."

Wilder flung a slipper across the room that missed Tootles' head and clattered among the paint-brushes.

"Well, Literature, supposing there is an ice-box, is there anything in it?"

"You're forgetting your English accent, Tootles," said Wilder, as he bustled, whistling, over to the window-box.

"My word — so I am!" said Tootles, following and peering over his shoulder.

Wilder drew forth half a bottle of milk, an open tin of potted ham and several portions of bread.

"The sardines," he said, "are for our Christmas dinner."

"Don't let's overeat," said Tootles seriously, trying to coax forth a smile. "Flick, the stomach must be empty when the brain is full."

They sat down at the table, facing each other.

"What! No finger-bowls?" said Tootles facetiously, drumming a march on the table.

"Art, it's no use," said Wilder, shaking his head. "It's a bum night. Damn Christmas anyhow!"

"Ah, but wait until Santa Claus comes," said Tootles brightly.

At this moment, as though in answer, there came two sharp raps on the door that set the glass to rattling.

"Who's that?" said Wilder, startled at the coincidence.

"Santa Claus," said Tootles. "Well, come in if you're good looking."

The door opened immediately, and King O'Leary's broad shoulders loomed out of the dusk. He stood there in his flannel shirt and loose tie, at ease from a long acquaintance with the freemasonry of men, peering in at the oddities of the studio, which seemed to amuse him immensely. Then he saluted, with the curious, fluttering salute of the English private, and exclaimed:

"Hello, neighbors! Am I butting in?"

"Not at all," said Tootles cheerily. "What can we do for you?" He waved a hand toward Wilder, adding: "My collaborator, the Hope of Literature, Mr. Flick Wilder."

"Glad to know you," said the new arrival, shaking hands heartily, as though he were indeed delighted at the opportunity. "My name's O'Leary." And he added, grinning expectantly, "What do you collaborate in?"

"In the studio, of course," said Tootles. "I pay the rent, and he occupies it."

Wilder at once transferred this to his memorandum-book with an appreciative nod.

"Gentlemen, this place has sort of gotten on my nerves to-night," said O'Leary, by way of explanation. "Christmas usually does, whether I'm in Singapore, Manila, or hoofing it up the Roo Royale. If I'm butting in, kick me out, but if you fellows have got it as bad as I have, what do you say to pooling our misery and grubbing together. It strikes me that's better than chewing the cud in our corners."

Wilder looked at Tootles, who said with gravity, in his best English manner:

"Your idea interests me strangely; but the fact is — well, we've been out so much in society lately that we thought we'd enjoy a quiet little supper at home —" King O'Leary glanced at the table; perceiving which, Tootles hastened to add, "No, that isn't for the canary; that is just the *hors d'œuvres.*"

"Strapped?"

"That is a vulgar way of expressing the same idea."

"Stranger treats the crowd," said O'Leary with an easy authority. "That's the rule of the game wherever I have played. I'm asking you. Happen to have a little swelling in the pocket just at present. When it's empty, which will be soon enough, why — your turn. How about it, neighbors? Suppose we look each other over and size it up?"

Half an hour later they deployed from the Arcade and set out for Healy's, grimly determined on revelry and the conquest of the glums. Unfortunately, the Christmas crowds were still about them, homeward bound.

"They might get home at a decent hour," said Flick, indignantly.

"No turkeys to-night," said Tootles. "I'm against it. My word! The thought of all those birds, plucked and skinned, thousands and thousands"— he reflected a moment —"no, hundreds of thousands — think of it — hundreds of thousands of turkeys!"

"Confound them, they look happy," said Flick, blowing the snow from his nostrils. "Well, anyhow, they'll all be ill to-morrow!"

King O'Leary squared his shoulders and looked straight ahead, but he found a moment, as they were crossing the newsboys at the subway, to slip surreptitiously a shiny quarter into the fist of a pursuing urchin.

"No public stuff," he said, as he entered by the bar entrance. "A quiet corner where men can lounge and spin a yarn as they like. Here's a seat. Shove in." He glanced at the rough-hewn crowd by the rail, and said grimly: "Mighty grateful to you fellows. Suppose I'd have had to pick up with one of those guys."

They slipped into a padded nook with high backs, tucked away from the whirl of mirrors and the regimented bottles beyond the black, curved backs, and derbies pushed over the ears.

"What'll it be?"

"No turkey," said Tootles.

"And no cranberry sauce," added Flick.

"No, no — forget all that!"

But at this moment, as though the spirit of the holiday were bent on pursuing them like a tantalizing imp, a stableman, affably inclined, saluted the room in his departure.

"Well, and good luck to youse all. A foine Christmas!"

"How about a steak?" said Tootles hastily.

"That hits me, and we'll have it planked," said O'Leary.

"Better look at the tax," said Flick, in a burst of friendliness.

"Rot! We'll make a night of it!" said King O'Leary, with the gesture of a millionaire toward Schnapps, the veteran waiter, who grinned down at them from his gobbler head.

"My word! If I ordered that, they'd make me show the goods," said Tootles, in admiration. "Have you found a gold mine?"

"Hardly that."

"Been away quite a bit, haven't you?"

"Yep; just back." He paused, and noting the curiosity written on the faces of his guests, said: "Suppose it's up to me to give an account of myself." Schnapps was back with a bottle. O'Leary poured out his glass of whisky, taking it neat, with a look of surprise at Tootles' refusal. "Water-wagon? Always have been? Well, don't know but what you have the advantage. Will say this, though, cottoned right up to you, boy, over there in that elevator. You got the first laugh out of me in a long blue day, and that's more than I thought any one could do. Here's to you! Kind of reckon we'll hit it off. You'll find me a different sort day after to-morrow — right there with the repartee and the jollying stuff. How!" He emptied the glass and pushed it away. "I say, we might as well start fair. I'm apt to get pretty down — not violent — just down. Savvy?"

"I've handled them before," said Tootles cheerily, with a glance of tribute to Flick. "Go as far as you like. This is free soil."

"What made you turn around there in the hall and wish me luck?" said King O'Leary slowly.

"Don't know. Kind of felt how you felt, I suppose."

"You hit it, all right. But that's something we won't talk about. Well, lads, I suppose you're curious about me, same as I am about you. If I were to tell you all the scrapes I've been in and out of in thirty-seven years, we'd be sitting here at Easter. If any one should ask me what I did, suppose I'd have to answer — just circulate.

"That's what I've been doing — for I've been doing everything, and some of it is worth the telling, as you'll hear if we get to chumming. If you ask me what I like, I'd rather beat the box than eat. Don't know anything about it, but just can't help playing — natural ear. When I get short of funds, I wander in anywhere, café or vaudeville, and whip up the old pianner — All right, Schnapps, don't annoy the bottle — Trouble with me, I suppose is, I got to roaming early. A habit now. Am never long in one spot before something comes tugging around at my shirt sleeve and I get to dreaming of fast expresses, or sailing into blue seas, or Piccadilly on Saturday night, or the little dog-sleds up in Alasky or something far-off and similar. Times there are when I think I've come to the point of driving a stake. Suppose it'll strike me some time. I ain't quite as restless as I used to be, but just at present, why, say — if you were to suggest skipping down to Coentes Slip and shipping for Honolulu or Madagascar, I'd beat you to it."

"Do you feel that way?" said Flick, opening his eyes with delight. "Shake! You're my long-lost brother."

"However, we're not shipping before the mast," said Tootles anxiously, who saw the dinner arriving with relief. "We're eating a nice, ripe, juicy steak with friend Santa Claus."

"Where have you come from now?" said Flick, waking up.

"Had a try at Alasky, sunk it all in a bum mine and a phony partner," said O'Leary. "Got as far as Kansas City and got trimmed by a pickpocket while I snoozed. Boys, I certainly was up against it there. Had to take a job as a coachman. Mighty little I had to go on, but luck was with me. Usually is, wherever I tumble. The horses were a couple of baa-lambs that an infant could have harnessed, let alone driven. That was all right, I bluffed through that. But the old lady was a terror. The old man had struck it sudden, and she was wallowing in that carriage. She was fierce. She was a fat woman, and she swore like a mule-driver. I tell you, that month was something awful. I stood it until she drove down to the bank and paid me off, jabbing me in the back with her parasol and swearing directions under her breath. I've stood a good deal in my little canters around this globe, but I can't stand being sworn at by a fat woman on a public street."

"What did you do?" said Tootles, adding a curling strip of brown potatoes, smothered onions, and splashes of beans, peas, and carrots to each plate.

"With fifty dollars tucked away, I laid for her until out she came with a final poke in the ribs. Then I hauled in my horses, took off my livery, made her a bow, and handed it over to her with the reins, right there in the main street. By jingo, it was worth it to see her face!"

"What's the queerest job you ever landed?" said Flick, savoring the steak with gratitude.

"Queerest?" said O'Leary, scratching his head and seeming to return over a long and grotesque line. "I've done some funny things in my time."

"Tell you what I did over in Chattanooga — in red-hot midsummer, too," said Flick, in a burst of confidence. "I was a dog-catcher."

"That certainly is going down for it," said O'Leary, grinning. "But I've got you beat. I subbed in a face-parlor."

"A what?"

"Painted out black eyes and that sort of thing. Fact — out in Chicago."

"My word!" said Tootles, overjoyed to see a beam of good humor breaking through the clouds. "I wonder that I associate with such persons."

"Leaving out the dog-catcher," said O'Leary, falling with gusto to the attack of his heaped-up plate, "I do believe, with the exception of preaching and tooth-extracting, I've tried them all. I've run a country paper. There's a story there I'll give you some day. Lord! I even taught school in the Philippines to the pesky heathen. Have mined for gold, silver, copper, diamonds, and zinc, from Cripple Creek to Kimberley. I've traded and sold everything from a thousand cattle to peddling collar-buttons at the Queen's Jubilee. I've been a bartender in Paree, and into a peck of trouble, too. I've run a steam laundry in Porto Ricky and had the whole danged business washed away in a hurricane. I've dipped into a few spring revolutions in South Americky, and I rode out with Jameson in the raid that kicked out the whole African mess. Got in and out of Kimberley, and joined the Rough Riders with Teddy — here's to him! Never was much of a sailor, but I've seen my time before the mast through the Southern seas (that's how I appreciated your nautical terms, boy) when I stowed away for Chiny and Calcutta. Lord, where haven't I been?"

"O'Leary, you're either a hell of a big liar or a regular fellow," said Flick, cheerfully, "and either way, I'm for you."

"Maybe I'm blowing too much," said O'Leary quietly. "But it's sort o' whistling in the wind to keep your courage up. However, I've laid my cards on the table. That's me. Well, this is starting good enough to keep it going. What do you say to taking in a show? There's something in the line of vaudeville over at the Colonial?"

"Is there so much money in the world?" said Tootles doubtfully.

"Boy, a taxi!" said King O'Leary, pounding on the table gorgeously.

"I'm beginning to feel like the Fourth of July," said Flick, who gave in completely with this last display of magnificence.

"That's what we'll make it," said King O'Leary. "Schnapps, steal the change. Come on."

The visit to the theater was the undoing of all the good work accomplished, nor could the result have been foreseen. The orchestra was comfortably filled with an indiscriminate scattering of transients, plainly marooned, and the three friends, being resolved to laughter, applauded the opening numbers with such zest that they woke up the torpid house and had the entertainers gratefully aiming their shafts in the direction of their box for the pure joy of rousing King O'Leary's soul-filling, rumbling laughter, to hear which was infection itself. The outer world, the season, and the calendar had been shut away as they roared over the grotesque tumbles and trippings of a comic acrobat who gyrated fearfully on a bicycle the size of a house, when the curtain went down and up again on the Lovibond Sisters. "Sweet Singers from the South," who, according to the program, "would introduce sentimental favorites."

All their mirth vanished. They waited glumly through "Annie Laurie," and fidgeted as the quartet quavered into "Way Down Upon the Suwanee River," but when "My Old Kentucky Home" began, with moonlight effects on the back drop and cowbells tinkling, O'Leary got up suddenly and said:

"Hell! Let's beat it."

They emerged glumly on the sidewalk, while Flick swore copiously for the crowd and led the way down the avenue to Campeau's, where they found a table in a noisy gathering thundered over by a dynamic orchestra.

"O'Leary, it's no use," said Flick; "we can't get away from it."

"Guess you're right."

They stayed there a long while, passing into the confidential stage, while Tootles consumed large quantities of ginger ale and sought desperately to stem the rising tide, which came rolling in blackly. They had yielded to their depression, reveling in it. While King O'Leary listened, jerking at his fingers, Flick reminisced of forgotten days in a little Western town, of white Christmases when the relations gathered in jingling sleighs and the table was crowned with a wild turkey at one end and a crackling pig at the other.

"With a roast apple in his snout, and a ribbon — a blue — no, a pink ribbon decorating his ornery little tail. King, I can taste that pig yet — fact — good pig — good old pig! What did we use to call him? Can't remember." He went off into a foggy search, dipping his finger in a puddle of water on the table and seeking to reconstruct it in the shape of his remembered idol. "Looked like that — just so. There's the tail — see? We used to fight to get that tail, Lem, Minnie, and me —" He suddenly looked up, as though conscious of O'Leary's staring silence. "I say, did you used to have pig — roast pig? No? Well, what sort of Christmas did you have?"

"There was only one that counted," said King O'Leary, frowning stubbornly, "and that, son, we won't talk about."

"Why not?" said Flick indignantly. He added, as though in his clouded brain he had found the answer, "Secret sorrow — that it?"

"Call it that."

The news seemed further to depress Flick. He contemplated the shining plate with deep commiseration, shaking his head.

"All right. Sorry — mighty sorry. Felt that right off about you. Fact! Shake — shake hands."

Tootles watched Flick, a little maudlin, silently offer his hand to King O'Leary, who took it glumly and abruptly arose as though shaking off a leaden weight, saying:

"Well, I've had enough of this place. Beat it again."

They began to wander, east and west, up-town and down-town, seeking memory's oblivion, finding it always dogging their heels — a rapid, confused passage through lighted restaurants and noisy cafés, with momentary junctions in casual parties. They ended up in an all-night restaurant, where King O'Leary took possession of the piano, Tootles conducting the orchestra, while Flick, with pompous dignity, singled out the fattest and oldest ladies and made them a bow, saying with terrific dignity:

"Madam, will you accord me the honor of this dance? No? I am sorry — very sorry, but thank you, thank you perfectly jus' same."

Tootles, finally, in the wee hours, coaxed them back to the Arcade (after many a slip), and woke up Sassafras, whose fee for such gala performances was half a dollar. But on the threshold of the elevator King O'Leary suddenly remembered the alarming ascent of the afternoon and hastily imparted the information to Flick, saying:

"Wouldn't have it harm a hair of your head, not a hair. Understand? Like you, boy. No harm!"

"Must be careful, very careful," said Flick solemnly. "Won't stand great strain, see? That's the idea."

"I see," said King O'Leary, "but how?"

"That's it. How?"

"Six — all six at once — too much. Dangerous," said King O'Leary sadly. "And, son, I wouldn't have 'em harm a hair of your head, not a hair."

"I've got idea," said Flick, all at once. "No strain — you'll see — coax elevator."

Tootles, who always remained in the picture, solemnly led King O'Leary into the elevator, saying in a soothing manner,

"It's all right, King; we all trust Flick."

Wilder was so touched by this burst of confidence that he momentarily forgot his happy thought. But all at once, as they waited anxiously and expectantly, he woke up and said firmly:

"Up one!"

The elevator groaned and lumbered to the first floor.

"What now?" said Tootles.

"Out!"

The three filed forth.

"Down!"

He led the way down to the ground floor, while they followed him, mystified, and into the elevator again.

"Up *two!*" said Flick, with the gleam of a field-marshal in his eyes. "Out! Down!"

A third time they entered the elevator, mounted to the third floor and solemnly, like the King of France and all his men, descended three flights and again rose to the fourth. Again at the bottom, Flick condescended to explain:

"One flight at time — see? No strain. Always be kind to elevators — see? Coax elevators."

"Absolutely," said King O'Leary, with the dignity of an archbishop.

Tootles, inwardly convulsed, maintained a grave face, assuming the tense gravity of his two friends, mounting to the fifth floor and carefully descending the long stone flights, his hands on King O'Leary's shoulders, whose hands in turn reposed on Flick's scrawny back, which stiffened with the sense of responsibility of a chosen leader. They waited solemnly for Sassafras, standing in dusky line, for all the world like a vat, a walking-stick, and a peanut, until the elevator sank, gleaming, to the level. Then they entered, rose to the sixth floor, and congratulated Flick.

Back in the windy corridor, with two dusky spots of light overhead and empty milk-bottles before the doors, King O'Leary was seized with a new emotion, an overflowing love of mankind, and a longing to cheer blighted existences.

"Poor things,— poor miserable things!" he said, contemplating the row of shadowy doors. "No Christmas cheer."

"No peace on earth, no good-will to men," said Flick, seeing the idea and almost moved to tears.

"Son, we never thought — did we? — never thought of that."

"Never," said Flick.

"We must."

"Absolutely," said Flick, who had been struck by the word, and he frowned and asked, "What should we think?"

"We should think—" began King O'Leary, and stopped, lost in conjecture. He repeated: "We should think," and turned, looking to Flick for relief. "I say, what was the thing — the thing I told you we should think about?"

Wilder, thus appealed to, shook his head mournfully, and Tootles had visions of crowning the last two hours' labors with the blissful prospect of getting them safely into the studio and to bed, when, as luck would have it, King O'Leary's foot came in contact with a milk bottle. The rolling sound revived his memory.

"We must cheer — bring cheer — bring presents," said King O'Leary, getting at length to his thought. "Every one must have presents — Christmas presents."

Tootles here interposed hastily, with the irritation of the sober pilot who sees the harbor of rest escaping.

"To-morrow. Good idea! To-morrow we'll get presents for them all — fine — but to-morrow! Now bedtime."

This ending was unfortunate, as Tootles felt the moment he had uttered it.

"Never bedtime," said Flick indignantly.

"Presents — now — Christmas Eve — Santa Claus," said King O'Leary, with equal firmness. "Go right down — now."

"All right, then; go and get them," said Tootles, in despair, and, at the end of his patience, he entered the studio and shut the door. "Well, they'll come back in about a week, I suppose," he said angrily. "Three o'clock! Lord! I've got to get some sleep."

But to his surprise, in about half an hour he heard them returning, having accomplished the upper trip by the same gradual process. He peered cautiously out and perceived them laden with paper bags, solemnly and reverently passing from door to door and placing before each one orange, one hazel nut, and one raisin. They entered with the satisfied serenity of good Samaritans, and, perceiving Tootles in pajamas, were immediately struck by the same idea.

"We must put the child to bed," said King O'Leary.

"Absolutely. Christmas eve. Children should be asleep — all children."

They addressed him affectionately, lifted him up tenderly, and placed him in bed (Tootles was wise enough to submit), tucked him in solicitously, and chuckling over some plotted joke, got out three stockings, which they hung up with difficulty and filled from the bags.

Tootles, peeping over the coverlet, laughed to himself at their grotesque efforts and air of concentrated seriousness, waiting until they had fallen asleep on the couches. He arose, listened to the heavy breathing a moment, and, being of an economical trend, passed into the hall to collect the oranges. At O'Leary's door he perceived the end of an envelope and drew it forth.

"That's queer," he said to himself, examining it. "It's neither a bill nor an advertisement." This in itself, was an event in the Arcade. "How strange!"

He placed it between his teeth and continued on his mission. But as he reached the further end of the hall, fronting Broadway, he perceived, to his amazement, that the oranges which should be there had disappeared. He stopped, with ear on edge, listening for a sound, but no sound returned. Then he went along on tiptoe, vastly intrigued. There was the door of Lorenzo P. Drinkwater, counsellor-at-law. But there was no sign of any one's being up. Neither there, nor at the next, which bore the names of Miss Belle Shaler and Miss Pansy Hartmann, with the placard:

Out for lunch. Leave messages with elevator-man.

Miss Angelica Quirley's room was likewise dark, as was the next of Miss Millie Brewster. But opposite, through the foggy glass door inscribed " Aristide Jean-Marie Cornelius " a faint blur was showing — a telltale streak of yellow under the door.

" By Jove, it's the baron! " he said to himself, and he remained a long moment, stock-still, in surprise. " Wonder if the poor devil is actually hungry. Well, if he is —" He yielded to the good impulse, softly placed three oranges in line, and withdrew on tiptoe.

Back in the studio, he took the letter from his lips, scanned it curiously, and then inserted it in the stocking which was King O'Leary's by right of a desperate scrawl. He approached the two sleepers, drew a blanket over each and stood a moment studying the new friend who had dropped in on their existence as though he had fallen like the rain-drip through the skylight, drawing his own conclusions, neither judge nor sinner but wise young philosopher.

King O'Leary lay with his head on an outstretched arm, which showed the green tracings of a tattoo, the shock of hair well off the clear and friendly forehead, the face flushed and contracted in a painful frown, as though still under the fever of tormenting recollections.

" Not the sort that bats for nothing," thought Tootles. " The kind that drinks to forget. Wonder what the deuce is back of it all, old boy. Well, you wouldn't make a bad Santa Claus at that! "

He put out the lights slowly, one by one — the great green Chinese dragon floating in mid-air, where it had swallowed a bulb which gleamed through its belly; the twin yellow shades on either side of the door, held up by brass statues of Liberty, sadly tarnished — until only the four yellow eyes of the owls remained glowing out of the upper darkness. Then he cautiously withdrew the electric button from Flick's relaxed fingers and extinguishing these in turn, tiptoed over and went gratefully to bed.

IV

THE oldest inhabitant of the sixth floor, so ancient that he was already installed when the present Mr. Teagan had inherited the Arcade from his uncle, was a Frenchman, Mr. Cornelius, who lived in the corner room on the court overlooking the square, which had one economy that, to his mind, compensated for the thunder of the elevated, the grind of the traffic and the shrill of the newsboys which rolled through it — a providential arc-light, sputtering and furnace-white, which lit his room, once the curtains were drawn, and saved the expense of lighting. There was a tradition that he had at one time occupied the large studio at the farther end and had successively progressed down the hall to his present quarters, which, on account of the clamor of Broadway, were favored with a special price. Mr. Cornelius was in the sixties, of slight build, erect, and springy on his little feet, mustache and imperial worn in the manner of the Emperor Napoleon III, snow-white against the dusky Spanish tan of his complexion and the still eloquent eyes of mellow brown. His features were delicate and finely chiseled, especially the nose, and one eyebrow was noticeably lifted, which gave him an alert expression. In his youth he must have been remarkably handsome, in a dashing, wild-animal way that appealed to women. He lived in seclusion, scrupulously polite whenever in the elevator he encountered a neighbor, but opening his door only to one person — Miss Pansy Hartmann, who had won his confidence and posed for the dilettante sketches it amused him to make, while she read mechanically to him from yellowed books of which she understood not a word — Pascal, the letters of Madame de Sévigné, and the works of Voltaire. He wore a nightcap with a tassel, and for days never left his room, occasionally appearing in a faded peacock-blue dressing-gown. Each Sunday, however, he donned a Prince Albert coat of forgotten lines, scrupulously clean, though shiny and mended, put on a black stock and brought out from some treasure-box a top-hat of swirling lines, such as the celebrated Victor Hugo was wont to wear, inclined it slightly over one ear, and, taking gloves and silver-studded cane in hand, walked magnificently to church and back again.

Several things were inexplicable in his habits. No one knew when he slept, while curious whirring noises were heard over the transom after the fall of night. On the first days of each month, sometimes for two nights, never for more than three, he donned his gala attire, ordered a taxi from the opposite hotel and gave orders to the chauffeur to drive to Delmonico's. When he returned, Sassafras always noticed a gardenia in his button-hole. The rest of the month he skimped along, no one knew how except little Pansy, who by a pretense of feeding the parrot, which was his sole companion, contrived to leave daily a third of a bottle of milk and a good portion of bread.

In the room next to Mr. Cornelius, who was called " the baron," was a tiny old lady, Miss Angelica Quirley, who had nested there for a decade in the company of a shivering, jerky little black-and-tan terrier, Rudolph (in memory perhaps of an unhappy romance), who was known as " the fire-hound " from the uncanny instinct with which he could rouse the Arcade with his yapping at the slightest smoldering. Miss Quirley spent her time dressing dolls for toy shops, mending old favorites, and painting into china cheeks rosebud smiles to gladden the hearts of unknown children. She was all in a flutter when she had to pass any one and began to bob her graying curls when she was still yards away, until the gold-rimmed spectacles all but fell off — for all the world like a fairy godmother. Children would have flocked to her knee, only, unfortunately, there were no children there. And so Miss Quirley went on bobbing and smiling, longing for some one to listen to but never quite mustering up her courage to approach a friendship. In the morning she would peer timidly from her door to make sure that no one could see her, before hastily emerging in wrapper and slippers to gather in the milk and rolls.

Next to Miss Quirley was a lawyer, lately arrived, Lorenzo Pinto Drinkwater, a Portuguese Yankee, who had an office on the second floor, and who seemed to envelop all his movements with an instinctive mystery and was believed not only to exercise the profession accredited him but to be not averse to lending money as well at profitable returns. He had the Yankee body, lank and ribbed, and was so tall that his head seemed always looking over a transom. The face was handsome, in a dark, gipsy way, and the eyes, despite their shiftiness, had a certain flashy attraction. He dressed loudly, and spoke in a confidential whisper. Several times he had sought to open a conversation with "the baron," who evidently had aroused his ferreting instincts, but Mr. Cornelius, despite his usual courtesy, had openly snubbed him.

Across the passage from the elevator to the hall, next to King O'Leary's room, was the home of Miss Myrtle Popper, manicurist and marcel-waver, who had looked kindly on O'Leary as he stood in the Arcade before Joey Shine's barber shop, wondering to whom he could send a present. She had come from New Hartford, Connecticut, with a yearning for the greater advantages of metropolitan society, tall, clear-eyed, a Junoesque figure, undeniably stunning, with her youth, her vibrant health, her smiling green eyes and her miraculous coils of ruddy hair. She had thoroughly enjoyed her first winter in New York society, and was slangy, pert, calmly determined to be amused and as equally determined to hold her head high, quite capable of taking care of herself, a democrat by association and a philosopher by a native shrewdness, amusing and amused.

Across the hall from Mr. Cornelius was another arrival of the autumn, a migratory type of which the Arcade had seen many a flight — Miss Minnie Brewster from the Middle West, who had come to New York with golden dreams of an operatic career and who paid an unhanged charlatan the sum of five dollars a quarter of an hour for refusing to tell her the truth about her sweet, toylike voice. She was a pretty country plant, sadly transplanted, a fragile blonde, with an angelic face and starry eyes, destined for simpler things, and quite helpless when confronting the world alone. She was dying of loneliness.

The two models who roomed together in the adjoining studio (whom Millie was longing to meet and lay awake nights constructing conversations which would lead to an acquaintance), Miss Belle Shaler and Miss Pansy Hartmann, were daughters of New York, utterly opposite in temperament and inclination, but fast friends by the bond of a long and united front against the perplexities, the trials, and the tribulations of their existence.

Belle Shaler was a noted character in the art circles in New York, through which she roamed slangy, cheeky, outswearing a man, flying occasionally into the temper of a fishwife, but with the biggest heart in the world — a female gamin, up out of the slums, always ready to wage battle against injustice or for misfortune, speaking her mind brusquely, a terror to pretense and hypocrites; a jewel of a model, with lithe, slender limbs and delicate curves, despite her sandy hair bobbed short and the upturned urchin's nose, defiant and satirical. She made herself at home wherever she pleased, carrying the gossip of the profession, welcomed everywhere, in the studios of celebrated illustrators on the West Side, in the lofts of sculptors on the top floor of Healy's, or rambling through the outer regions of Washington Square and Greenwich Village always ready for a spree, brimming over with vitality and a cocky summons to the world to amuse her.

Pansy was of opposite type, soft-eyed soft-spoken and gentle, without Belle's beauty of limb, but like a dark and velvety flower, with her soft oval, blushing face and Oriental eyes which seemed to crowd her eyelids; — all feminine, a virtue by which she had made a deep and disquieting mark on the impressionable heart of Tootles. She knew little of her own life. She had been a model as a child, with blurred memories of older and harsher beings about her who had long since faded away. She had an archness in her smile, and one eyebrow noticeably uplifted, in a manner so strikingly like the baron's that every one commented on it. Indeed, she might easily have passed for his daughter, nor could he have treated her with more deference, punctiliously surrounding her with formality, always leaving the door open with ostentation when she came to visit him. She was very fond of the aristocratic, lonely old man with an impulsive kindliness which was deep in her nature.

Between their room and the abode of Art and Literature was the home of Ludovic Schneibel, a dentist by necessity, with offices on the third floor, but with a spiritual yearning toward art, literature, and music, and, in particular, the company of artists. He was a squatty, fiery-headed and fiery-worded Swiss-American, in the forties, lame in one leg, and given to velvet coats and flowing neckties. He executed fearful compositions of Alpine storms over leaden lakes with large rainbows in the background, being indeed without any talent but the love of painting, yet selling his canvases to the large department-stores to set off their stock of gilt frames. He worked at night and during holidays, singing unmusically sentimental ballads, with occasional outbursts of yodeling whenever the creative fit was strong. He was a lovable, social tramp, and any rascal in long hair with the requisite jargon could reach his sympathies and his pocketbook. Everything to him was an enthusiasm; Tootles vowed he could go into a paroxysm over a cold potato.

Down the hall, at the extreme back, in the little studio next to King O'Leary's, was a Miss Inga Sonderson, of whom the Arcade knew as little as they did of Mr. Aristide Jean-Marie Cornelius (if indeed that were his true name, which no one believed). Belle Shaler had posed for her several times — she did posters, covers, and decorative sketches — and had a peaceful memory of filmy coverings and hangings, harmonies in gray and green like the brooding sea, neat couches and window boxes of pungent and bright flowers. She seemed twenty-four or twenty-five — possibly a year or so older — repressed and contemplative — as one who, contrary to the ordinary prejudice, never used conversation to think out loud.

Her body was like a youth's, firm and supple, and when she moved, the eye went to the hip immediately as a center of grace — of that flowing grace which one sees in the poised female figures on Grecian friezes. Her hair, which was a profound black with the depth in it of a forest pool, had certain blue, furtive gleams which perhaps only an artist would have noticed. She wore it braided and drawn over her forehead in a Swedish coil, rather severe in movement. The face was fragile, unusually dark, with the darkness of the Northlander, and two things were remarkable in it — the eyes and the upper lip, which was unusually sensitive and the first to quiver with any strong emotion which was elsewhere repressed. The eyes were the blue of cold, open waters, with a mist of gray — like a curtain drawn across her soul, beyond which no one, not even the man who came to love her, ever penetrated. She dressed in simple lines and quiet tones, dark blues and black, with only a broad lace collar and cuffs in neat relief. She appeared haughty; Tootles ,who, as well as Flick, had been romantically attracted, referred to her as "Lady Vere de Vere." As a matter of fact, she was not haughty at all, and utterly unaristocratic, as Belle Shaler, that ardent social anarchist, admitted herself. She was simply self-sufficient. Whatever her antecedents, she spoke English naturally, as though she had been born to it, with a low, rather guttural, but pleasant note, curiously soothing; and yet she might have been a waif from a distant Scandinavian region of encroaching night and wan, midnight days. Despite their curiosity, no one would have dreamed of questioning her, not even Belle Shaler, who was unaccountably silent under the sea-blue eyes which looked out at her as though through a mist.

Opposite this room, at the back corner, was the show studio of the Arcade. A genius now passed into society had inhabited it, and the tradition remained. Yet it had had an unlucky history. Those who had held it had not held it long, and the last occupant, a friend of Inga Sonderson's, Champeno, a young sculptor of great promise, had disappeared under a cloud, leaving his furniture in forfeit. For a month it had stood empty, until several days before the opening of this story, when the rumor went around that it had been let to an artist by the name of Dangerfield, and the curiosity of the Arcade was further excited by the appearance of numerous packing boxes of unusual size, suggesting furniture *de luxe.*

This was the situation on the sixth floor back among these social stragglers enclosed in narrow prisons of their own choosing, secretly yearning for each other's company, when on Christmas day, invitations issued jointly by Mr. St. George Kidder, Mr. Flick Wilder, and Mr. King O'Leary fell among them like carnival bombs.

V

THERE was only one thing in life that bothered Tootles greatly, and that was the getting out of bed in the morning. It was high noon by a shaft of sunlight that beat persistently on his Wellingtonian nose, when he finally determined to try the influence of mind over matter according to a method all his own.

' I see myself skipping gracefully over to the washbasin," he said aloud.

The Mind was attentive, but Matter did not bulge. He decided to modify the test.

" I see myself standing proudly on my own feet by the side of my bed."

Still no result.

" I see one of my legs thrust from the covers," he persisted, in the line of the best psychopathic suggestion. Immediately, one lavender pajama emerged. " I see both of my legs out. I see myself raising myself to a sitting position," he continued triumphantly, and, suiting the action to the word, he sat bolt upright. At the same moment, King O'Leary rose to a sitting position. They confronted each other thus drowsily a moment, and then smiled, and the smile seemed to descend over the accidental meeting with the binding cement of friendship.

" Well, Santa Claus, how are you?" said Tootles, with the superior cruelty of the teetotaler.

King O'Leary made a wry face, and ran his hand nervously through his hair.

" Was I pretty bad last night?"

" My boy, I thought you were charming," said Tootles, encouragingly, "particularly when you put me to bed and hung up my stocking. Mother couldn't have done it more gently."

"Good Lord, I don't get that way once in a dog's age!" said King O'Leary, rather ashamed; and he asked, nervously: "Did I get to shooting off my mouth?"

"You talked," said Tootles, descending, "but you kept a tight lip. You said nothing you didn't want to, old cockywax."

This seemed to reassure O'Leary. He rose, shaking himself together, and his glance fell on the three suspended socks bulging grotesquely.

"Did I do that?" he said, with a wan smile.

"Don't you remember playing Santa Claus up and down the hall?"

"No; but I remember something about riding miles and miles in an elevator."

Flick Wilder now began to return, talking violently and flopping about in the last stages of a nightmare.

"Whoa there! Catch him! Hold on to him! Don't let go of him — head off that camel!"

"Wake up!" said Tootles, shaking him. "Where do you think you are?"

"Where's Sassafras?" said Flick frantically, betwixt the dream and the reality. "Good Lord, I thought that elevator had broken loose — riding him down Broadway, when he turned into Elsie, the camel!"

He stared at King O'Leary a moment in confusion, and then a light dawned.

"Oh, hello! Well, King, you're the real guy. How are you?"

"Fine," said King O'Leary, as cheerfully as such answers are given the morning after.

"Art, you may start the coffee," said Flick, yawning. "What's that — oranges?"

"You don't remember decorating the hall?" said Tootles, lighting the percolator.

"I do," said Flick, whose memory was remarkable. He added sternly: "King, the infant has stolen our Christmas presents — presents we gave the floor. All our kind intentions are beaten by this son of a thief."

"I may have taken away the Christmas presents," said Tootles unfeelingly, "but I was thinking of Christmas breakfast, likewise Christmas lunch and Christmas dinner."

King O'Leary immediately, with an air of great apprehension, dove into his clothes, while they awaited the result of the search with increasing anxiety.

O'Leary straightened up, displaying a last remaining handful of small coin.

"Shake yourself," said Flick, alarmed.

"You fed one greenback to a cab-horse down at the Café Boulevard," said Tootles, trying to be helpful.

"Seventy-nine cents," said King O'Leary ruefully.

"You can buy a lot of peanuts for that," said Flick, "and, believe me, peanuts are nourishing."

"Beans are cheap, so is macaroni," said Tootles, considering. "We might get three twenty-five-cent lunches at Brannigan's bar." By this, O'Leary understood that he was definitely adopted by virtue of the axiom of what was his was theirs. "Brannigan's a friend of mine. Might stretch it a little if I offered to paint his portrait. What did you give Sassafras?"

"Fifty cents, of course."

"Every time you got into the elevator?"

"By Jove, that's so."

"Great system of yours, Flick. Sassafras has got six of it. Of course, we might murder Sassafras," said Tootles unfeelingly. "Never mind; there's the stockings. They're full of nuts."

O'Leary went to them and emptied them on the table, perceiving the letter for the first time. He took it up, looking at it suspiciously.

"I don't like these things," he said, frowning.

"Neither do I," said Tootles. "They send you a bill nowadays like a billet-doux."

Flick began to repeat, doubtfully.

"Bill — billet-doux; billet-doux — bill."

"What are you doing now?" said Tootles, perceiving Flick resorting to his note-book.

"I might work up that elevator story," said Wilder, who had abandoned the pun. "There's a meal in that."

"Yes; but that's to-morrow," said Tootles.

"Kick me," said O'Leary, all at once, staring at the open letter.

"Perfectly willing to, but why?" said Tootles, approaching.

"Kick me — bite me — stick a pin in me," said O'Leary wildly.

"Wish it was that fellow Drinkwater," said Tootles, who availed himself, however, of the first alternative.

"Then I am awake," said O'Leary solemnly. "Listen."

Perceiving that something startling had happened, they gathered around while O'Leary read:

South Washington, Oklahoma.

King O'Leary.

Dear Sir:

By the will of your second cousin, Halloran O'Leary, deceased October last, I am directed to transmit to each of the beneficiaries so as to reach them on Christmas day exactly, the sum of one thousand dollars ($1000), which I enclose.

Sincerely yours,
McDavitt & Courtney,
Attorneys.

"Let me read it," said Flick, while Tootles gazed anxiously at King O'Leary, in doubt as to the effect on his heart. Then they all sat down and looked at each other.

"Say something," said Flick angrily, at last.

"I feel like praying," said Tootles weakly. "I believe I'll believe in Santa Claus."

They examined the letter again, passing it from hand to hand, turning it over and over in a sort of stupefaction, without finding a flaw. Even the draft was at sight on a New York bank.

"King," said Flick reverently, "never let me hear you curse Christmas again."

"Never again." He gazed at the check overwhelmed. "My Lord, how can we ever spend that money!"

"Art and Literature will help you," said Tootles cheerfully.

The problem was a terrific one. They all sat down to think again.

"Boys, we've brought each other luck," said King O'Leary, with a sudden glow. "Here's my proposition: If you like me as I like you, I'll move my old tune-box in to-night and pay a year's rent."

Flick and Tootles first shook his hand with emotion, giving him, so to speak, the accolade, and then protested.

"You're one of us, but nix on that rent idea. I'm firmly against that," said Tootles. "Suppose we went up in smoke?"

"But how the deuce, then, are we to get away with it?" said King O'Leary, frowning. "If I invest it, some one else will get it. By golly, this time I'm going to have a run for my money! We must do the thing up in a big way — one grand splash. We might move over to the St. Regis and take the bridal suite."

Flick was visibly impressed at this possibility of entering society, but Tootles turned the idea aside with the suggestion of a superior craftiness.

"And after it's gone, what good will it do you? No, no; spend it where it will leave grateful memories," he said wisely. "Keep it right around the block."

"Them's is wise words," said Flick, yielding at once. "Tootles, you lack a heart, but you're wise. It's a wonder, though, you didn't gum it all by stealing those oranges."

"Pooh! I'm not superstitious," said Tootles, while King O'Leary was still immersed in the distressing problem of how to get rid of the perplexing windfall.

"I am," said Flick, "for let me tell you right now that this is the reward of virtue, *my* virtue. You needn't throw up your hands. It's what comes of having a kind heart. Yes, even toward elevators — always remember the milk of human kindness," continued Flick, looking at Tootles reproachfully.

"Right you are," said King O'Leary, with conviction, for his faith was of the simplest. And suddenly he exploded: "Flick, you've found it. By golly, son, I'll tell you now how we'll start to crack that check!"

"How?"

"We'll have a Christmas of our own — a tree with presents for every one, and a Christmas dinner with a turkey and a pig — yes, sir, a roast pig!" His eyes began to snap as he enlarged upon his idea. "Boys, we'll have them in, every lonely mother's son of them — daughters, too! We'll have an orchestra and decorate the studio — By jingo, we'll give the old place the greatest shebang these regions have ever known!"

"King O'Leary," said Tootles rapturously, "tell me the truth — *are* you Santa Claus?"

An hour later there was deposited at the door of each room along the hall, to the amazement of each occupant, the following card, jointly composed and decorated with Christmas designs by Tootles, in which a tree, a turkey, and a roast pig disported:

WHY BE GLUM?
GET TOGETHER AND SWAT THAT GROUCH!
MR. ST. GEORGE KIDDER, MR. FLICK WILDER,
AND MR. KING O'LEARY
INVITE YOU TO A LITTLE CHRISTMAS OF
THEIR OWN
ONE GLITTERING, GUZZLING GORGE,
including a monster TURKEY and a genuine roast PIG,
prepared absolutely regardless of expense.
CHRISTMAS DINNER AT 7
CHRISTMAS TREE AT 9.
CHRISTMAS DANCE AT 10.

MR. FLICK WILDER will carve the roast pig;
MR. KING O'LEARY will tickle the ivories;
MR. ST. GEORGE KIDDER will amuse.

COME AND ENJOY YOURSELVES
STAY AWAY AND BE DAMNED.

R. S. V. P.

VI

DURING the afternoon King O'Leary performed wonders. Healy's, through the mediation of that friend of struggling artists, Pat (blessed be his memory along with Abou Ben Adhem and the Good Samaritan!) had agreed to hold the check and even to advance a hundred dollars cash in consideration of the magnificent order for the evening. Tootles, who was left in charge of the studio as the Committee on Decorations, beheld in successive stages of amazement the arrival of a Christmas tree, followed by two urchins staggering under wreaths with trailing red ribbons and green garlands sufficient to decorate a theater, an immense clump of mistletoe, which he immediately suspended to the snout of the Chinese dragon; and while he was yet in the throes of apprehension that King O'Leary's thousand dollars had been dissipated, a brigade of waiters arrived, who built up, as though by magic, a table capable of seating a score. On top of this followed two florists (one evidently having proven incapable of filling King O'Leary's desires), who further transformed the studio with potted flowers and palms and left a moist, tissue-filled box redolent with *boutonnières*.

By five o'clock acceptances had come in from every one except Drinkwater and Inga Sonderson — and also Dangerfield, who, however, had probably not yet moved in. At six, Flick and King O'Leary, returning laden with presents, stopped at the door with exclamations of wonder at the miracle they themselves had wrought. The studio had disappeared under the verdant arbor, while a wonderful spangled tree rose like a fairy dream, in one corner. In the center the snowy white spread of the table, sparkling with silver and the glass that snuggled among the green decorations, seemed prepared for a ducal banquet in some sylvan hunting-lodge.

At seven o'clock the guests arrived: Mr. and Mrs. Teagan, who had been especially and strategically invited — Mr. Teagan very dignified and stiff in dinner coat and fat black tie; Mrs. Teagan, rustling good naturedly and beaming forth from a gorgeous pink-satin ball gown with black stomacher — Millie Brewster in blue frock cut properly high and loaded with flounce on flounce of ancient lace; the baron in the evening suit which he wore to Delmonico's, blue-velvet collar and brass-buttoned vest, with a cut of black-satin ribbon across the frilled shirt; Miss Quirley in a marvelous black-lace gown over a pink silk foundation, with dainty wristlets; Schneibel in green-velvet smoking-jacket and red tie of a totally different hue from his hair; Belle Shaler and Pansy Hartmann in evening gowns, popular editions of the latest styles, presented to them by illustrators in search of heroines of high society; while Tootles, who did the honors, moved among them like a dancing master, more English than ever in a snug dinner coat, with his chin reposing on a high white stockade. Flick had dressed for the evening by the simple expedient of adding a *boutonnière* to his faithful (the expression is his) ruddy chestnut suit, eclipsing King O'Leary, who remained the roving democrat that he was. Finally, Myrtle Popper arrived the last, on a calculated entrance, towering in mauve, loaded with brooches and sparklers and distilling perfume.

Once gathered, a certain unease unaccountably fell over the party. Mr. and Mrs. Teagan stood alone, clinging to each other, as Schneibel roamed about, admiring the back drops which he believed the work of Tootles. Miss

Quirley looked so frightened when the baron tried to open a conversation, while Myrtle Popper and Millie Brewster looked each other over with such visible amazement that King O'Leary, fearing the party was going on the rocks, cried,

"Every one find his place at the table."

A moment later each guest was gazing in wonder, first at a large portion of caviar ingeniously reposing among clusters of chopped onions, eggs, and lemons, and, second, at the following menu:

FIRST ANNUAL DINNER
MENU

Caviar Celery Olives Salted Almonds
Turtle Soup
Oysters on the Half-Shell
Vermont Turkey with Cranberry Sauce
Roast Pig with Fried Apples
Baked Sweet Potatoes Mashed Potatoes Succotash
Lobster Salad
Plum Pudding Pistache Ice-cream Angel Cake
Demi-tasse

Schneibel and Millie were visibly alarmed at the spectacle of the caviar, while the rest of the party, before the magnitude of the task before them, seemed struck dumb, perceiving which, King O'Leary rose and spoke as follows:

"Friends: You have noticed, I suppose, at the head of the menu, that this is the first annual feed. Now, I'm not much on a speech, and this ain't a speech. We're here to get together. That's my motto: If you've got a gold mine or a tooth-ache — get together! Let some one else share it. Sort of struck me that we had as much right to a Christmas of our own as some one else — this is the answer. If any one doesn't like anything here, or anything goes wrong — blame me. As for me, I hope you'll like me, as I have made up my mind to like you. And after seeing a lot of this old world, I reckon one of us is just as good as another, and if I brought you together, why —"

Here he stopped suddenly, fidgeted, and sat down, amid immense applause.

In ten minutes the party was off at top speed, every one laughing and rattling on in a high voice, utterly regardless of whether any one was listening or not, as though each had been released from solitary confinement and had to talk for the month of repression endured. The first shyness wore off. They gazed gratefully at King O'Leary and then at each other, wondering why they had kept apart so long, so utterly happy that, at times, they stopped and caught their breaths. To attempt to give an adequate idea of this mixed conflict is impossible. The room rang with such remarks as these:

"I'm going to eat that lobster salad if I die for it."

"Tootles, where did you find him — he's wonderful!"

"Waiter — hist, waiter — a little more of that there pig, and a bit of the bark!"

"Teagan, you're all right — here's to you!"

"Get out of my plate, you dog! Oh, you wanted to help me to some succotash? Well, why didn't you say so?"

"Whache think o' the swell that's movin' in at the corner? Didche ask him to the party?"

"Say, I'll tell you one thing."

"What?"

"He's got a real fur coat — real fur."

"Did you ask him?"

"Sorry he's not moved in yet."

"Sure he is. Didn't Pansy get a squint in his studio? He came in to-day," said Belle.

"Who else didn't come?" said Myrtle Popper (who had vowed to eat lobster), looking at King O'Leary from her smiling green eyes.

"Drinkwater and the girl at the end."

"Oh, *her!*"

"Lady Vere de Vere."

"Sonderson's all right," said Belle Shaler loudly. "What's wrong? Couldn't she see you?"

Tootles, who had placed himself next to Pansy, who looked unusually fragrant, indignantly defended himself amid shouts of laughter. And they had just risen joyously, when the door opened and Drinkwater's high face and roving eyes appeared.

"Sorry, most sorry. Didn't get your invitation until just now," he said, sliding in. He spoke just above a whisper, every fifth word interrupted by a nervous blowing out of the breath through his nose, which he tweaked constantly. "Am I too late?"

"Not at all; you're welcome, Drinkwater. This is open house to-night," said King O'Leary, with outstretched hand. "My name's O'Leary. Come on and meet the bunch."

The new arrival cast a momentary chill on the group, a new element difficult to assimilate, while several remarked that he came in as the thirteenth — a coincidence which many later recalled. There was something too eager, too effusive in his greeting as he made the rounds. When he came to the baron, the latter barely acknowledged his salute with the slightest of nods, a reception which Drinkwater did not appear to notice in the least. When the introductions were over, he went directly to the side of Pansy, to the evident and rising amazement of Tootles.

However, the tree was waiting, and amid the shock of surprise at the unexpected appearance of presents, neatly done up and addressed to each, they momentarily forgot the unwelcome element. In default of the usual bazaars O'Leary had returned with the spoils of half a dozen pawn-shops. There was an old black-lace fan with carved ivory sticks for Miss Quirley, which so exactly matched her gown that she sat down and cried, quietly confessing, in a burst of confidence, that it replaced one she had been forced to sell a dozen years before. There were brooches and bracelets for the other ladies, not imitations but real silver and gold with genuine stones — which left them enraptured and stupefied. The baron, Drinkwater, and Schneibel received stick-pins, while Tootles and Flick were themselves amazed to receive each a real-gold watch. To escape the torrent of thanks, King O'Leary, blushing and happy, bolted to the piano; the colored orchestra, which had just arrived, struck up, and in a moment the whole company was whirling around the studio, from which the tables had disappeared.

In the midst of the second dance, Madame Probasco, the medium directly below, rushed up in stormy protest, followed by a Mr. Dean, a pale young man who was studying to be a veterinary surgeon. Madame Probasco was a fat, rolly lady, dressed in Gypsy shawls and glittering ear-rings, whose yellow corkscrew curls, streaked with gray, came straggling over her washed-out features so that she looked more like a wild spirit herself than one who was supposed to tame them and call them forth. At the sight of Mrs. Teagan revolving in the arms of Flick, and the landlord himself capering with Belle Shaler in a step absolutely his own, her anger vanished in open-mouthed amazement, and before she could recover, King O'Leary had her about the waist and spinning among the others, while the pale young man who had been craning over her shoulder, fled bashfully.

Sassafras now came in for an exhibition of double shuffling and a visit to the punch-bowl. Mr. and Mrs.

Teagan, already in uproarious spirits, followed with an Irish jig, whereupon Schneibel volunteered to give an exhibition of yodeling.

By this time, several facts were apparent to all: first, that Myrtle Popper and Minnie Brewster had eyes only for King O'Leary, of which he seemed quite unconscious, and second, that the introduction of Drinkwater into the group was destined to have disagreeable consequences. Tootles, who was good humor itself, was in a thundering rage at the lawyer's continued attentions to Pansy, who, strange to say, seemed rather to relish them.

"Damn him! Why doesn't he keep his eyes quiet?" he said to Belle Shaler, who was trying to pacify him. "What's he trying to discover around here, anyhow? He'd better be careful what he does. Why — the cheeky blackguard!"

This exclamation was drawn from him by the sight of Drinkwater, who had maneuvered Pansy under the mistletoe (which every one seemed to have neglected up to the present), availing himself of this undeniable privilege. Tootles started forward angrily, and there is no telling what might have happened had not King O'Leary, who had noticed his fury, saved the day by catching Miss Quirley in the same predicament amid shrieks of laughter. Tootles, in the general scramble that now took place, was forced to relinquish his grouch, while King O'Leary, profiting by a favorable moment, caught Drinkwater's arm not too gently and swung him around.

"Look out — you hurt!" said the latter, with an exclamation of pain.

"Sorry," said King O'Leary, squeezing the harder, "but a word to you. Go easy — you're trespassing — do you get me?"

To any other, Drinkwater might have returned an impudent answer — one indeed was on his lips; but he looked a second time at King O'Leary's steady eyes, scowled, and turned away, for a while at least devoting himself elsewhere. Mr. Cornelius, who had witnessed the episode, came to King O'Leary and offered his hand with dignity.

"Thanks, Meester O'Leary. If you had not do it, I should have! The man is *canaille!*"

To the surprise of every one, Flick volunteered to sing a comic song, at the conclusion of which it was voted, on Tootles' motion, that it was the sentiment of the assemblage that he should never be permitted a second transgression. Millie Brewster, to offset Flick's offending, was prevailed upon to sing, and chose to render "The Lass o' Bonnie Dundee," which she sang in such a sweet if slight voice that a sudden gloom fell about the room, as though through the fragile illusion of jollity they had so courageously built up, the hard, lonely facts of their lives had suddenly struck in. Mr. Cornelius was tugging at his mustache; Tootles, whose cup was overflowing anyhow, was staring glumly ahead, while through the heavy silence could be heard the sniffle of Miss Quirley and the throaty sob of Madame Probasco, who had become more and more human.

"I, too, will sing a sentimental ballad," said Schneibel, his red-bobbed head glowing with redder enthusiasm.

"No, you won't," said King O'Leary resolutely. "I know the kind of stuff you love — moonbeams and gravestones! Nothing but yodeling for you, old friend Schneibel! Here, we've got to break this up! Every one on the floor, and all tune up. Who knows 'We'll all go down to Casey's'? – Good! Come on now, knock the blues higher than a kite. One — two — three!"

"We'll all go down to Casey's
And we'll have a little gin,

And we'll sit upon the sand
Till the tide comes in,
Till the tide comes in;
And we'll sit upon the sand
Till the tide comes in."

"Right over again and faster," said King O'Leary. "That's the way, Miss Quirley; you're a sport. That's right — thump the floor; beat time anyhow!"

They were chanting this memory-haunting snatch for the third time, clapping hands in rhythm and struggling amid laughter to get their breaths, when the door was flung violently open and Dangerfield appeared, top-hat, fur coat and the gleam of a white tie.

The chorus died down immediately. Every one was struck by the strangeness of his entrance. He looked bigger and rougher than he was, muffled up in the great coat, with a flurry of snow on the shoulders, over which could be seen the white of two other faces peering curiously in. He took off his hat slowly, as he saw the company, but in a dazed way, and stood there blinking at them, for all the world like a great bear wandering into the glare of a camp-fire. There was indeed something restless and shaggy about him that struck them all as he stood there, staring into the room. The head was full and round with an abundance of curly black hair, grizzled at the temples, with one white lock that rose from the forehead like a white flame. The face was wide-spaced and rather flat, the yellow-green eyes were deep set with distended pupils, very animal-like — eyes that glowed and set in sudden fixed stares.

Evidently the party had startled him — perhaps it was the presence of women, which he had not foreseen, for after a moment he seemed to recover himself with an effort and said a few words which caused his companions to scuttle away and took a step into the room, smiling courteously, without a trace of the former wild, almost unbalanced stare.

"I am afraid I owe you an apology," he said quietly. "My friends mistook this for my studio. I hope you will forgive the rudeness of my intrusion."

During the moments which had followed the flying open of the door, the entire company had remained hushed under the spell of the brusque incident. Every one had the same feeling — there was something out of place with the man, dressed as he was, here in the Arcade alone on Christmas night — something indefinably wrong, though what it was each would have been hard put to it to express. In this short moment, where each man felt that he was in trouble, there was something about him, a certain weakness or a certain childlike wildness, that went to the heart of every woman present — a quality the man had of being lovable (for it was unconscious) despite all his faults. He had bowed and started to withdraw, before King O'Leary came to.

"Hold up, friend — you must be Dangerfield, aren't you?"

"Dangerfield?" said the new arrival, stopping. "Yes, that's my name."

"Then you've fallen in right. There's an invitation waiting for you in your room for this same shebang."

"An invitation?" said Dangerfield slowly, and he passed his hand over his brow, which was splendid and open. Many noticed the effort which he seemed to put into his words. "I was out, probably. If I had been there, I assure you I would have come with the greatest of pleasure. It's my loss," he added, with a smile that seemed to appeal for their friendship.

"Never too late, neighbor. This is a get-together party. Drop your duds and join us."

"May I? Thank you," he said, but he continued to stand there without a move to shed his overcoat, until Flick, who had been watching him narrowly, approached, saying:

"Let me give you a hand. Wilder's my name. Glad to know you."

He seemed to recall himself, and slipped from the heavy coat.

A curious thing among the many curious things of this night was that immediately all the others came up to be introduced to Dangerfield, with an instinctive tribute, or the feeling that the man was in deep trouble. Drinkwater was among the first, his nervous, prying little eyes fairly fastened on the other in his excitement. Dangerfield shook each hand cordially, with a smile that seemed to transform his whole expression into one of democracy and kindliness, giving to his greeting of each woman present a touch of exquisite deference.

Then a strange thing happened.

"Mr. Cornelius," said King O'Leary. "There's a string of names I wouldn't dare tackle. We call him 'the baron.'"

"Mr. Cornelius, I am very —" said Dangerfield, and then raised his head and stopped short. The baron, too, was staring at him as though he had seen a vision of the past, mumbling over and over as though dissatisfied, "Meester Dangerfeel — Dangerfeel ——"

It was only a moment, but every one perceived it, while Drinkwater's face was fairly quivering with interest. Each caught himself up and bowed, but for a moment across the face of Dangerfield had come again that sudden, startled, bearlike stare which seemed the frightened uprising of another nature struggling within him.

What happened after that came so suddenly that few could remember it clearly. The orchestra had broken into a rattling two-step, and the studio was shaking with the shuffling of feet; Dangerfield had not moved from his original position, and remained thus staring for so long a while that most had forgotten him, when all of a sudden there was a warning shout from Tootles, a scream from Pansy, and the next moment Dangerfield had reeled and fallen with a crash to the floor.

There was a babel of cries — some one calling to the orchestra to stop, Miss Quirley sobbing, and the baron calling for a glass of water, while Mr. Teagan rushed to and fro volubly, doing nothing at all — when in the midst of this turmoil, without any one knowing how she had gotten there, or indeed, noticing anything strange in her appearance, Inga Sonderson was seen kneeling at the side of the fallen man, examining him quietly and in a businesslike manner.

"He must be carried into his own room," she said, after a quick examination. "When he comes to, there must be quiet — absolute quiet. He must be gotten there now." Her eyes fell on King O'Leary. "You're strong; can you carry him?"

For answer he stooped and lifted the senseless body, but not without an effort, for the man was powerfully built. Every one seemed at once to turn to Inga, as though recognizing a providential authority.

"Is he alive?"

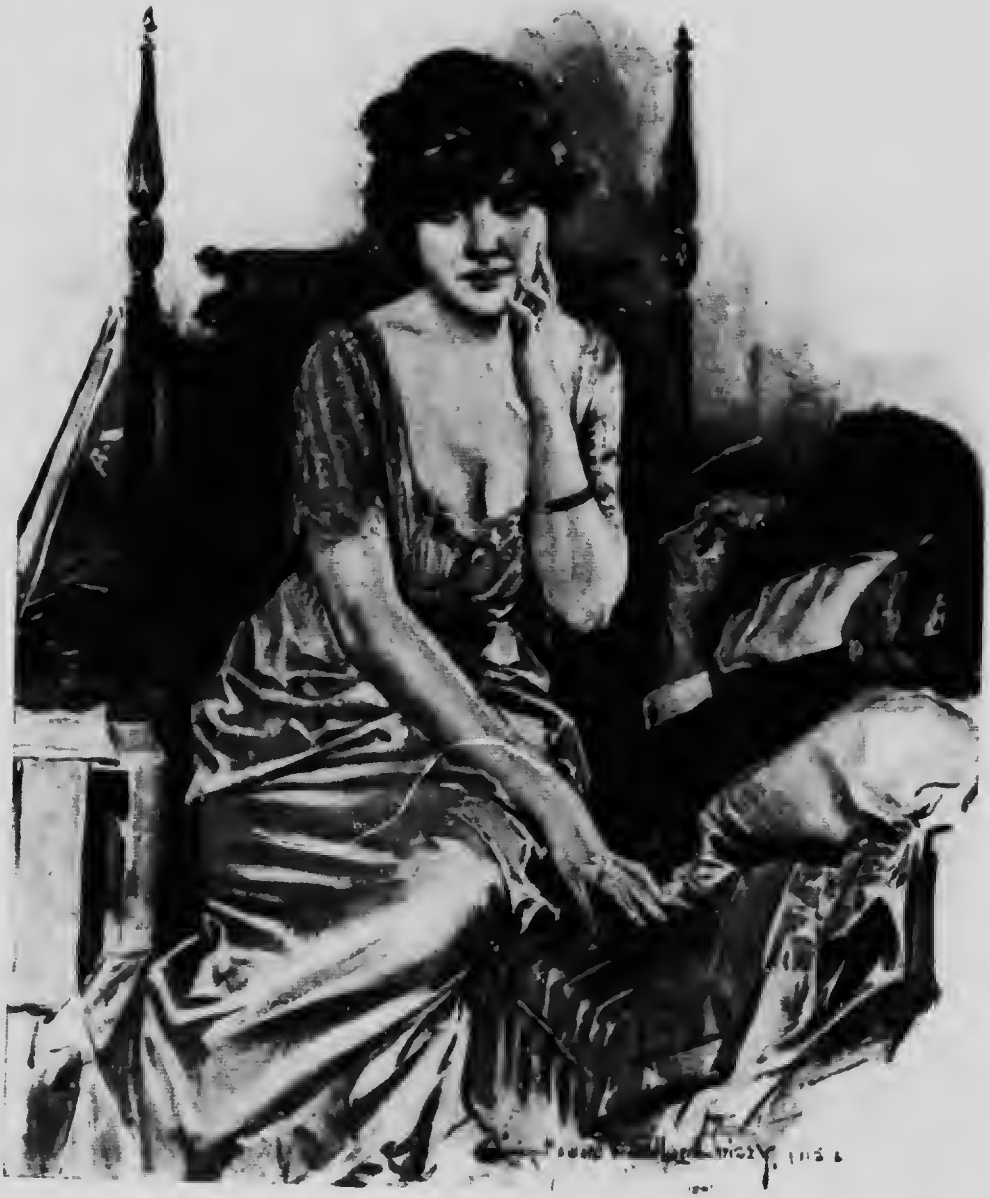
"What was it — heart-stroke?"

"Apoplexy?"

"But is his studio ready?"

"His studio is ready," said Inga quietly. She nodded to O'Leary. "Carry him in now. The rest stay here." She glanced around. "I think the party had better end. There must be quiet. Belle, I shall want cold cloths; and Mr. Teagan, you had better send for a doctor. Baker is over on Sixty-seventh Street. Better telephone."

Leaving the crowd, flustered and frightened, to dis-



It never occurred to King O'Leary to ask what she intended to do. *Page 69.*

perse into whispering groups, she went down the hall to the corner studio, which was piled with packing-cases in an indescribable confusion. In one corner, very black and white in the glare of the center-light, was a four-poster bed, and on it the sprawling figure of Dangerfield. She went to it straight and silent, knelt again, felt the pulse, lifted the eyelids, while King O'Leary waited.

"Well," he said, as she arose. "D.T.'s, isn't it?"

"Only a part of it — I think," she said, looking down at the powerful figure that looked more like a stricken animal than ever. The curious thing is that it never occurred to King O'Leary to ask what she intended to do. He seemed to accept her as a fact, just as naturally as she had assumed control. She stood a moment silent, her finger on her lips, looking down, and then drew herself together with a sort of shudder, looked at King O'Leary, who was watching her, and said:

"Undress him and get him into bed. Then call me."

VII

It was a weird ending to the night of Christmas romping for King O'Leary, sitting breathless on an upturned box, his elbows on his knees, chin in hand, staring through the dim shafts of light at the two figures in the further corner — Dangerfield, limp and inert, head and shoulders a confused shadow against the white, propped-up pillows, with the lithe figure of the girl, straight as a young spruce, waiting. From the time O'Leary had placed him in the great four-poster bed, the man had not moved, while the heavy breathing, slow and regular, was the only sound through the stillness in the room. Against O'Leary the boxes rose in craggy somberness: a rug, leaning against the wall in an elongated roll, stretched upward like a climbing tree. Bits of sculpture, struggling groups of single busts, peered down at him above heaped-up chairs and tables in such confusion that, at times, he seemed to be moving through a fantastic warehouse.

Doctor Baker was away, and in despair they had routed Mr. Dean out of bed — the pale young man who was studying to be a veterinary. He had come, perched on the bed like a shadowy crow, taken the pulse, listened to Inga, and departed, after a wise caressing of his chin, without committing himself. Half an hour later, after a diligent consultation of certain books, he slipped back and beckoned O'Leary into the hall.

"The best thing is to let him sleep," he said, with a professionally satisfied air. "Give him all the sleep he can get. Looks to me like nerves — and a touch — I'm not sure — but there are certain indications — lips blue, and the way he went over — a touch of heart-disease. Of course, it might be acute indigestion and then, too, he has been hitting it up pretty hard ——"

"I congratulate you," said King O'Leary, who had a prejudice against the profession, and who returned without imparting this expert opinion.

At about three o'clock, as nearly as he could judge, Dangerfield suddenly awoke, or at least seemed to awake, and sat bolt upright in bed, staring directly at the girl. This silent confrontation lasted a long moment; possibly in the darkness Dangerfield, if he were truly awake and not in a semisomnambulistic state, was staring at the girl with that startled animal intensity which had characterized his first entrance. All at once she put out her hand and said in a low, softly modulated voice:

"That's enough; lie down again — go back to sleep."

He did not respond immediately, and his eyes seemed to wander apprehensively into the shadows, but at last, perhaps under the pressure of her hand, he lay back. In a moment he began to stir and toss, mumbling incoherently to himself. She leaned over, taking his hand, and said something in gentle command, and presently he became quiet, and his sleep from then on was untroubled.

Toward the first filtering in of the dawn, King O'Leary, dozing at his post, woke up at a touch on his shoulder. It was Inga, looming out of the mist that streaked the room, like a dweller from the sea, one finger on her lips in warning, looking seriously down at him from her sea-blue eyes and dark face. They tiptoed across the room, looked a moment back at the unconscious figure on the bed, and stole out, closing the door. In the hall, the dusty globe shone sickly in the watery dawn.

"He's all right now, I think," she said, in a whisper. "It's better for us not to be there when he awakes."

"I — I guess I fell asleep," said King O'Leary awk-

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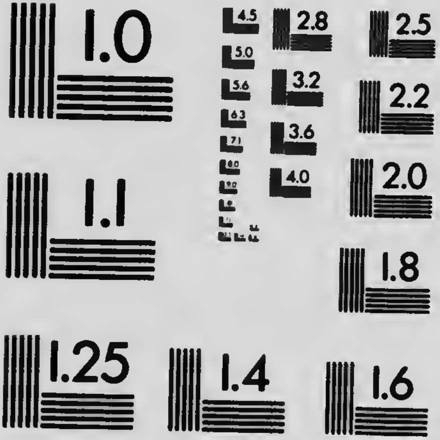
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wardly, a little ashamed before the alert and young figure which showed no sign of fatigue.

"You really didn't need to be there," she said, and he noticed there was an awakened ring in her voice, as though a great joy or a great test had come to her. "Better get a bit of sleep now."

"And you?"

"Don't worry about me."

"I say, wouldn't it be a good thing to lock him in — until later?"

"No, no," she said with some emphasis; "never that — that sets them crazy. Besides, he'd get out of the window and over the roofs — there's a way over the tenements. Then there *would* be trouble."

He stared at her with a feeling that this was a situation not entirely new to her, wondering many things. She felt the weight of this curiosity, for she turned toward her door, but without embarrassment, saying:

"Good night; thank you."

"I say, will you tell me one thing?"

"What?"

She turned, her hand to the door, her back against it, drawing her eyebrows together, and, for the first time, he noticed the dark pools of wakefulness under her eyes, shadows that were not unbecoming, but gave an expression of acute sensitiveness to the fragile, dark oval of her face, which ordinarily was a little too placid — like the unmarked stretch of new-fallen snow.

"Did you know him — before?" he said, with a jerk of his head toward the corner studio.

She shook her head.

"But you know — at least you've got a guess — who he is?" he persisted.

"Yes," she said, after a moment's consideration; "I think I know."

Then she nodded and went in.

Everything remained deeply quiet until about ten o'clock in the morning, when Dangerfield awoke, dressed himself in the discarded evening clothes, put on his fur coat and top-hat, and went down the hall, searching the inscriptions on each door until he arrived at the room of Mr. Cornelius, where, oblivious to the appearance of curious heads, he knocked loudly and entered. He was there fully half an hour before he emerged, and, returning to his room, closed and locked the door. What was said at this odd interview, no one ever found out. The baron, instantly questioned, replied that it was a matter which lay between them. He was in a high state of excitement, seeming unaccountably younger and making fearful blunders in English. His answer naturally served to increase the curiosity of the Arcadians, already exceedingly intrigued — an effect which was further heightened by the subsequent actions of Dangerfield himself.

Hardly had the surprise of his visit to the baron in incongruous attire died down, when he came out of his room shaved and properly dressed, and went down the hall and out. Sassafras, who took him down, vowed he looked just as natural as any one. At five o'clock the same afternoon, as the three friends were discussing the one topic, Dangerfield entered unexpectedly, and a curious thing happened. He came in as he had the night before, without a word of greeting, until he had stood quite a moment, with the same startled, set look that an animal shows — a look of trying to take in mentally, to comprehend something unaccustomed. This, however, passed, and he came forward with outstretched hand and winning smile.

"I am afraid I gave you quite a shock last night," he said, and then, evidently forgetting that introductions had taken place, he added: "My name's Dangerfield. Seeing that I am your next-door neighbor, I hope I did not make too bad an impression."

"This is free soil up here," said Tootles cheerfully. "Nobody's business what anybody does."

This answer must have raised a suspicion in the visitor's mind, for he was quiet a moment and presently asked:

"I am rather hazy as to last night. What happened?"

"Oh, there was quite a christening up here," said Flick sympathetically. "You stood around for a while like a statue of Liberty and then went to sleep rather violently."

"Did I do that?" said Dangerfield gloomily.

"Oh, don't let that worry you," said Flick, who seemed all at once to realize that his past record debarred him from sitting in judgment. "Thought you were damned dignified. Only, you gave the skirts quite a scare."

"I am sorry for that," said Dangerfield gravely. He hesitated, and added: "The fact is, I get doubled up occasionally. It's a nervous contraction that stiffens up my right side. It's nothing to worry about — there's nothing really to be done. The only thing to do is to stretch me out and let me come to. Did you notice that my right arm was doubled up?" he asked, suddenly looking at King O'Leary.

"Why, yes; it seems to me it was," O'Leary answered, looking down at the floor, so as to avoid the other's gaze. "That's it."

Flick had it on his tongue to retort: "Old geezer, struck me you were pickled," but, for some reason, he restrained this impulse and said instead.

"Lingering with us long?"

"I suppose so."

"Going to sling some paint?"

"What?"

"You're an artist, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"What kind — cow, sea bathing or just green grass?"

Dangerfield looked at him a moment, and gradually a smile broke through.

"I see. Well, I am only a portrait painter."

"Like Tootles," said Flick.

Dangerfield glanced at Tootles, who acknowledged this tribute by bowing and saying with dignity, after making sure that no remnants of Wimpfheimer & Goldfinch's cartoons were visible:

"Quite right. I do portraits. My friend is one of the hopes of literature. Mr. O'Leary draws harmonies from even a rented piano."

"I hope you will take me in," said Dangerfield, with his engaging smile. "Perhaps we can get off to a better start."

"You're examining the impressive mural decoration to the left?" said Tootles, following Dangerfield's gaze, which had suddenly fixed itself in fascinated surprise upon the sunset breaking over the cañon of Colorado.

"Your work?"

"It's not my work," said Tootles firmly. "It belongs to the first Hoboken period. Mr. Flick Wilder, the well-known art connoisseur, collects such things. You may laugh," he added, perceiving Dangerfield's eyes twinkling.

"That's all right; but you should see the walls," said Flick defensively. "Well, how does it strike you — what do you think of our little boudoir?"

"It's great — it's real," said Dangerfield, with such genuine joy that they all burst into laughter.

For half an hour he passed around, eager as a boy, examining everything, marveling at the owls and the

Chinese dragon, which Flick called the "belly-light," roaring with laughter over the reconstruction of the Harlem bear which had so wantonly attacked Flick, and gazing enraptured at the signs, the lodging box and the allotted abodes of Literature and Art, giving his advice as to the place to be assigned to Music, which was the present problem. During all this time he entered into their moods with enthusiasm and boyish glee as though nothing existed outside of the room, nor a worry in the world. But all at once, without warning or apparent cause, he lapsed back into his former moodiness, seemed to forget them completely, and presently, with a sign to King O'Leary, rose and left the room.

"Who took me into my room last night?" he asked, when King O'Leary had followed him into the hall.

"I did."

"By yourself?"

"Yes; and you were some load," said O'Leary cheerfully.

Dangerfield was silent a moment, his glance wandering up and down the hall. Finally he asked, after a delay so long that O'Leary had grown tired of waiting:

"I have an impression — was any one else with you?"

"Yes, there was —"

"A woman?" he interrupted.

O'Leary nodded.

"I thought so," he said, with a sort of sigh of relief. Presently he added, but with less curiosity, "Who was it?"

"Girl across the way from you — Miss Sonderson. She happened along just as you keeled over. No one knows much about her, only she seemed to be able to handle you in first-rate style."

"How long was she there?"

"*We* spent the night, thank you," said O'Leary, who had begun to be impatient for some signs of gratitude to appear.

"She lives here — you're sure?" said Dangerfield, looking at him intently.

"Sure; opposite to you. Look for yourself," said King O'Leary with some irritation.

Dangerfield gave him a second glance, and then went slowly to Inga Sonderson's door and bent over the card carefully.

"Yes; that's right," he said, nodding, and went into his room, as though that were the only point to be settled.

"Well, you certainly are a queer rooster," said King O'Leary to himself, so perplexed that he remained scratching his head. The door opened, and Dangerfield reappeared, coming toward him with extended hand.

"Please forgive me. What I wanted to say — what I came in to say, was to thank you."

"Oh, forget it!" said O'Leary, instantly mollified. He felt the grasp of the other man's hand, and liked him better for its free, powerful hug.

"I am not — not quite myself these days," said Dangerfield, with boyish frankness. "Don't mind what I do — and I hope we will be good friends."

As he said this, there came a look of pain across the eyes, a look of inward distress that struck O'Leary, who went back into the studio, however, without response.

The man had a sense of authority, as he had authority himself, and there was perhaps in King O'Leary's heart a shade of jealousy that the memory of Inga Sonderson and the way she had gone to his assistance did not serve to lessen. When he entered, his first question showed in what direction his curiosity had gone.

"What do you know about that Sonderson girl?"

"Lady Vere de Vere?" began Tootles.

"She's not that," said King O'Leary gruffly. "She's the real stuff. Well, what do you know about her, Flick?"

"About as much as you, old life-guard."

"I believe," said Tootles, who assumed his English manner to show that his feelings were ruffled, "that there was a bit of an attachment between her and that chap, Champeno — queer beggar, and shockingly wild. How far it went, I really could not say. We hadn't organized the Sixth Floor Social Club in those days, and the most we chaps did was to remark it was hot when it was hot, and cold when it was cold, and there you are!"

"Tootles," said Flick severely, "put the cold soup, the cold turkey and the cold pig upon the table." And turning to King O'Leary, he said. "Well, what do you think of Dangerfield? How do you make him out?"

"Haven't made up my mind yet," said King O'Leary shortly.

"What *is* wrong with him?" said Tootles, from the provision-box.

"Booze!" said Flick, in virtuous condemnation.

"Not entirely," said King O'Leary, shaking his head. "I've seen a lot of booze-fighters, and helped tuck some of them underground, but I never saw any rum hound just like this guy."

"Maybe he's murdered some one," said Tootles cheerfully.

"That would be more like it."

"Well, I think he's a nut," said Flick.

"And I think he's one corker!" said Tootles enthusiastically.

"'Corker' is not English, Art," said Flick.

"Quite right, old boy. I consider him a jolly good chap," said Tootles. "We'd better have the girls in; we never can eat all this."

At this moment there came a determined pounding on the wall.

"What's that?" said Flick, startled.

"Madame Probasco's spirits," said Tootles, who always took an extreme view.

"Why, it's Schneibel!" said King O'Leary, listening to the knocking, which was repeated with more insistence.

They rushed around and found the dentist doubled up on the sofa betwixt rage and pain, gasping,

"Dot lobster — oh, dot lobster salad!"

"That's true," said Flick, in a whisper. "He ate half the salad; I saw him."

While Tootles ran off in search of Dean, O'Leary and Flick gazed, fascinated, at the unfortunate man, who, between his fury and his agony, had turned an orange red.

Young Mr. Dean arrived, and immediately began to explore for symptoms of appendicitis, showing that whatever his present incapacity, he had at least mastered the economic theory of medicine.

"No, no; it ain't de appendix, it's de lobster — de damned lobster an' de pistache ice-cream —"

"Has he eaten that combination?" said the pale young man, who, from the last twenty-four hours' experience, had begun to form a professional manner.

"And more," said Flick.

"Then that is probably the cause," said the sub-doctor regretfully, at which Schneibel howled out an oath, roaring:

"Don' tell vat it is! Stop it; for God's sake, stop it!"

"But how will we stop it?" said King O'Leary.

Thus confronted, Mr. Dean looked very solemn and introspective, while the others waited.

"Well?" said Flick.

"If he were a horse," said the sub-doctor pensively, "I think I'd bleed him."

"Throw him oudt — throw dot chump oudt!" cried Schneibel, who rose up in such wrath that Mr. Dean whisked away.

King O'Leary had the happy idea to resort to Miss Quirley, who came, applied a hot-water bottle and dosed him from three small blue bottles so efficaciously that in half an hour the storm was over.

They sat down with the assistance of the others to vanquish the cold remnants and to plan a party which would complete the one that had been so rudely interrupted.

In the middle of the meal, King O'Leary, who had been singularly silent, rose without explanation, searched a moment in his trunk, which was stowed behind the second Japanese atrocity, and left the room.

He went rapidly down the hall until he had covered two-thirds of the way to Miss Sonderson's room. Then he slowed down abruptly, hesitated, went on, listened and finally knocked. Instantly the door was half opened and the girl appeared, lifting her eyes in wonder.

"Here," said King O'Leary, shoving forth a little package carefully wrapped and inscribed "A Merry Christmas."

"What is it?" she said, noticing the confusion in his eyes.

"From the Christmas party last night," he said awkwardly. "This was on the tree for you. Every one got something — please take it. And say — what I wanted to tell you is — my hat's off to you! Honest, I think you're a wonder!"

Before she could answer, he had actually blushed, wheeled clumsily, and gone hastily back.

VIII

One evening, the third after the party, Dangerfield came stamping into the Arcade, shaking from him the snow that lay clinging to his ulster. Inga Sonderson was already in the elevator, but beyond one of his characteristic, set looks, he paid no attention to her, to the active amazement of Sassafras, who stared hopefully from one to the other. Dangerfield was evidently in one of his worst moods, with furrowed lower face and brooding, far-distant glance. At the sixth floor he started to bolt out, and then, aware of her presence, drew back hastily, saying,

"I — I beg your pardon."

"Thank you, Mr. Dangerfield," she said, and inclined her head.

He started at the name, whirled about, and peered at her as she stood waiting for him to open the conversation. Then all at once he went past her rapidly, and was at his own door, with the key in the lock, before he became aware that she was back of him. He wheeled abruptly, stared at her, and in a moment came toward her curiously.

"Are you — I — I forget the name," he said, after a moment's attempt to recall it. "Are you the girl who took care of me — that night?"

She turned under the glare of the hall light, the snow glistening on her ulster where it had settled, her cheeks tingling, the dainty upper lip quivering with a faint smile.

"I suppose I am."

It was characteristic of him that he did not at once thank her, but continued gazing down into the unfathomable eyes, now black-blue as the wintry sea.

"Why did you do it?" he said gruffly.

She leaned back, as though withdrawing defensively before his looming inspection, and the door swung open on the darkness of the studio, with its wan, gray spread above where the snow was sifting against the skylight.

"Some one had to — didn't they?"

The voice, though not a cultured one, had something peculiarly soothing and pleasant in its low modulation that caught his ear and left him with the desire to listen further.

"I have seen you before, haven't I?"

She shook her head.

"That's strange — seemed to me I had," he muttered, looking at her again so intently and so long that at last she repeated to recall him,

"No; never."

"You have never posed for me?"

"I don't pose."

"What?" He looked startled. "Oh, I beg your pardon."

"No offense. I shouldn't mind," she said, smiling. "Well, good night."

"Wait." He held out his hand, and she gave hers directly. "I have to thank you very deeply — though I don't know at all why you should have done it," he said, shaking his head as though seeking from her the answer.

Her shoulders moved in a little deprecatory gesture.

"It's just my way — that's all."

He continued to hold her hand, looking at her as though he were straining his eyes to distinguish some object in the fog. She did not attempt to draw her hand away, as most women would, rather taken with this brusque-ness and assumption that was, at heart, unconscious.

"Something restful about you — your voice, and the touch of your hand," he said, as though to himself. "I remember now — that night. I thought it was an hallucination. Yes; I remember you now, quite distinctly — and the sound of your voice." He added abruptly: "You haven't told me your name."

"Inga Sonderson."

He repeated it.

"Really? Sounds like the sea rolling in — curious name. You're not American?"

"I was born here."

"Shouldn't have thought it."

At this moment a door opened down the hall, and, recalled to himself, he frowned, looked down, seemed suddenly to perceive that her firm, slender hand lay in his huge spreading one, and said hastily:

"Well, thank you, anyhow."

He went into his room without having shown anything more than a little wonder, a starting curiosity, and much kindliness.

They did not meet again for several days. He made no attempt to advance the acquaintance, which was perhaps what led her to take the next step.

During this time, the Arcadians saw little of Dangerfield, though they knew of his presence by the unusual coming and going of men such as were rare visitors in those sequestered halls; men of that outer world that lies bound between the iron confines of the elevated and lives from Madison Square to the park. In particular there was one man who arrived in a resplendent car, accompanied by a young clerk with a black brief-bag under his arm. At such times loud voices rose in argument, and they could hear the restless fall of Dangerfield's feet tramping the room. After these visits he would disappear, returning late in the night, unseen. At other times, at any hour, midnight or dawn, he would start from his studio and begin pacing up and down the hall in slippered feet that made a dismal, sifting iteration in the wee hours. Once, after quite a group had been in the studio, and the conversation had gone into such a high pitch that Tootles had heard him cry, against some lower-pitched remonstrance, " He'll do it — by God, he'll do it! " Dangerfield was left in such a state of excitement that he passed Flick in the hall literally without seeing him, his eyes absolutely blinded to objects about him, as though filled with the obsession of distant figures. That night he came in late, and wandered up and down the hall until almost four o'clock in the morning. Whether he was drunk or sober they had no way of telling — only twice, directly outside their door, in startling contrast to his silent moods, they heard him swearing to himself. It was not the oaths themselves, but the stark savagery with which he ripped them out that caused Tootles to whisper to Flick:

" Literature, it's not nice to swear like that. It makes my blood run cold."

" What the deuce is he going through? " said Flick, in wonder.

" Hell of some sort," said Tootles laconically. " Suppose the Christian thing is to promenade with the chap."

" Let him alone," said King O'Leary, who had waked up also. " Fellows like that aren't in the mood for coddling."

Immediately the sifting slip-slip ceased. Probably Dangerfield had heard the sound of their voices and retired. At any rate, he had waked up the whole floor and scared Miss Quirley almost into hysterics. No one, however, reported the disturbance, though each had been gruesomely affected. There seemed to be a tacit understanding that the man was passing through some crisis and should be left alone.

One person, however, took active interest in all Dangerfield's movements — the Portuguese-Yankee, Drinkwater, who was always prowling down toward that end of the floor. Twice, when conferences had been going on in the corner studio, Inga Sonderson had found him outside her door, ostensibly seeking a view of the snow-capped roofs of the tenements that rolled grimly toward the river. Each time he had mumbled some excuse and unwillingly shifted away. Meanwhile, the boxes still encumbered the passage, while within the studio the same heaped-up disorder must have prevailed.

Matters were thus when, on New Year's eve, Inga Sonderson returned to the Arcade after a solitary supper at the Childs restaurant on the avenue. She had no sooner turned the hall than down the somber stretch she noticed with surprise a brilliant swath of light. She went on, wondering what this could portend, for since their chance meeting, she had not laid eyes on her neighbor. Through the opening of his studio door she could see boxes, furniture and bric-à-brac piled toward the ceiling like wreckage washed against the shore. At the grating of her key in the lock, Dangerfield loomed into the door-frame, dressed for the street, and saw her, with a swift, appealing light in the storm-ridden face.

" Come in," he said, without preliminaries, as though he had been waiting in desperation for her return.

She rather liked this abruptness, so devoid of male coquetry, instinctively warned that the man must have called to her in his need. He had returned into the studio, as though sure of her coming She entered, closed the door, and found him by the window that gave on the misery of the tenements, seated in a chair, his back bent, his fists doubled up and pressed under his chin.

"Talk to me," he said, in abrupt demand.

She stood a little away from him, looking down at his suffering, divining the forces of doubt and despair wrestling within his soul. In the midst of the surging confusion of the studio, they were in a shallow clearing. She went over and laid her hand on his shoulder, holding it there until she forced him to look up.

"Let me help," she said quietly.

The sound of her voice seemed to arrest his attention. He turned restlessly, his hand closing over her wrist.

"Bad night?"

He nodded, and his eyes wandered from her. All at once he rose with a great breath, stretched out his arms, and then, with a brusque turn, came back, looking at her with even a touch of suspicion in his eyes.

"Why do you want to?"

What thoughts might have been in his mind were dispelled by the frankness of her answer.

"Because you need help — don't you?" she said, her eyes never swerving under the shock of his stare, that was not easy to encounter.

"Take off your hat."

She saw that it was his curiosity that had been aroused, and lifted her two arms in that wholly feminine gesture which seems to accord the first note of intimacy to the man who witnesses it. He stared at her more intently, with the eye of the artist, quick to note values — the massed blacks of her hair and the odd contrast of the sea-blue eyes against the brown oval of her face that gave to the little teeth, when she smiled her serious smile, the lustrous flash of milky porcelain.

"No; that's true," he said abruptly.

"What?" she asked, after a moment's waiting.

"You've never posed for me."

"Do you want me to?"

"No, no; that's all over," he said moodily; and, as though the allusion had been unfortunate, he turned from her, bumping against the corner of a chest which protruded.

"Great Heavens! What a horror — what a nightmare of a hole!" he said, gazing about him.

"Then why not fix it up?"

If he heard the question he did not answer it, staring glumly into the disorder, his fist doubled against his teeth, biting at his nails, a convulsive, aggressive gesture characteristic of him.

"Let's unpack things and fix up the studio," she repeated.

He shook his head, plainly annoyed, and, after a moment, came back, as though some gust of emotion had whirled through him and left a lull of fatigue.

"Talk to me," he said, sinking down limply. "Tell me about yourself." But immediately he broke in upon his own mood, saying abruptly: "So you think I am down and out, don't you?"

"No — I don't think that," she said gently. "That's what *you* think."

"Well, I am," he said vehemently. "Do you know what's wrong?" he added sharply, and, as she continued to watch him, he laughed and said: "No, no; I won't tell you that. Find out."

She laid her hand on his shoulder again, to still the rising excitement in his voice.

"Why didn't you call me before?"

"Curious voice you have," he said, without attention to her question, in his haphazard jumping way. "Wish you'd go on talking. It makes me drowsy — feeling of green fields, little swishing brooks, and multitudes of silver leaves sweeping the skies. I love your voice."

"Let me take care of you to-night."

"Why, what would you do?" he said, jerking up his head.

"Let's start right by making a home out of this."

"A home?"

The allusion was unfortunate, for he broke into a laugh, starting up and seizing her arm, while the excitement seemed to pile up within him.

"No, no; I'll tell you what I'm going to do a night like this. I'm going to break loose — stop this eternal, maddening fighting to hold myself in — give way!" His voice had risen into rapid, shrill notes, and she noticed that his eyes had taken on the unseeing shimmer. "Give way — give way! Stop living as others want you — let the world roar about you. What's it matter — whom does it hurt — who cares the slightest?"

He seized his hat, and, turning toward her, flung an arm around her, holding her to him as though to sweep her up and out in his breathless progress.

"Will you do that? Just to-night? Just for one night? Will you follow me to-night?"

"No, I will not," she said firmly, though into her eyes leaped something untamed at the gusty, wild embrace in which he had caught her. "And you won't go, either."

"I won't?" he said, laughing boisterously, looking down into her eyes that were so close to his. "That's a good one! You think you can change me, do you? Well, you'll see!"

He let go of her, and was starting toward the door when she said quickly,

"You're right — do as you please."

"Of course I shall," he said angrily. Then a new thought seemed to strike him. He hesitated, came back on tiptoe, and said, with a curious smile:

"Aren't you just a little bit afraid of me?"

"No; I am not afraid of you," she said, and she ke her eyes on his so intently that, in a moment, his glance went away.

"Well, I'll tell you something," he said, in a whisper; "I am afraid of myself."

He allowed her, without further resistance, to take his hat and draw off his coat.

At this moment, the sound of voices and the crashing chords of a piano broke in incongruously upon their mood.

"What's that?" he said, startled.

"The studio next door," she said. "They've gathered to see the old year out, I suppose."

Down the hall they heard Flick calling:

"Every one this way! Greatest social function of the year!"

Then the sound of knocking, an imperative personal summons. She passed swiftly to the button and extinguished the light. Through the window a pale shadow made Dangerfield just discernible. She felt her way back and sat down near him, with a whispered caution to silence. Tootles' and Schneibel's voices could be heard outside in consultation.

"Oh, Miss Sonderson!"

"She's oudt."

"Thought I heard her coming back."

The door of the room where they were shivered, and Tootles cried:

"I say there, friend Dangerfield, foregather!"

She put her hand quickly over his wrist to check a response. The knock was repeated.

"He's oudt, too," said Schneibel. "Can't you see, you chump, dere's no light?"

"My, but he'll be off on a record bat to-night!"

"Well, you just bet he will."

They moved away, and in the obscurity, Dangerfield began to laugh, a bitter, gloomy laugh.

"Don't!" she said sharply.

Across the wall, O'Leary's powerful hands awoke the piano. Sitting side by side, they heard laughter and the sounds of dancing. The man at Inga's side was silent again. Music and the shuffling iteration of the dance seemed to act in a soothing way upon his nerves. He began to talk in a low, matter-of-fact voice, with a curious gift he had, even in the most soul-racking moments, of standing off and looking back at himself.

"How extraordinary to be ending the year like this! Last year and this! Up here, marooned, lost — ended! I certainly have seen queer turns in my life. Well, the last phase, and then *Bonsoir* —

> "*La vie est brève:*
> *Un peu d'espoir,*
> *Un peu de rêve,*
> *Et puis bonsoir!*"

"Do you understand French?"

"No."

"What I like about you," he said irrelevantly, "is you don't ask questions."

"No; I never do."

"That's right," he said, and, as though unconscious of her presence, he began to talk to himself in a sort of dreamy monotone that had an odd contrast of melancholy against the background of gaiety that came thrumming and throbbing from across the wall.

"Well, and, after all, we're just children — all great cry-babies. We can't enjoy what we've got, or know how to keep it. We go out and shoot ourselves or some one else — at least the great fools do — because some one we don't love and over whose life, after all, we have no right, meets some one else who is bored. Work — work," he said, his thoughts flowing in some connection comprehensible only to himself; "that's the whole thing — the joy of working for something, for something you hope to get — and when that's gone ——" he stopped suddenly, continuing the thought in his own mind, looking out of the window. "Well, even then, why should we cry out? At least we don't starve; we have a roof over our heads; we don't harness our bodies to grindstones just to keep on living. I wonder which counts in the end — what *they* do, or what we do?"

Evidently he was thinking of the hordes which spread away from them in filthy blocks, for, after a long contemplation of the snow-coated roofs, and the heavy, reddened pall of clouds which caught the city's reflection, he continued,

"Do you know what keeps them going — all of them — thousands on thousands — just the same as us?"

"What?"

"Hope," he said, with a laugh. "The hope that something wonderful *may* happen. They don't know what it is. Poor devils, what can *they* hope for? But, you see, it may come. That's where destiny plays tricks with us — has its laugh at us. Good Lord, how life plays with us, like a cat plays with a mouse! Hope! That's how it can get us to go on, to stand a little more — the future — to-morrow — the thing you can't guess." He turned to her again. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand — to-morrow."

"You don't understand at all," he said impatiently. "What would you do if you knew, absolutely knew, that everything was over, that all you had hoped for was impossible, that everything you had been striving for — that nothing was to come of it, nothing — no more illusions, no more dreams." The last words seemed to stick in his mind, for presently he began to grow more excited. "It's the dreaming that's the best of all; and when that's gone — when you can't lie back at night and dream to yourself of doing something so great that the whole world comes crowding in to stare at it — a 'Mona Lisa' or a 'Spring' of Botticelli or ——" He ended abruptly, with a curious sound that was not quite a laugh but more a bitter protest. "No, no — no more dreams, no more."

On the other side of the wall the dancing had ended. With the approach of the weakening hour when the old year would yield its last breath, the company began to sing old-fashioned ballads —"Kathleen Mavourneen" and "The Lass o' Lowrie." He seemed suddenly to realize all that he had been revealing of the rebellion in his soul, for he turned toward her in a sudden antagonism.

"Here, I don't like your sitting there making me talk!"

"I'm not making you," she said. "It's you who wanted me to be by you to-night."

"That's so," he assented. He turned toward her with another touch of that shrewd, half-smiling cunning which he had shown when he had thought to frighten her before. "If you only knew ——"

"That's just what I don't want," she said quickly. "I don't want to know."

"Really?" he said, drawing back to watch her.

"It isn't necessary."

This answer seemed to satisfy him, for he forgot her presently, returning to the contemplation of the city below them.

"I suppose it's almost time," he said. "The whistles will be blowing soon."

From the adjoining studio came a chorus led by Schneibel's shrill tenor impetuously in advance:

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And days o' lang syne?"

Far out toward the river, a premature tug began a tiny whistle.

"How ridiculous that sounds!" he said irritably. Then, listening intently to the repeated chorus, he seemed to be visualizing another scene, for presently he said, with a touch of sadness, the first he had displayed:

"They'll be singing that pretty soon down by the marble fireplace after the speech. Steingall, Quinny, the whole crowd — the boys — perhaps — no, no; I guess not —'auld acquaintance '— I wonder ——"

Outside, a great bell rang, and swift upon it another. All at once, like a storm breaking, the night awoke with whistle, siren, and clanging steeple — joyful, eager, perennially hopeful.

She bent toward him and laid her hand over his.

"A new chance."

He stood up suddenly, as though at the limit of his tether, and said between his teeth:

"By heavens, I *am* going out! I can't stand this."

She rose silently, and turning, took his overcoat and held it up to him — an action so unexpected that he looked at her in surprise.

"Thought you didn't want me to ——"

"I was wrong. You have a right to do anything you want."

He nodded appreciatively, and said suddenly, as though in excuse:

"I can't help it; I can't — I tell you, I can't. I've got to get out."

"Don't explain," she said quietly. "Don't get excited; and when you come in, call me."

He took her shoulders in his hands and turned her toward the light.

"You're a queer one, queer as I am, I guess — but you understand."

"Yes; I understand."

"Why do you do it?" he said suddenly, his mind evidently turning again and again to the problem which perplexed him.

She laid both her hands against his shoulders, looking straight into his eyes.

"Because I don't like to see a splendid ship go down."

"I — a splendid ship?" he said, with an incredulous laugh.

"One in ten thousand."

He laughed again, moving irritably.

"So you believe in me, do you?"

"Absolutely."

He caught his breath, stood silent a long moment in a conflict of emotions, yielding, longing, haunted, and rebellious. At the end he said scornfully:

"Yes, they all do — at first. Well, you're wrong!"

With which he stalked away without further notice. He did not come back that night at all, though the light shone under her door patiently. Late the next afternoon, Sassafras came into the studio with a mysterious gesture to King O'Leary, who was taking tea at the hands of Myrtle Popper and pretending to like it. Together they carried Dangerfield to his room. He was in a dreadful condition — a soiled and hopeless mass from the gutter out of which he had been rescued.

IX

During this time Art, Literature, and Music were industriously engaged in the laudable enterprise of spending the unearned increment, in the course of which redistribution of wealth, they found the necessary encouragement from the more expensive sex. A round of gaiety set in such as the Arcadians had never known. Visits to restaurants and theaters became mere details of a daily routine. They gave a dance in the studio and plunged into the revelry of costume balls, then at its height; while, under the guidance of Belle Shaler, they made several excursions into the bohemia of Washington Square and Greenwich Village. In the inevitable pairing-off process, it transpired that, however they started forth, they returned home with Myrtle Popper snuggling close to O'Leary's protecting bulk (she seemed particularly sensitive to the cold), Tootles tagging close to Pansy's provoking shoulder, and Flick and Belle Shaler, who had quarreled from the start, walking six feet apart and stabbing each other with final deadly glances. Millie Brewster came to the parties in the studio, but seldom ventured forth on the marauding expeditions — not that she did not envy these rollicking sallies in wig and fancy dress, only she could not shake off the timidity and shyness which had grown about her in her months of isolation.

" Boys," said King O'Leary, one morning, when from his couch he had watched Tootles' mental control of Matter carrying him by successive jerks to the sink —" boys, I have a bit of news to break to you. I have been counting up, and there is just one more jamboree in sight."

Flick awoke by one of those subconscious mental perceptions that the Society for Psychical Research is at present investigating.

" Broke? "

" King, tell us the worst."

" Sixty-two dollars and some miserable change," said O'Leary cheerfully, " is all that keeps us among the high rollers."

A fearful suspicion flashed across Tootles' ducal countenance as it dawned upon him that, though it was the first week of the month, no summons to pay the rent had yet appeared.

" King, you paid the rent! "

O'Leary did not deny it.

" How much? " said Flick faintly.

" A year."

Tootles took this announcement very hard.

" It's squandering money, that's what it is," he said bitterly.

" Why, damn it, man," said Flick, equally outraged, " anything can happen — another uncle might die! "

" Well, it's done," said King O'Leary, without sign of penitence. " I'm getting tired of dissipation, anyhow. At least we have a roof over our heads.'

" We shall starve to death — like Croton water-bugs caught in a diamond casket," said Flick, who had a taste for poetical flights.

" But, even then," said Tootles, " even with that and the parties and the gorgeous presents, there ought to be three or four hundred left." At this moment he caught sight of a guilty look on King O'Leary's face. " Literature, I do believe he's been and done some low-down, sneaking good action. What is it — paying rent for the whole floor? "

" Nothing of the sort," said King O'Leary, but so gruffly that Tootles was confirmed in the idea that his guess had some pertinency.

"He's been buying diamonds for Myrtle," said Flick suspiciously.

"Well, here it is," said King O'Leary, depositing a collection of bills and change upon the table. "What'll we do with it?"

To his shame, Tootles, who had bourgeois inclinations, suggested that they should save it against the daily ache of the stomach.

"Never!" said Flick, with a withering look. "We have lived like dead-game sports, and we must end with a bang and not with a trickle."

"Shake!" said King O'Leary.

"Well, what?" said Tootles glumly. "Oh, you fellows can grin; but I know what's going to happen to me. That confounded money-eating little flirt of a Pansy will give me the royal shake the moment she gets wise." When Tootles had a grief or a woe, he confided it to the world. "By Jove, I've made a fool enough of myself, running after her, when all I had to do was to sit quiet and condescend to let her feed out of my hand! Damn that Portuguese, Drinkwater! It was bad enough before — but now, O Lord!"

"I shall break my engagement to Belle," said Flick facetiously. "Thank Heaven for one thing, *she* won't come around any more."

"We've wasted too much time, anyhow," said King O'Leary, mistaking the sincerity of these professions. "As for me, I feel like getting back to doing something. I tell you what we'll do: We'll take the girls out once more, give them the greatest razzle-dazzle blowout they have ever seen, and then, when their eyes are bulging out and they are ready to melt in our arms, we'll say, 'Ladies, adoo forever!'"

"Then we're to tell them we're bust?" said Flick, to whom the bravado appealed.

"No," said Tootles firmly; "let's put it on high moral grounds. We must tell them that we have listened to the stern voice of ambition, that we are artists, and our professions are reclaiming us."

"That means work," said Flick.

"I have an idea for a masterpiece," said Tootles, who, by the last speech, had recovered lost ground. "It's to be called 'The Ages Contemplating the Well-Dressed Man.' It's to be a monumental work. Who knows, it may bring another thousand!"

At noon, while they were perfecting their plans (Flick's suggestion of dining at the St. Regis having been dismissed on account of King O'Leary's hostility to boiled linen and social dog-collars), there came a timid tap-tap at the door, and, to the amazement of two members of the firm at least, Millie Brewster arrived with a broom and a dust-cloth.

"Can't I be useful?" she said, dreadfully confused at her own daring. (She had studied over this opening for an hour.) "It's only neighborly, isn't it?"

King O'Leary sprang up rather quickly, and while Tootles' eyes watched him with a dawning suspicion, he went to the girl and said with rough good nature:

"You certainly can — come right in and set to it. Give your orders, Millie — we're here."

But to the surprise of everybody, the girl pushed him away with determination, saying:

"Not at all. Sit down — please. You'll only be in the way."

"So that's the way the wind blows," thought Tootles, noticing the light that came into the childish face as she looked up at the rugged globe-trotter.

"Why, bless my soul, is this to be a habit, Millie?" said Flick encouragingly.

"Please — if you'll let me," she said eagerly.

Flick gave the permission with the air of one parting with a string of pearls. The three men, lounging over their morning pipes, followed with delicious satisfaction the young girl routing the dust, and such is the soul-delight that such rare feminine spectacles engender in the masculine mind, that they found her, all at once, amazingly young, graceful, and romantically pretty.

"There's lots and lots of dust," said Millie, shaking her head. "I can't get it all out at once."

"I should like to make a sketch of her bending down like that," said Tootles pensively. "Beautiful line — charming!"

"What a cracking idea for a heroine," said Flick, who was stirred to creative rashness.

O'Leary, who understood better than the others, leaned back dreamily, puffing in contentment.

At this moment the door opened, and Belle Shaler slouched in, in a manner which would have set the hearts of fashionable débutantes afire with envy, and stopped short, her shocked hair whirling around her saucy face in amazement at the sight of Millie on a chair, caressing the dragon's tail with a dust-cloth.

"For the love of Mike, woman, what's struck you?" she exclaimed, though in somewhat stronger terms. "Degrading yourself for this bunch of loafers and sofa-warmers!"

"Don't worry, sweetheart," said Flick sweetly. "No one's going to ask you."

"Well, you certainly have got your nerve," said Belle, mistaking the initiative. "If you want a slave, why don't you get a wife?"

"Miss Brewster has offered to do it out of the kindness of her heart," said King O'Leary, seeing Millie overcome with embarrassment.

"Sit down, Belle; we're keeping the family mending for you."

Before Belle could get her breath to retort, Millie broke in:

"Oh, please — I expected — I wanted to do that — really I did!"

The tone in which it was said struck each one. Each felt the loneliness from which the girl was struggling. Belle gave her a short look of amazement and then went up and put her arm around her with abrupt good nature, saying:

"Don't mind my jawing. I'm a rough nut. Bless your heart, don't worry; you shall do it!"

"'Pon my word," said Flick aggressively, "who's disposing of things around here?"

"I am," said Belle, shrugging her shoulders.

"Angel, you're wrong," said Flick suavely. "If you want to know what makes woman an elevating force and a tender, inspiring ideal in the life of rough men, sit here and watch Millie."

Belle Shaler slumped to the table, swung up on it, and lit a cigarette before she condescended to glance down at Flick.

"Say, I'll bet that's what you think," she said, with her battling glance.

"A woman like Millie," said Flick, from the cushions, watching dreamily the bustling progress of the housecleaning, "could make me a credit to society."

"Ha, ha!" said Belle, and flicked away the ash of her cigarette with a scornful wave. "What you need, bo, is a hell-cat, a raring, tearing hell-cat with a rotten temper, to stand over you with a poker and whang you one. Then you'd work."

"No, Belle; no," said Flick, putting out his hand as though to ward her off. "I can *not* marry you."

"Dog!" said Belle, and flung at him the nearest object at hand, which happened to be a saucer.

"I really do believe they're fond of each other," said Tootles, the acute observer.

"Oh, you're no better," said Belle, turning on him; "you're worse. You've got brains and won't use them. Lord, but I loathe a bunch of work-dodgers! I see your finish — a lot of sandwich-men beating the pavements."

"What the devil does she come around here for?" said Flick, beginning to grow angry, "just as we were comfy?"

"Haven't we been keeping you in luxury?" said O'Leary, arousing himself.

"Well, you're a good bunch," said Belle, relaxing a little, "but what I said goes. You're a fine lithograph of ambition, you are — wallowing around like a lot of yellow dogs. Why don't you get up and work?"

"Where's Pansy?" said Tootles, to divert the attack.

"Out cooing with Drinkwater, I guess," said Belle, who flounced off with this parting stab. "You don't think she takes *you* seriously, do you? Why, you couldn't support a canary!"

"Damn women, anyhow!" said Tootles, who winced perceptibly. "That's what money does for you. They only come into your life to help you spend it, and then they make you miserable. Curse every one of them! Curse them one and all!"

"But curse Belle Shaler first," said Flick.

"All except Millie," said O'Leary, smiling.

"Well, except Millie."

But, to their surprise, the girl, having finished what might be called her dust-survey, approached them and blurted out:

"Don't be mad at her, Mr. Wilder. It's because she cares for you she goes at you so."

"Why, Millie, how do you know such things?" said Tootles, opening his eyes.

"Well, I do."

"I do believe she agrees with Belle," said O'Leary, who believed no such thing. "Come, now, the truth!"

Thus cornered, to their astonishment the girl looked very red and uncomfortable, but finally announced with a determined shake of her head:

"Well, yes; I do! I think she is absolutely right. And I think — I think you ought to be ashamed of yourselves, every one of you!"

When she had rushed away, overcome with her own daring, the three loungers looked helplessly at each other and then up at the skylight, as though to discover whence the bomb had fallen.

"I do believe we have touched these maidens' hearts," said Tootles, the first to break the silence.

"Never felt so gorgeously, deliciously happy in my life," said Flick, in a melancholy tone. "Everything seemed just lovely with the world; I was just plain plumb glad to be alive — and then some one has to break in and shout, 'Get up and work!'"

"Well, son, they're right," said O'Leary, jumping up and stretching his arms. "Guess millions don't agree with us."

"Speak for yourself," said Flick.

"Flick," said O'Leary solemnly, "Belle hits hard but she hits square. Son, you ought to be up and doing!"

"Why me any more than Tootles?"

"You're older than I am," said Tootles, who joined O'Leary in a withering contemplation of the joke-smith. "Besides, who cracks the jokes you sell?"

"So you're all picking on me?" said Flick wrathfully.

"All right; I'll show you. And I won't have to kill an uncle to do it, either," he added, with a vindictive glance at O'Leary as he left the room.

"He's gone out in search of puns," said Tootles, who, after a moment's whistling, added, "The party still on for to-night?"

"It's our only salvation."

"Well, I'll go down and give the invitations," said Tootles, who departed in quest of Pansy.

X

Left alone, King O'Leary began to move restlessly about the studio, his hands behind his back. The sun was sparkling through the skylight — the same sun that was shining on distant tranquil seas and over green islands; and some of the old tugging was at his heart, for he moved over to the trunk which was always ready for an instant departure. He was on his knees, searching through old keepsakes that had about them the scent of other days, when the voice of Myrtle Popper called:

" Hello there! Anybody in? "

He turned from his knees, to find her looking down suspiciously.

" Say you look as though you were running off? "

King O'Leary laughed guiltily.

" Myrtle, you've caught me with the goods! Well, yes; I was getting restless." He rose and looked down at her with a shake of his head. " Lord, wouldn't I like to be lying on my back, sailing into Hong Kong harbor, watching the mast scraping against the blue, and the yards creaking lazily ——"

She went to the trunk and shut it with a bang, placing a red-heeled slipper on it, with a neat flash of blue-silk ankle above.

" Say, how old are you? "

" Myrtle, you're looking as fresh as the first roses," said King O'Leary artfully. " And that's a lovely bit of ankle, blue as the blue sky over Hong Kong."

" How old are you? " repeated the girl sternly, who looked wonderfully enticing, with her coiled hair and young figure set off by the lace apron against the black working-dress.

"Thirty-six beautiful years — and one more."

"Thirty-seven!" said the girl severely. "And what are you — nothing but a hobo!"

"Hold up!" said O'Leary suspiciously. "Is this a conspiracy? Have you been talking to Belle?"

"I have been talking to no one," said Myrtle indignantly. "I say what I mean; and I mean it's a crying shame to see a fine, upstanding man like you, King O'Leary, no further along than you were twenty years ago."

"What the devil's got into this place, anyhow?" said O'Leary, putting his hand to his forehead and sitting down before the storm.

"Why don't you settle down?" said Myrtle, in a coaxing voice. "You can do things — you can handle men — Lord, they'd jump for you!"

"What would you have me do?" said O'Leary, not insensible to the compliment of being frowned at by a pretty face.

"You can't go on bumming forever. Get hold of something and stick to it. You've got brains, and you've got the push, too. Why, there are thousands of men making their pile right here in little old New York that aren't fit to hold your coat!"

By this time, King O'Leary's early resentment had passed, and the Irish fondness for teasing had begun to twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, Myrtle dear, what have you been making up your mind I am to do?"

"Try a chance with a moving-picture house," said Myrtle eagerly. "Honest, King, I mean it. I've been thinking of what you might do for days. I want to see you get ahead. There's an old fellow called Pomello that has struck it rich and would do anything for me. Put some money in with him. Sure, I could arrange it in a minute."

"My money is already invested," said King O'Leary, telling a defensive fib.

"There are a dozen chances passing you every day, if you'll only keep your eyes open," said Myrtle, sitting on the sofa next to O'Leary, with such excitement in her great green eyes that King O'Leary was conscious of a pleasant conceit.

"Myrtle, I'm afraid you're a determined woman," he said, with a provoking smile.

"I wouldn't be here if I wasn't," she said. "What would I be to-day if I couldn't make up my mind? What you need is some one to push you on."

"How would you like to be rolling up the Roo Royale — that's in Paris — in a jingling open-front carriage, stretched back and watching the dukes and duchesses go by?" said King O'Leary maliciously.

"You'll never be sensible," said Myrtle, frowning.

He lay back, propped up against the pillows, watching the fine figure the girl made sitting there, her eyes sparkling with the busy schemes she was concocting in the back of her head, of whose one object he was pleasantly aware.

"What a pity I'm not the marrying kind," he said slyly. "I believe you would make an alderman out of me."

"Quit your kiddin'," she said, shrugging her shoulders, "and don't think, because a girl's a good-enough pal to want to see you get on, that she's throwing herself at your head."

He laughed hugely.

"Got me that time, all right!"

"Be sensible," she said, relenting. "It ain't often we get a chance to sit down alone. Lord, you don't know what good it does me to slump in here for a quiet chat! You're one of my own kind, King!"

O'Leary yielded to the temptation of the moment far enough to play with the coiled bracelet which lay against the girl's wrist.

"Say, I'm rather curious about you," he said, studying her gravely. "You see a queer side of life."

"I can handle it."

"I know that."

"There's one thing I have got," she said, eager to seize the rare opportunity to lead him into a serious conversation, "and that's a good, hard bump of common sense. Don't make any mistakes about me and — and the others. I don't lose my head, King."

"Well, that's a wonder, for you're pretty enough to make the Pope himself lose his," said O'Leary, patting her hand.

"Wish you meant it," she said, looking at him seriously, "but, what with your blarney and your jollying, no one knows what you think. Yes, I like sassiety, but I'm not fooled. You bet I know where to pin the young fellows who take me out — and the old ones, too."

"Should think you got into tight places sometimes," said O'Leary, looking steadily into her eyes.

"Pooh! Men are like strange dogs," she said contemptuously. "Walk right up to them, bold as life, and they're gentle as ducks. Say — after all, there's a lot of bunk about this bold, bad-man stuff. Honest, outside of a couple of freshies, men has been awfully decent to me. You know what I think? I think a lot of them are bored stiff with the women about them and just tickled to death to take out a girl who appreciates having a good time."

O'Leary nodded.

"Men are rather decent. They go just about as far as a woman wants them to."

"That's right," she said frankly, bobbing her head. "You get from them about what you want. Sure, I like the going out to the restaurants and the the-ayters, and I dote on dancing; but — say — that's not all the game."

"It isn't, eh?"

"Not on your life; and little Myrtle knows it, and don't you forget it. There's a long ways to go after the mashers drop off. The main thing is settlin' down to something that's your own; findin' the fellow who's worth helping on, and startin' to save."

"Why, Myrtle, I thought you were a social butterfly!" said O'Leary, surprised and a little apprehensive as he thought he perceived the drift of these remarks.

"Butterfly nothing! Not when the right man comes up the street! Nix! Home and kiddies for me. I'm not ashamed to say it. That's the real life. I've seen all I want of sassiety."

"Well, Myrtle, you've got lots of chances," he said, little reckoning how the future would play the cards. "I'll bet some day I'll see you rolling down the avenue in a fine limousine just like Mrs. Van Astorbilt."

"Don't tease me," she said, so quietly that an embarrassing silence fell between them. She got up nervously. "I must be getting back to the job," she said, glancing at her watch.

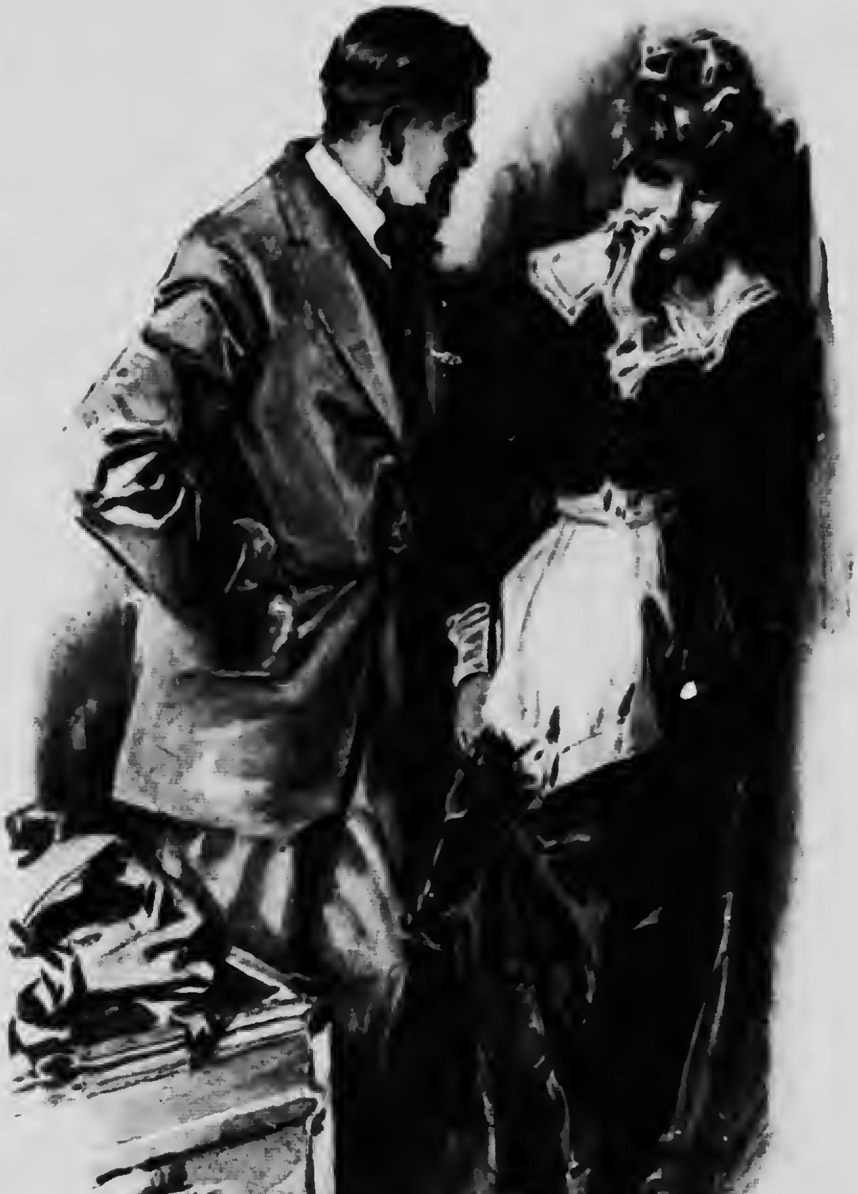
"You're dining with me to-night," he said, rising.

"Am I?" she said, putting her head back defiantly. "I've got an engagement — had it for a week."

"You'll break it, Myrtle darlin'?"

"Oh, will I?" she said impertinently. "You seem very sure of yourself."

"I am," he said, smiling and looking into her eyes so intently that she turned her glance away.



"Friendship!" she said scornfully, with a quick breath, "a lot of friendship there was in that!" *Page* 109.

"Just you and me?" she said, in a quieter tone.

"No; it's the bunch. Oh, you needn't make a face. We're dining at the Waldorf. Sure, I'm not jollying you this time. So get out your swell duds," he said, coming nearer and playing with the lace collar which lay close to her throat, "for I want the girl that's on my arm to put it all over the rest of them — savvy?"

"Do you think I can?" she said, with a quick breath, for he was close to her, and her eyes flashed with a sudden leap as they met his.

"Sure, Myrtle, if you look at me again like that, you do it at your own peril," he said, wild Irish mischief dancing in his glance.

"Don't you dare!" she said, throwing up her head; and there was something in her look that made him laugh, and after a little scuffle, kiss her.

"Mind, though, that was just in friendship," he said, in pretended seriousness.

She stood away against the wall, breathless, her cheeks on fire and her eyes snapping, her head a little light from the fervor of his embrace.

"Friendship!" she said scornfully, with a quick breath. "A lot of friendship there was in that!"

When she had gone, King O'Leary stood shaking his head slowly, his hands in his pockets, whistling to himself as he glanced in perplexity at the sun which was sparkling through the skylight — the sun that shone over distant seas and green isles.

XI

TOOTLE's sentimental difficulties were the more annoying inasmuch as he had only himself to blame, though he had this excuse: that the plight in which he found himself floundering, according to the caprices of the most fascinating game of chance in the world, was one into which many a satisfied male idol has precipitated himself unwittingly. In brief, up to the advent of the Christmas party and Drinkwater's impertinent intrusion, Tootles had been adored because he was in the strategical position of permitting the adoration. During this time, Pansy, enraptured with Tootles' sartorial splendor, his aristocratic features (which reminded one of a footman or a duke), his holiday English intonation, and finding him only languidly interested, was overjoyed at his condescension and quite miserable at his displeasure when she forgot and shifted her pose. Her eyes showed plainly her adoration, and she hurried gratefully to his call whenever Tootles would come rapping at the door, saying in his impertinent manner:

"Miss Hartmann, Mr. St. George Kidder will receive you for half an hour — for only half an hour, mind you. He has a sitter at three — a lady of the highest society, who wishes her visits to remain unsuspected."

The more coolly the young scamp took her adoration, the more she adored him; and matters might have gone on thus indefinitely, had not Tootles been so amateurish as to resent the attentions of Drinkwater. Overnight the whole face of the world was changed, and from being pursued by a beautiful nymph who trembled under the favor of his smile, Tootles, to his indignation, found himself the pursuer, without quite comprehending how the transformation had been worked. He was as astonished (as he himself expressed it) as the fleeing rabbit circling around a tree is to find himself abruptly pursuing the dog. Miss Pansy, from a grateful young lady with her heart at her finger-tips, became overnight a delighted and outrageous little flirt, maliciously bent on tormenting him to the limit of his endurance. Tootles, not having sense enough to stop and run in the opposite direction, continued with wrath and fury to pursue the tantalizing eyes which danced at him over her fleeing shoulder, until he was ready to believe that the love and likewise the tragedy of his life had descended upon him.

Belle Shaler's trifling allusion to Drinkwater had aroused the atavistic yearning for murder in simple or exaggerated degrees in his usually easy-going nature. He stopped before the door of her studio a moment, frowning darkly, before deciding, with supreme cunning, to disguise his misery under a countenance of excessive joy. Pansy, to his relief, was there, camped in a green-plush rocking-chair, sewing on something pink and filmy. On the center-table was a very large vase of chrysanthemums. When Tootles perceived this, his gaiety descended, so to speak, into the cellar. He entered the room with a forced dapperness, saying:

"Have the diamonds come yet, or would you prefer pearls?"

The room was divided by a green-baize curtain which concealed the domestic arrangements and the oil-stove. Popular full-pages in color from magazines and newspapers littered the walls, while different articles of furniture were decked out in ribbons and ruffles, which gave them the effect of displaying their lingerie. A sewing-machine was disguised under an Eastern blanket, while the bed-couches were piled with fancy pillows, depicting such romantic scenes as a mother-bird feeding its young; a tennis-match entitled "Love All," the noble red Indians around a camp-fire, and another, adorned with a red-cheeked damsel with her hand behind her head and her legs out of proportion, inscribed "An American Beauty." Tootles saw none of these details, nor the kimono-covered screen, nor the knicknacks on the desk representing dogs with pipes in their mouths, rabbits in the form of match-safes and a young man kissing a young lady over a stile He saw only the chrysanthemums.

"Oh, hello!" said Pansy, continuing at her work.

"Who's that?" said Belle, sticking her head through the curtains. "Oh, it's only you!"

Tootles put his hand on his heart and made several rapid bows.

"Thanks — thanks for this ovation!"

"What have ye been doing all this while?" Pansy condescended to say, and, as though this were a soul-confidence, she raised her eyes liquidly and allowed her glance to flutter in his in one of those destructive looks which do not need to be taught at high school.

"It's my birthday," said Tootles, hoping to derive some future advantage; "and I am arranging for my friends to give me a surprise-party."

"Go wan," said Pansy, who, having treated him to a melting look, now froze him with one of indifferent disdain. However, the scent of dinner in the air demanded a certain diplomacy. She smiled. "What is it — feed or show?"

"It is my birthday," said Tootles indignantly. Don't you think I was born, the same as you?"

"Come off!" said Belle, who emerged from behind the curtains with her hat on. "I'll bet they picked you off a tree."

" My dear girl," said Tootles, who resorted to his defensive English accent, " it would be far better if you attended to your own troubles. At this very moment, Flick may be a suicide. He started for the river."

" He may choke to death," said Belle scornfully, " but he'll never end in water."

" He is exceedingly distressed," said Tootles, who was afraid that, if he annoyed her, she might stay. " Well, girls, the automobile will be here at seven. Those who love me are invited." And as he was still fearful that she might linger, he added artfully, with an admiring glance at her slender body and saucy face tucked under a fur toque that set off her rebellious shock of hair, " Belle, I particularly want you; I like to be surrounded by beautiful women."

As Belle Shaler was both human and feminine, she was grateful, and showed it, first by abuse, and then by a bit of advice.

" Try that on some one from the green grass," she said, with a tilt of her nose. " Oh, I'll be there." And she added, patting his cheek: " Well, he's a nice boy, only "— this in a lower tone, with a glance at Pansy — " don't be a softy, Tootles — give her hell."

Tootles answered her with a manly glare, to convince her of his inflexibility, and the door once closed behind her, flung a leg over the table, flirted with the work-basket, waited unsuccessfully for Pansy to take the initiative, and ended by saying:

" Well, how about it? "

" About what? " said Pansy, looking up as though she had just perceived his presence.

" Those who love me are invited," said Tootles, folding his arms and giving her a killing look, as he remembered his favorite romantic actor, Mr. Wilbur Montague, would have done in such a situation.

"Do you want me to come?"

Saying which, she put down the sewing and looked again into his eyes with a tender look that seemed to say, "'Why hide what's in your heart, dear?'"

"Oh, no," said Tootles, falling back on sarcasm as he felt himself crumbling weakly; "I came here expressly to beg you to refrain."

"Now you're cross," said Pansy, quite delighted. "I suppose it's them flowers."

"What flowers?" said Tootles, looking around in surprise. He examined them and added: "Wired! Cheap stuff. Now, isn't that just like a shyster lawyer!"

"Silly!" said Pansy, bursting into laughter. "How do ye know that ain't for Belle?"

"Really?" said Tootles, beaming as though the sun had suddenly entered the room.

"Goose!"

"You've been mean enough to me," said Tootles, taking her hand. "You might let up."

"Do you really want me to come?" said Pansy, smiling all over.

"Want you? Why, you beautiful creature," said Tootles, ecstatically, "come, and I'll go before you with a dust-pan and dust the way! That's how much I want you."

These higher flights from Tootles always moved Pansy, who had a penchant for refined romance. She relented, and there was quite an important discussion as to whether Tootles did not, in fact, really believe that Myrtle Popper's eyes were more unusual than hers, and favor the figure of Belle Shaler. All of which would have had an agreeable ending, had not Belle returned and let the cat out of the bag by asking Pansy if she might wear some of her chrysanthemums.

When Tootles returned, to find King O'Leary in a perplexed self-examination, he was in a fearful state. He slammed the door and dove on the couch, where he gave an exhibition of tearing his hair which would have inspired Mr. Wilbur Montague himself to envy.

"Say, what is this?" said O'Leary, after a moment of amazement. "Love or bills?"

Tootles' remarks, while intelligible, remained outside the limits of organized speech which the wise fathers who established the dictionary as an uplift have imposed. In the end, when calm had returned, he arose and said, with terrific impressiveness:

"That ends it! King, take witness — I'm through — I'm cured!"

"Oh, Pansy's a good sort, all right," said O'Leary, understanding.

"Good sort! Yes; certainly. Do tell me why I, St. George Kidder, with a career, with fame and with riches, a future, should be running after a little smudgy-eyed slip of a girl who hasn't a thought in her head."

"Oh, now!"

"She hasn't. King, I swear she is positively stupid! Fact. Now, honestly, what gets me, why am I pattering at her heels — why?"

"She has beautiful eyes, son."

"Do you think that's enough? No; it's not enough!"

"Well, that depends how close they are," said King O'Leary ruefully, thinking of other eyes.

"Do you see me now?" said Tootles fiercely. "I am calm. I am not saying this because I am excited. I am calm. Now listen: I can look at myself and see what's what. King, I am cured! There's nothing — nothing there. A pretty face, yes — but that's all. Drinkwater can have her. I don't care now. It's only vanity — just low, despicable vanity, with me, I admit. Thank heaven, I am strong enough to admit it, and because I admit it, I can laugh at it!" He gave an imitation of great hilarity. "Lord, King, what asses we can be!"

Belle Shaler rapped at the door.

"Hey there, Tootles!"

"Well, what?" growled Tootles, stopping short.

"Pansy wants to speak to you."

"Oh, she does? Well, I'm in the bathtub," said Tootles, and, as the steps went down the hall, he whistled blithely at King O'Leary, and said:

"You see?"

"Sure; but why did you give a lie?"

"I dislike undignified discussions," said Tootles loftily.

"Well, on the whole, I think you're right about the girls," said O'Leary. "We'll give them a grand-stand finish to-night, and then we'll get down to tacks."

Flick came in with his hat over his eyes, saying gloomily:

"Is the wake still on?"

While King O'Leary was explaining the finality of the ceremony, there came a rush and tap outside, and the voice of Belle Shaler cried:

"Tootles, Pansy's cut her finger."

"Good Lord!" said Tootles, who sprang from the imaginary bathtub to the door, to find Belle Shaler confronting him with a scornful glance.

"Hmm! Bathtub! Well, young man, I know what I'd do to you."

But behind Belle was Pansy, with soulful eyes, holding out an imploring hand, saying in the voice of an angel:

"Tootles — please!"

Tootles went, and when he returned, he said triumphantly, deadened to all sense of shame:

"It was all Belle's doing. The flowers *were* hers. I suppose I was a little hasty."

They departed in taxi-cabs at seven sharp. Tootles in evening dress, pleasantly aware of the admiring glance of Pansy, directed at the irreproachable set of his white cravat; Flick with collar reversed and a black-silk square drawn over the opening of his vest; while the problem of passing King O'Leary through the barriers of evening dress was solved by the simple expedient of taking the part out of his hair and decorating him with a flowing tie, which, as Tootles aptly remarked, made the difference between a genius and a piker. In case of need he was to be addressed as "Prince Olgoff." Despite these precautions and Tootles' finished air of distilling money, whether due to the irreverent expression of Flick or some suspicion of the virtuosity of King O'Leary, they were held up at the door of the brilliant dining-room. While they were fidgeting under the expert scrutiny of the head waiter, the ladies all aflutter, who should come up from a near-by table but Dangerfield.

"Friends of mine, Oscar," he said. "One of your best tables."

He glanced at Flick's clerical make-up with a twinkle in his eye, but under Tootles' cautious look he checked himself and took the introductions gravely, and only Flick, who had noted the apprehensive glances of the group of men he had left, divined under the correctness of his attitude the fierce struggle for control which was going on.

"Did you get the name the head waiter called him?" said O'Leary to Tootles, as they were ushered to a corner table with honors due to an ambassador.

"No."

"Neither did I, but it was not Dangerfield — hello!"

"What is it?"

O'Leary, whose eyes had found some one in the crowd, mumbled an evasive explanation and proceeded to arrange the table with special attention to the placing of Tootles and Pansy.

The evening made a terrific impression on the ladies, whose eyes began to glow more kindly under the spell of the lights and the music and the awed recognition of what each dish must cost. They went to a comic opera in a box, in full view of an audience, took supper among the highest paying social strata, oblivious of the rising fear in the breasts of Flick and Tootles lest O'Leary might make an error in subtraction. King, in fact, had calculated so fine that he was forced to send the others ahead while he picked a quarrel with the waiter to save the tip for the journey home, where they ended, so to speak, in a dead heat. At that, disaster had hovered near while Flick was arguing Belle Shaler out of a second ice.

"Did you see him?" O'Leary found a moment to whisper to Flick.

"Never thought he'd get out of the door," said Wilder, who had watched Dangerfield's perilous exit.

"No, not Dangerfield — Drinkwater," said O'Leary. "I was afraid Tootles would see him."

"That ferret! Was he there? Chasing Pansy, eh?"

"No — he was there on other business," said O'Leary. "Mark my words. he's on Dangerfield's trail, boy. There's some dirty business in the wind."

Tootles approached, and they switched the conversation. Each couple now showed such a desire to linger in the shadows that they arrived at the sixth floor well together.

"Mr. St. George Kidder has a few words to say," said Flick gravely.

Tootles, the stage having been thus set, brought one lock of hair over his forehead in the wild, romantic way of a true genius, and said:

"Charming and beautiful women — we thank you!

We thank you for being just what you are — charming and beautiful! We thank you the more because to-night we say farewell. You laugh, you doubt me -- but the laugh is on you. You thought to roll on forever in luxury. To-night you have assisted at our farewell appearance as gilded dispensers of ill-gotten wealth."

"Amen!" said Flick and O'Leary, in sepulchral chorus.

"Despite your sneers, your abuse, your cruel misunderstandings," continued Tootles, charmèd with the sound of his own voice, "we have shown you how artists dispense their wealth. While gold flowed from our pockets, we planned only how to give you pleasure. Now that we face a cold, hard dawn, without a cent, without a friend, but proudly, with the inspiration of our art, we do not wait to be abandoned by you — we say farewell!"

"You're broke?" said the three girls, in horrified chorus.

"Broke!" said the three men, delighted; and, falling into lockstep, their hats waving gaily, they marched roaring with laughter down the hall and into their room.

XII

The next morning the sixth floor was treated to two surprises. Before the home of the Arts a placard in red ink announced:

WE ARE WORKING.
NO WOMEN ADMITTED BEFORE TEA-TIME.
P. S. Bring the Tea.

Down the hall was the sound of wrenching planks, and those who ventured curiously beheld Dangerfield, assisted by Sassafras, busy at the task of unpacking, while Inga, from her point of vantage, surveyed the operations.

Since New Year's, Dangerfield had made no attempt to mingle with the others, though several times he had stopped for a word of greeting, as though in self-excuse: but he never passed the threshold, and, after a moment's fidgeting and a few gracious words, he departed.

"Sometimes I think he'd like to chum in, but is afraid to," said Flick, who was puzzled by this lack of sociability — not being affected in the same way.

"Let him alone; he'll come around in his way," said O'Leary, "if there's anything left of him."

At this period, though he would not have admitted it, he felt a growing antagonism, and the cause was Inga. The girl had a drawing force of which he was always aware. It was not that he felt sentimentally moved, for there was an ingrained common sense about him that warned him of the folly of such a hope. She perplexed him; she held him; she aroused a certain sense of combat in him, like a spirited horse. It was not that he would ever be in love with her, but that, rating her high in his experience, it rankled in his vanity, not that she was indifferent to him but that she should have gone so directly to another, who had not even sought her. Yet he had gone twice in the fortnight at her call to help her through stormy nights with the derelict.

Inga, alone of the floor, knew the full extent of the turbulent voyage through which Dangerfield was passing. Since the night on which she had committed the error of attempting to restrain him, she had refrained from putting any brake upon his actions, holding herself in readiness to come to him in the limp hours of succeeding weakness and despair. This attitude awakened his curiosity. as it gained his confidence. Once he even asked to see her room. She refused.

"Why not?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said thoughtfully, "but I had rather you wouldn't."

"It's not —" Then he stopped. It could not have been on account of prudery. "No; it's not that you care what the others say."

"No; it's not that," she said, amused at the thought.

"Well, then?"

"It's a feeling — I don't know. It's something I want to keep to myself — part of me. You don't understand."

He shook his head, and, struck with the peculiar intensity of her eyes, revery mixed almost with a touch of fear, he said impulsively,

"Inga, I can't make you out."

"Don't."

This reply dissatisfied him. His eyes began to follow her more intently when they were alone, and several times unsuccessfully he returned to the attack.

During this time, the visitors, men of his own world, who flitted in for a brief duty-visit, began to fall away.

He saw them go with a scorn and bitterness at first, and then with a sort of relief. Sassafras received orders to announce that he was out, except to two men, lawyers evidently, who came from time to time. Curiously enough, even after the wildest nights, he never showed any remorse. When Inga was there he often fell into profound fits of moroseness, in which he would sit with his fists clutched to his mouth, gnawing at his nails, staring at a medallion, a Della Robbia, or a Perseus of Benvenuto Cellini, which he had brought forth out of the disorder.

She never relinquished her intention of getting him into an atmosphere of calm and order, and occasionally tried by devious ways to suggest the subject of unpacking. But the moment the man felt a compelling hand, some malicious and refractory devil seemed to rise up in him, and he would say:

"I know what you're after. Well, I won't do it."

Then, one morning, to her surprise, he called her and said abruptly:

"Well, I'm going to fix up the studio. There now — will you be satisfied?"

"Thank you," she said, with a bright nod.

"Oh, you needn't thank me," he said grimly. "Wait and see. You may regret it."

They set to work with a vim, and once launched on a new idea, he threw himself into it with the enthusiasm of a child. Sassafras was pressed into service (having surreptitiously jammed the elevator), rolling his eyes at the magnificence he uncovered. They spent a gay morning transforming the boarded bareness of the studio with the warm, green background of great tapestries, restful in harmony and dreamy verdure. The man had a love of beauty as intense as all his desires, and if she did not always understand the value of the really fine bits of

Louis XV furniture, spreading *fauteuils* and the great flat-top desk with bulging curves which reminded one of a pompous burgomaster, or the shadowy massiveness of the carved-oak sideboard, she had an instinctive eye for proportion and delicacy.

"Well, I suppose we'll have to stop for lunch," he said at last.

"Send Sam for sandwiches, and let's go on," she said eagerly.

"Do you want to?"

"Indeed I do!"

They lunched on a great Florentine table of carved oak, ample enough to seat a dozen, discussing where the sideboard should stand and the old Roman chest with beaten brass clasps. Underneath them, a great rug in the center transformed the floor with the heavy faded yellows and greens of its rich softness.

"We'll draw a curtain of China silk, a warm gray, over the skylight," he said, studying the harmonies that had come into the room. "Hello! What are you doing?" he added, smiling.

She had stolen from her slippers, and was moving lightly over the deep Oriental rug, reveling in its velvety voluptuousness.

"I love the very feel of it," she said, her face flushing in the first emotion she had shown him.

"Go back into the tapestry," he said, with mock sternness, and half closing his eyes, he nodded approvingly, his glance following the flowing line of the deep-green silk skirt which turned from the graceful hip, the firm, dark neck rising above the youthful breast, and the forestlike wildness of the oval face.

She slipped her green-silk feet back into the slippers and said impulsively:

"It's all just as I thought you would have it."

"Oh, it is?" he said, enjoying her enthusiasm.

"Things you live with tell so much," she said, moving curiously toward the chest.

"You've got some strange ideas about me," he said grimly.

"I have the right one," she said calmly. She laid her hand on the chest. "What's hidden here?"

"So you can have curiosity, too?" he said, smiling, caught by the rare mood of enthusiasm, which seemed to waken sudden delicate flushes and sensitive emotions across the blue veil of her eyes and the finely turned upper lip.

He opened the chest and drew forth an armful of old silks and velvets, rare satins and brocades, spilling a riot of color into her arms — leaping, flashing swirls of sapphire, gold, and faded amethyst. She put them aside, and, with a cry of delight, seized something lying in the chest — a rose velvet with the faintest silver sheen, which brought back the pageantry of the Middle Ages.

"How wonderful!"

"You have a good instinct," he said, nodding. "That's Italian, thirteenth century, the rarest of all. What color, eh?"

She wrapped her arms in it and drew her cheek across the glorious velvet, which might have lain against the cheek of a storied princess, and as her breath drew deep, across the dark face there spread such a blush of pleasure that she seemed to absorb the rare tint into her own body. He took it from her and gazed at it hungrily, as though he were plunging his look into some gorgeous autumnal pool, drinking in its ecstasy with the mingled pain and pleasure of a lost love remembered.

"Color — color!" he said, held by it. "It thrills you like the first sight of your own country."

All at once, with a smothered cry — the longing of his soul for the lost days of inspiration, perhaps — he struck the chest with the full force of his fist and turned away in rebellion.

"God!"

"Don't." She laid her hands quickly on his shoulders, straight and slim, as she stood gazing earnestly into his tormented eyes. "Mr. Dangerfield, that'll come again."

"Never; no, never," he said gloomily, and his lips twitched as he glanced away.

Sassafras returned at this moment. Then they set to work again, but she had lost him for the day. The exuberance had departed. He gave his assent in monosyllables, and seemed to have so completely lost interest that she hastened the work, fearing that the whim would seize him to countermand it. The worst of it was that in such moods there was no arguing with him, as he seemed to go so completely from her as to have no sense of what he heard. With the coming of the night and the blazing-out of the lights, he began to get restless, wandering about the room as though each thing in it were raising a haunting memory before him. Once he objected, when Sassafras had started to unpack the easel and the paint-boxes.

"Not that!" he said angrily.

"Unpack them; you can put them away afterward," she said casually.

He looked at her so furiously that, for a moment, she half expected an angry answer. Then he laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"I know your idea — little good it will do!" he said, with a stubborn look, and went to the window, gazing out without further notice of what she did.

There was yet much to be done, but the essential had been accomplished. The studio had been rid of boxes and wrappings, and though frames and bric-à-brac, porcelains, bronzes, terra cottas, stood against the walls, mingled with the dull gray of rapiers, green masks and brown boxing gloves, with glowing pools of burnished copper, the room was humanized.

"That's enough for to-night," she said, after she had sent Sassafras away.

He turned, and the first thing he saw was the easel.

"You seem to know where to place it," he said abruptly.

"I am glad that's right," she said quietly.

"Well, now that you've gotten me to do it," he said, staring dully about the room, his nails at his mouth, "we'll see what will come of it."

She started to leave.

"Wait! I don't mean to be rude," he said nervously, "only ——"

"Why, Mr. Dangerfield, don't say that!" she said quietly. "I understand."

He nodded, and rather absent-mindedly patted her shoulder. Then, apparently irrelevantly, he said:

"Afraid I'm going off on a wild night, aren't you?"

"I wasn't thinking of it."

"See here," he said abruptly; "I want you to understand one thing — that isn't the trouble — I can stop that any time I want"— he added almost viciously —"but I don't want to." Then he said, seemingly without reason, as though his mind were vacillating from one extreme to the other: "How long is it to the twentieth?"

"Why, twelve days."

"Still twelve? The twentieth — that's a date to remember," he said, as though to himself.

She saw him frown and stare past her, as that other self came into his eyes, bristling, savage, rebelling against some inner torture.

He started at the sound of her voice, looked at her a moment as though trying to account for her presence, and ended by saying:

"Well, it was curious."

"What?"

"How you knew where to place that easel."

"I don't think so," she said quietly.

He waited a moment, evidently turning something over in his mind, before saying with the same abruptness:

"Do I remind you of any one?"

She glanced at him quickly, and then shook her head twice energetically.

"That's strange — well, you made me think so," he said, and without explaining his meaning, he went off.

Having permitted her to influence him so far, out of pure deviltry, he seemed determined to make her regret it. To the surprise of every one, he became exceedingly sociable, dropping in at all hours, with the exception of tea-time, when the girls came back at the end of the day. He was always polite to them; but it was plain to see that they did not interest him in the least. This new phase of Dangerfield's had unfortunately an upsetting influence, just as virtue had set in strongly, with Tootles composing the figure-scheme of his monumental work which would represent the ages in admiration before the apotheosis of the well-dressed man; Flick beginning new duties as the press-agent for a folding tooth-brush which could be carried in the vest pocket; and King O'Leary installed at the piano at Campeau's restaurant. If Tootles and O'Leary maintained some semblance of concentration, Flick, who never refused an invitation to patrol the city or to usher in the sun, abandoned the folding tooth-brush on the second day of sightseeing in Dangerfield's company. Sometimes the night ended in the studio with boxing or fencing or a group about the card-table, and Sassafras promoted to the station and perquisites of a butler. It was not so much the drinking that went on, though there was enough of that, but the waste of energy that was appalling. Though Dangerfield drank heavily and continuously, he had a knack of concealing it, of always remaining within the limits of his dignity. It was rather his consuming of vitality and lack of sleep that seemed to be wearing him down before their eyes.

"I am a classy, two-handed little champion myself," said Flick, shaking his head; "but I've got to sleep once in three days to get the kinks out of my hair. I've seen some tough ones in my day, but my hat's off to this one!"

"He can't go on this way forever," said Tootles, seriously.

"Right! There's a smash-up coming soon," said O'Leary laconically. "I know the signs."

And then a curious interruption occurred.

They were all in Dangerfield's studio, about eleven o'clock one night — a mixed group, for Dangerfield and Flick, in the wanderings of the night before, had been seized with the idea of giving a boxing carnival and had annexed two ornaments of the profession, Spike Feeley and Gumbo Rickey, who knew Flick of old. In order to impress Tootles, Flick had plotted a dramatic finale, in which, after the professionals had disposed of the amateurs, they were to go down before the might of his thin arms. Unfortunately, the imminence of this conclusion and the slight floating doubt which always accompanies trafficking with men of lower ethical standards had so weighed upon Flick that he had resorted to much artificial encouragement, until by the time Spike Feeley had floored Drinkwater (which was part of the program) and King O'Leary and Gumbo Rickey had slugged each other to their hearts' content, Flick, the coming champion, was heard to whisper to his antagonist:

" First time — down — you down; make sure — see! "

Spike, to the honor of the profession, carried out his part of the contract to the extent of going down under the first assault, with a realistic imitation of unconsciousness. Unfortunately, Flick went down also, and, going down, stayed there; so that a new record was established in the annals of the fistic art by the spectacle of both men knocked out by one blow. When the laughter and confusion had subsided, Dangerfield made up his mind suddenly to put on the gloves. Until now, though he had fenced several bouts with Mr. Cornelius, who wielded the rapier with surprising dexterity, Dangerfield had never boxed; but something in the joyful fury of O'Leary's bout had sent the fighting blood coursing in him. He stripped to the waist, and, in the glare of the top light which cut its brilliant circle through the obscurity of the farther room, his body came out impressively, muscled and knitted, despite the loose coating of flesh that lay over it.

" Look out for yourself, Spike! he said suddenly, as Feeley slouched into a lazy, receptive attitude; and the joy with which his voice rang warned them that he could box.

Feeley came forward languidly with an orthodox feint. Dangerfield walked into him and drove a hard left straight to the face that sent the professional back with a rude jar and a quick flash of temper.

" All right, if that's the way ye's fightin'," he said, and he came back crouching, with chin thrust out.

" I told you to look out," said Dangerfield, laughing, and the next moment they were at it, back and forth, hammer and tongs, fast and heavy.

In the long run, condition must, of course, have told, though, to be fair, the professional, too, had been in the cups that night; but at a quick, mixing scrap, Dangerfield had him at his mercy. There was something ferocious in the way he plunged in, as though reveling in the opportunity of throwing off the tension under which he had struggled — a certain wild delight in the clash of bodies which caused the on-lookers to watch him a little apprehensively. He caught hard smashes with a reckless laugh, giving in kind. Once he went reeling against the old Roman chest and almost over, but he steadied himself and fought back, rocking the other man under the impact of his blows. It was no tame boxing exhibition but a fight for blood by now, and the spectators were on their feet, shouting in excitement, Drinkwater quite beside himself with curiosity and satisfaction at his host's exhibition. A blow caught Feeley full on the head; he staggered, and Dangerfield stepped in with a mighty drive at the body which lifted him off the floor and flung him crashing into a pile of copper plaques that went clanging in every direction. . . . And at that precise moment the door opened and a woman stood looking in. Feeley, bounding up, came rushing in furiously, but Dangerfield stopped him with a quick oath, and he turned, gazing, too, at the tall figure, purposely concealed in furs and heavy veils.

There was a silence as flat as a calm in a gale. Each recognized at once that it was a woman of the world and that she had the right to be there, and drew back so as to leave the room to the two figures: the woman drawn up scornfully against the door, and Dangerfield, with his lips twitching and his curious bearlike stare, facing her, with the white lights running over his glistening neck and torso. It was a hard moment for him, and those who knew the man wondered into what paroxysm of anger he might go. In the end the breeding in him won out, and though his rage flashed up at the position into which she had put him, he held himself in fairly well. Fortunately, as he was standing there, seeking an excuse, King O'Leary came to his assistance.

"Better clear out, you fellows," he sang out; and with that, like a herd of huddling sheep, awkwardly and nervously, they crowded out of the room, suddenly quieted and sobered. King O'Leary, who came last, closed the door, leaving Dangerfield alone with the woman, who, by the possessive assurance of her attitude, they instinctively divined must be his wife.

XIII

This dramatic interruption made a tremendous commotion. The party broke up instantly. O'Leary, who had been watching Drinkwater from the moment Dangerfield had put on the gloves, purposely left the door of their room open into the hall.

"What's going on there is no business of ours," he said grimly. "I propose to keep it so."

Sure enough, presently along came Drinkwater, head down, as though unaware of the open door.

"Hey, there!"

At O'Leary's call, the elongated figure pulled up abruptly, and Drinkwater's gipsy face loomed high in the door-frame.

"Yes?" he said, blowing nervously through his nose. "What is it?"

"I say, Drinkwater, better keep away from that end of the hall," said O'Leary casually. "You see, you might overhear something you oughtn't to."

Drinkwater looked around with an excellent simulation of surprise.

"Really?" he said affably. "I wasn't noticing. Good-night." With which, smiling, he moved away, and quite casually he reached out and closed the door.

O'Leary, whistling to himself, rose and opened it again, saying sarcastically:

"Now, wasn't that cute of him!"

Presently, just as he had expected, Drinkwater came by the door again.

"Hey, there!"

The lawyer stopped, but this time there was no smile on his face.

"Well, what is it?" he said curtly.

"Told you to keep away from this end — savvy?" said O'Leary, looking at him.

"I do not recognize, O'Leary," said the lawyer, puffing after every third word, and speaking as though he were addressing the court, "any right of yours to tell me what I should do."

"You don't? Well, I do. What's going on in there is nothing in your life, old horse, so I've just made up my mind to sit here and see that no little five-dollar lawyer goes soft-footing it down there to sneak around. You see, Drinkwater, I'm on to your game."

"What do you mean?" said the other, quietly enough, though his fingers were twitching at the hem of his coat.

"Think it over," said O'Leary. "I'm not at all certain that this isn't some of your work to-night. But you heard what I said. Now, git!"

Drinkwater stood looking at him stubbornly, hatred fairly oozing out of his brilliant black eyes that were now drawn and wicked as a cornered reptile's. Then he blew through his nostrils again and went up the hall.

They waited with a sense of impending tragedy — Tootles at the table drawing nervous caricatures on a pad, Flick and Schneibel by the window, talking in low tones, O'Leary moving restlessly up and down the room. The woman had been there an hour by the watch which he jerked out every five minutes, when, all at once, they heard steps coming down the hall. O'Leary turned with a sudden start and shot over to the door, whether he believed it was Drinkwater again or whether he had some other possibility in mind. This time it was Mr. Cornelius, who, unable to contain his anxiety, had come down for news.

"Now, isn't this a nice damn thing?" he said, in his staccato, excited way, and they noticed that his gray mustache, ordinarily so immaculate, was sadly twisted and awry. He stood there, fretting and undecided. "How long is it now since she was there?"

"Over an hour."

Instinctively they were silent, listening. From the next room not a sound came to them.

"You hear anything?" said the baron.

"Once. They were getting up pretty high," said O'Leary. "I gave them a rap or two on the wall."

"I don't like it — *une sale affaire! Que diable vient-elle faire ici?*" said the baron, twitching at the tuft under his chin.

"Do you think some one had better break it up?" said O'Leary, who showed a good deal of uneasiness, for him.

Tootles drew a big breath, shoved away his pad, and went to listen by the wall.

"A nice damn thing," said Mr. Cornelius, angrily. "What a stupid damn thing — eh? Yes, perhaps some one had better go. One never knows — at such times. He is — so — so wild!"

"If any one goes, it's up to you, Baron," said O'Leary solemnly. "You've got more of the inside dope than we. It wouldn't be quite so raw —" He pulled out his watch again, though he had consulted it only a few moments before, and said nervously: "Yes; darned if I don't think you'd better see what's going on."

At this moment the door of the corner studio opened, and they heard Dangerfield say:

"Too late — I've said it — you've got just four days more." Then something unintelligible in the woman's voice, evidently a supplication, for he replied with a scornful laugh:

"With all your cleverness — you're not clever enough.

You should have known the man you were dealing with."

The nerves of the listeners were at such a tension that they were quite unconscious of their exposed position in the hall. Dangerfield perceived them first, for he drew up, folded his arms and said:

"Don't waste time — good-by."

Whether or not she became aware of her listeners, she seemed to accept the inevitable, for, after a moment she said quietly:

"You will, at least, I suppose, see me to my car?"

He hesitated, and was about to comply, though it was evident that it went against the grain to do so, when the door of the little studio opened abruptly and Inga came out.

"Don't go!" she said emphatically, moving directly to Dangerfield and touching his arm.

This unlooked-for action on the part of Inga left them all amazed. Curiously enough, the only one who seemed to take it as a matter of course was Dangerfield.

"Why do you say that?" he said sharply, yet seeming to give the matter attention.

"Don't go — don't!" she repeated insistently.

While every one was waiting for what was going to happen next, the woman said quietly, with supreme insolence, as though such persons as Inga were beneath her notice:

"You have not quite lost, I suppose, all sense of decency? Kindly take me out of this humiliating scene."

There was something in her tone that did not quite ring true. It was too calm, too calculatedly unresentful, perhaps. At any rate, each was conscious of an uneasy sense of distrust. Dangerfield, who had been looking at Inga's tense face, seemed to make up his mind all at once.

"O'Leary, are you there?" he said abruptly.

To the surprise of the others, O'Leary stepped forward at once and blurted out:

"Miss Sonderson's advice is good. If you want, I'll show the lady down."

"Do," said Dangerfield, who by now was in a high pitch of excitement, staring with shifty suspicion at the woman. At such moments, there was something brooding and combustible about him that gave one the sensation of walking over a mine.

The woman drew hastily away, as though really alarmed; then she turned on them as they stood together, Ingle's hand still resting on his arm, as though to quiet him.

"So that's how it is?" she said, with a high-pitched laugh.

Then she turned and went around the corner. At the steps she seemed to see O'Leary for the first time.

"I don't need your assistance," she said curtly.

O'Leary, without reply, continued to follow. At the bottom of the flight she turned again. This time her voice was conciliating.

"Thank you, but I prefer to go on alone."

"Yes, yes," said O'Leary, as though he had grown suddenly deaf; "but it's no trouble — none at all."

At the next flight she wheeled around with abrupt determination.

"You evidently don't understand me," she said sharply. "Your presence is obnoxious. I *wish* to be left alone."

"Very probably," said O'Leary, without, however, having shown any signs of departing.

"Do you hear me?" she said angrily.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Useless to talk to me like that, my lady," he said, exaggerating his rôle for purposes of his own. "I'm no gentleman, you see — you can't put those tricks over on me. I'm just King O'Leary, and I'm going to see that you get out of here. Now that you understand things better, will you go quietly, or do you want me to pick you up and carry you?"

She drew back with a cry.

"Don't touch me!"

"Well, which is it?"

She made up her mind quickly; evidently she could size up a situation and reconcile herself to it when faced with a crisis, for she turned and went down the other flights without a word.

On the second floor, his ear caught the sounds of hurried, slipping steps. He turned hastily, almost certain that he had seen the passage of some tall, shifting body, but he did not dare to investigate them, with the duty in hand.

"Are you satisfied now?" she said, when they had reached the ground floor. "Your intention is not to annoy me, is it?"

He stood stroking his chin, undecided. She profited by the moment's indecision to flit swiftly out of the ghostly arcade toward the avenue. He did not move purposely until he had seen her round the corner, where she gave a hasty backward glance to assure herself that she was not followed. Then, making up his mind suddenly, he went down the arcade and out onto the sidewalk, for spying was not in his nature. She was at the door of a closed touring car, some one was giving her a hand from within, and on the curb two men were standing. She saw O'Leary start angrily toward them, and said something in peremptory command, and before he could come rushing up, the Irish anger in him awaking at the suspicion of foul play, they had jumped in after her and the car had rushed away through the muddy slush.

Remembering the shadow he had seen on the second floor, he hastened back. He made a thorough inspection of the halls without finding any one in these old corridors given over to business offices. Then he went directly to Drinkwater's room and rapped sharply on the glowing glass. In a moment, the lawyer half opened the door, and seeing O'Leary there, stood scowling at him.

" What were you doing down on the second floor just now? " said O'Leary directly.

" Second floor? You're crazy! " said Drinkwater, surlily.

" You were down there five minutes ago."

" I was not, and I don't know what business it is of yours anyway," said the lawyer, catching his breath.

" Drinkwater, I believe you're lying," said O'Leary, with a twitching of his hands that made the other draw back abruptly. " If you've got any dirty scheme in your head — keep out of it, do you understand? "

" Is that all? " said the Portuguese, with a sneer.

O'Leary turned without answer and went down the hall.

" Dangerfield's been asking after you," said Flick. " Well, what? "

King O'Leary made a sign to signify that he would give his news later, and went to the next room.

Dangerfield jumped up at his entrance and came forward in a positive frenzy, crying:

" Well, what did you see — who was there? "

Behind him the straight, slender figure of Inga was standing. She shook her head hastily and placed her finger across her lips in warning.

" Why, no one at all," said O'Leary heartily.

" No one? " said Dangerfield, and he came up close to him and looked into his face like a puzzled child. " You say, no one? "

"I told you that there was no reason to be excited," said Inga, in a strangely calming voice.

"How do you know there was no one?" he said, dissatisfied. "Did you see who was outside? Did you go to the car,— all the way?"

"Yes, indeed; and the bigger fool I," said O'Leary, who comprehended that the man was in no condition to hear what he had seen.

"But some one was there — in the car — waiting?" said Dangerfield, insisting. "A square-set man, about my height, cropped mustache — you saw him — you ——"

Inga had advanced to his side; now she laid her hand on his arm and said with a smile:

"Why, Mr. Dangerfield, didn't you hear what he said? There was no one there?"

"No one?." said Dangerfield, frowning and looking back at O'Leary with a perplexed stare.

"No one at all, and no one waiting," said O'Leary glibly.

"Then why didn't you want me to go down?" he said abruptly, turning on her.

"You would only have gone on arguing," she said.

His back was turned a moment, as he ran his hand over his head and walked away. Inga's eyes went quickly to King O'Leary. He nodded and held up three fingers.

Dangerfield had sat down at the spacious Florentine table and taken up two packs of cards. Inga glanced at him, and going over to the sideboard, lit two candles and placed them on either side of him. He looked up, smiled, and patted her hand, quite unconscious of O'Leary's presence. Then he seemed to forget them both in the absorption of the solitaire, laying out the cards with minute pains, as though this assembled order rested his fluttering mind. She made a sign to King O'Leary and went to the door. Instantly Dangerfield looked up.

"Where are you going?" he said querulously.

She smiled.

"It's all right; I'm coming back."

Outside, O'Leary told her the results of the investigation, saying:

"Hadn't he ought to know?"

She considered thoughtfully.

"Do you think they were there on purpose?"

"Don't know — hard to tell," he said, frowning. "It was her actions that made me suspicious. Well, oughtn't we to put him wise?"

"I'll tell him," she said, nodding; "at least, I'll mention it so he'll be on his guard. Do you think — that is, if there is anything wrong — that there will be any danger to-night?"

"Can't tell," he said thoughtfully. "Do you want me to stay with him?"

She shook her head.

"If anything happens, I'll come for you. It's all right; I know how to handle him."

"Say?"

"What?"

He looked down at her a moment, while, a little puzzled, she stood facing him, wondering.

"You've made up your mind, haven't you?" he said abruptly.

She understood at once, but she waited some time before answering, as though the question were still undecided in her own mind.

"He needs me," she said, at length, looking up into his eager eyes. Then she went back to the studio for the long night's vigil.

XIV

One unlooked-for result of the evening's happenings was that O'Leary's antagonism to Dangerfield seemed completely to disappear. Indeed, he seemed now to share Inga's devotion — probably for no other reason than that Dangerfield, in a moment of perplexity, had called him to his assistance.

The effect on Dangerfield was marked. He sobered up all at once, as though concentrated on some fixed purpose. Yet the restless note remained — if anything, it was aggravated. There was always about him, even in the midst of conversation, the effect of listening for some distant warning sound. Another thing they noticed was that he did not leave the arcade or indeed the sixth floor, having his meals sent in by Sassafras. When O'Leary went down to see him the second night, he had to name himself in a loud voice before the door was opened cautiously, while once inside, he found quite a system of bars and bolts had been installed; and by this he divined that Inga had found a means to warn him.

The change in Dangerfield brought a more pliable mood, of which the girl availed herself to amuse his mind with the final arrangement of the studio. Curiously enough, though it was characteristic of his disconnected actions, he made but one reference, and that an indirect one, to the abrupt interruption of the woman, whoever she might have been in his other life. It was the second afternoon, and they were engaged in hanging pictures and placing the bric-à-brac. For long periods he was keen and interested, deeply enjoying her enthusiasm; then, all at once, there came a spell of moody aloofness in which he forgot her, roving about the room with a nervous, jerky snapping of his fingers, talking to himself. Once he stopped with his ear trained to some outer noise and went abruptly to the door for a suspicious survey. That ended, he closed it carefully and drew each bolt, trying the strength of the door.

"A couple of bars," he said, as though dissatisfied; "that's what it needs."

He came back, and, seemingly struck with her presence, went up to her and laid one of his big hands on her shoulder.

"You think this all very queer, don't you?"

"It is no business of mine," she said.

"How do I know you're not in their game — you, too?" he said abruptly, and a startled leap of suspicion came into his yellow-green eyes that made them almost uncanny. "By George, that would be clever!"

"Don't get excited, Mr. Dangerfield," she said; and whether consciously or unconsciously, her voice took on that dreamy, quiet tone — like the bubbling of waters along hidden brooks — that seemed to exercise a peculiar quieting effect upon him.

"No, no; that's crazy," he said. Then he frowned suddenly. "Well, it will all come out soon — the truth — as much as people ever get of the truth."

"Where do you want to hang this?"

He stopped and came back, studying a long time the canvas she held up, a study of sunlight through the foliage that flung spattered shadows across a group of urchins.

"Like that?" he said suddenly.

"I like it the best."

"You do?"

She smiled and nodded.

"I thought that a great picture when I painted it —

where was it? Yes, at Étretat,” he said moodily. “Wonder how good it really is? So you like it best, do you?”

“It's so sure and daring; and there's something that draws you into it.”

“Why, that's good criticism,” he said, pleased. “Yes, that's youth — when you don't know how difficult the thing is. That's why sometimes you succeed in doing it — Well, we'll give it the place of honor. Wish the sun shone like that nowadays.”

“You haven't taken off the signature,” she said, pointing to the lower corner. “Do you want to?”

“That's queer! Thought I'd cleaned them all up,” he said, without appearing to notice the knowledge her remark implied.

He took a palette-knife and carefully shaved away the telltale strokes.

When they had hung the picture, he seemed to come out of his mental eclipse as though reinvigorated, and turned to her quite normally.

“Why, you must be tired!” he said, with a sudden contrition. “What a brute I am! Kept you up all night, too.”

She shook her head and smiled.

“I like this — I like changing something bare and empty into something beautiful and fine.”

“Now, just what do you mean by that?” he said, with an odd smile; but, seeing by her expression that she had meant nothing more than the words implied, he laughed to himself and added thoughtfully, with some personal show of interest, as he looked into her quiet eyes:

“Queer — that you should happen to be just over there!”

“Fate, isn't it?” she said; and, for once, their rôles were reversed — the man studying her as she went into a revery, her lips a little drawn, looking far down the long-storied lanes of the tapestry.

"That's what it all is," he said, watching her with more curiosity than he had shown —" whether you turn to the left or the right at a certain moment. 'Life is a jest, and all things show it.' Why, Inga, if a gust of wind hadn't blown my hat off at the right —" he corrected himself —" no, the wrong moment, would I be here? A gust of wind — and that's the cause, the real cause of it all. How ridiculous!"

Then all at once, after they had completed their task and the studio stood about them clothed in dark greens and mellow golden rugs, with rich notes of carved furniture and glowing copper in subduing shadows, and great Spanish jars in streaked gray and green in massive restfulness, he became quite furious, as though suddenly realizing what her patience had accomplished.

"You made me do it, and I didn't want to! You made me!" he said, crossing his arms and looking so moodily ferocious that she began to smile. He continued to scowl at her without answering her mood. "Lots of good it will do," he said curtly, with a dark look.

"It kills time," she said quietly.

"Well, yes; anything for that. Thank God for anything that will do that," he admitted. "But as for anything else —" and he began to laugh in a low tone to himself at something that had struck his imagination. "All right, then, suppose we have tea here."

"That would be nice."

"Ask the others in," he said restlessly.

She looked up, genuinely surprised, wondering if she had understood him.

"The men next door?"

"The girls, too — all of them. Fix the tea — wait — I'll ask them in myself."

Accustomed as she was to his change of moods, this inconsistency amazed her. However, she said nothing, and busied herself at the tea-table. At the door he stopped and came back.

"You don't mind, do you?" he said tentatively.

"I? Mind what?"

"The others coming in — perhaps you'd rather not. I thought when I spoke, you looked as though —"

"No; on the contrary, I think that's what you ought to do. It will amuse you."

"Yes, yes; that's what I want."

He nodded, and went to the next studio, where he knocked.

"Who the devil is that?" cried the angry voice of King O'Leary.

"It's I, Dangerfield."

Instantly the room was filled with laughter, and the door was presently opened by Tootles, hair rumpled, paint-brush in his teeth, palette in hand, sunk in enormous overalls streaked and speckled with every conceivable combination of colors.

"Come in or shut the door," cried O'Leary, from across the screen. "This costume was never meant for January in New York."

"What is it?" said Dangerfield in surprise.

"I am engaged on a monumental masterpiece," said Tootles proudly. "Step in, brother artist, and give me your expert advice."

XV

Against the heroic proportions of the back drop, which represented a peculiarly violent sunset over the cañons of Colorado, was a group in such incongruous attire that Dangerfield, accustomed as he was to the eccentricities of the studio, halted in astonishment. King O'Leary, crowned with a battered helmet and draped in a white sheet to represent a toga, was in an attitude of deferential amazement before Flick, who occupied the center of the tableau in Tootles' dress suit, which shrunk below the elbows and positively refused to descend to the ankles. To the left, Sassafras, stripped to the waist, with the doctored pelt of the Harlem bear flung over one shoulder, and a wig of pendent black horsehair, was on one knee, rolling his eyes upward in ecstatic tribute. Behind appeared Mr. Cornelius in the most Elizabethan of frilled coats and the most Victorian of trousers, while Pansy, in powdered wig and black-silk knee-breeches, was the most charming of beaux.

"Do you seize the idea?" said Tootles proudly, his head on one side in paternal affection for the group which had sprung Minerva-wise from his brain.

Dangerfield resorted hastily to his pocket-handkerchief and surreptitiously flicked away a tear of agony, which all his self-control could not keep down.

"It's only a preliminary sketch," said Tootles hastily, "for my monumental decoration, 'The Ages Contemplating the Apotheosis of the Well-dressed Man.'"

"There's millions in it," said Flick, who forgot himself to the extent of raising one arm, with the result that a ripping sound was heard.

"Holy cats! Drop that arm!" exclaimed Tootles, who rushed to the rescue of the pride of the wardrobe.

During this diversion, Dangerfield was able to recover himself sufficiently to present a grave mask.

"What does Sassafras represent?" he asked, stroking his chin.

"Sassafras is primitive man," said Tootles, assuming the attitude of a lecturer. "O'Leary represents Rome — Cæsar or some other classic chap, you know. The baron is the Spirit of the Middle Ages, and Pansy is the celebrated Beau Brummel. It's symbolic, of course."

"And Wilder is the Apotheosis of the Well-dressed Man?" said Dangerfield gravely, contemplating the thin limbs, which seemed to have sprouted from the legs and arms of Wimpfheimer & Goldfinch's glorified dress suit.

"No, no," said Tootles hastily; "Flick is only a clothes-horse for the time being."

Flick objected strongly to this characterization, and while his feelings were being soothed, Dangerfield turned the easel and inspected the canvas.

"I'm afraid I'm in a terrible mix," said Tootles, scratching his head and looking in despair at the canvas, which had certain marked resemblances to the first days of Creation, when the earth and the waters were still mingled.

"How are you going at it?" said Dangerfield, peering into the confusion of colors.

"Diving in, head foremost, I guess," said Tootles, rather discouraged.

"Have you made any sketches, charcoal sketches?"

"Oh, yes; dozens."

He returned with heaped-up arms.

Dangerfield sorted them rapidly, humming to himself. Bits of drawing caught his attention, a free, felicitous line here and there evoking an approving grunt.

" Not so bad — this is more like it — too worked over — this means something — good! But you must get your composition first, my boy."

" I know that," said Tootles ruefully; " but then, I'm new to decoration, you see."

" Harder than you thought, eh ? "

Tootles nodded darkly.

" Here, give me a canvas," said Dangerfield, selecting a charcoal; and then, unable to hold in any longer, he burst into a shout and began to rock back and forth, convulsed with laughter. This cleared the atmosphere and brought them all down from the rarified heights to a working basis.

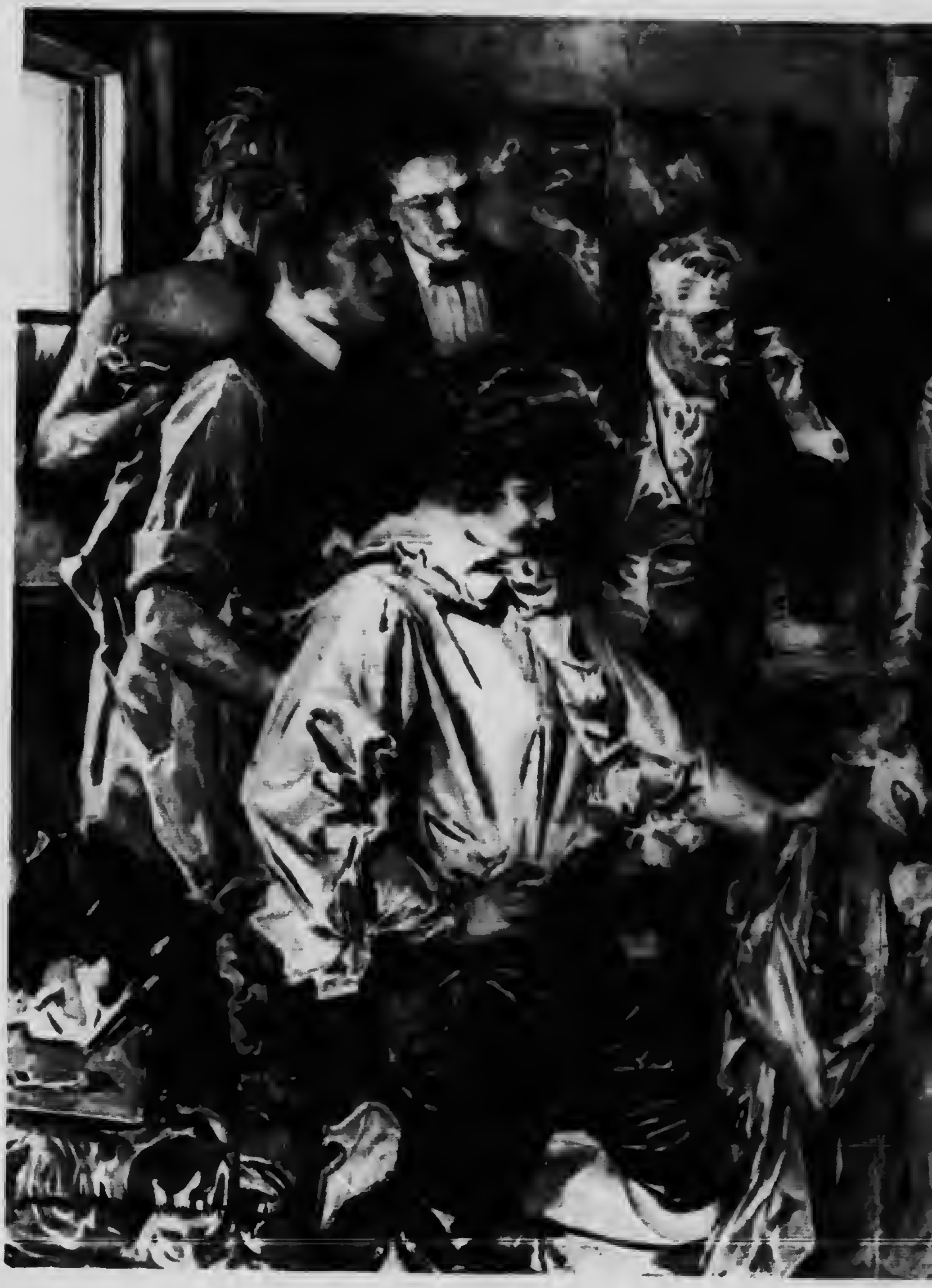
When Inga, anxious at his continued absence, came in a moment later, she found Dangerfield chuckling to himself, oblivious to everything but the joy of the moment, rearranging the group, as excited as though he were launched on a masterpiece.

" The first point is the Well-dressed Man," he began, with splendid gravity. " We must place him in a way to dominate everything else — a pedestal, or better still, a throne — no, no; he mustn't be sitting."

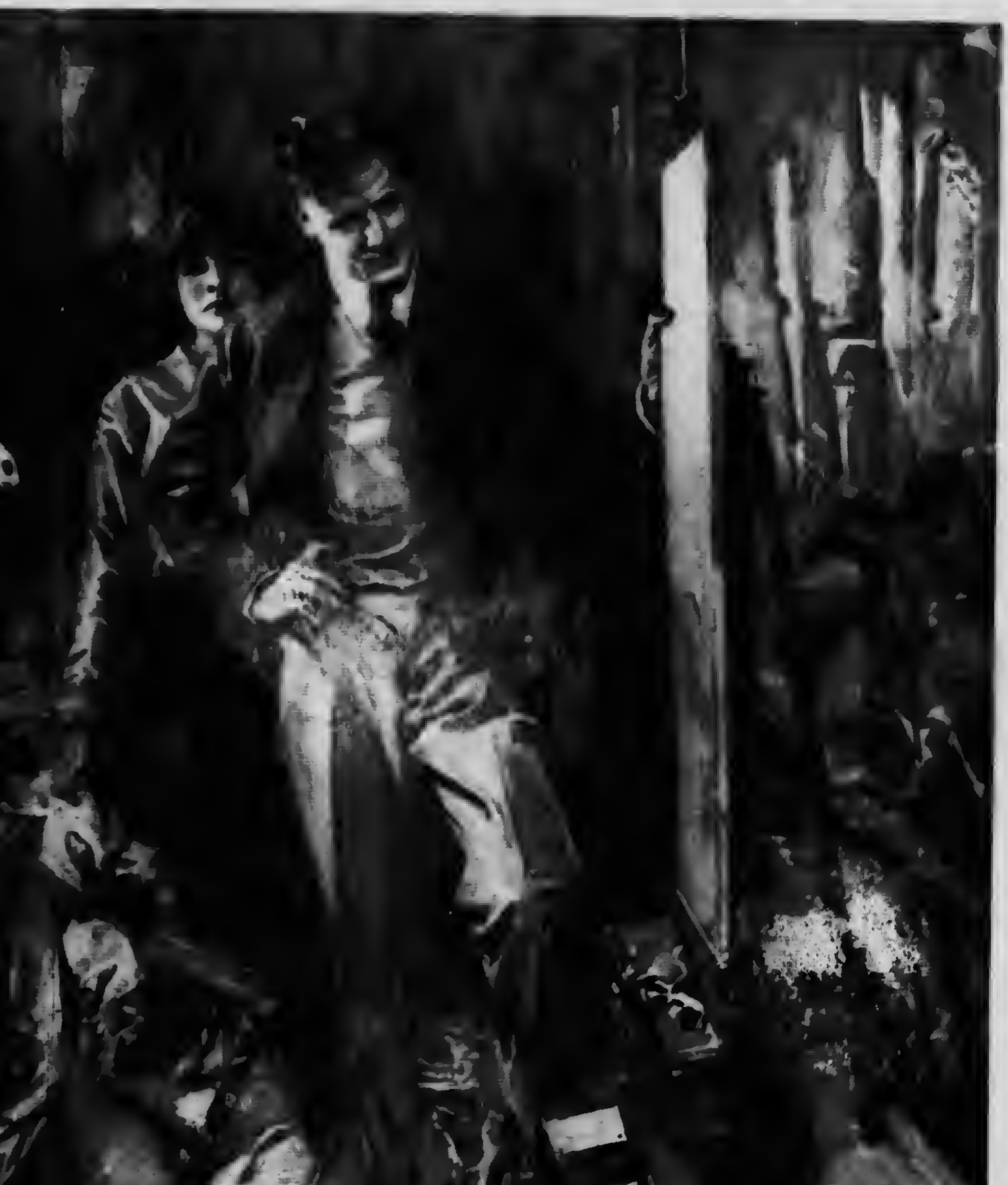
" The cut of the trousers is most important," said Flick, who had already formed ambitious plans for the marketing.

" Right — you must stand on an elevation, a flight of steps, perhaps. A box on the model-stand will do for the moment. Now we center it in a triangle, Sassafras at the left, reclining, one leg out, back to us — hold that, good line — other side, what ? — the Sphinx — Adam and the Sphinx — not a bad idea ! "

" Do you want me full-face or side view ? " said Flick, while Sassafras took his pose and King O'Leary was draped in a semi-recumbent position to fill the lower right half.



"There!" He gave them a signal, and stood off grinning, his
about the composition



ing, his head on one side, contemplatively, as they crowded
position. *Page* 149.

"Thought of taking him three-quarters, with hat and gloves resting on his cane in front — see, like this!" said Tootles meekly.

"Full-front is better for commercial purposes," said Flick.

"How so?"

"When they use it for magazine and newspaper ads., they can print '$47.50' over the shirt-front. That would be very effective."

"Vandal!" said Tootles indignantly. "This is intended for mural decoration only — like something dignified and inspiring — over a bar."

"Still, if the dress suit is to be held up as the ultimate expression of grace," said Dangerfield, looking over at Inga, "it ought to be full-front."

"Absolutely," said King O'Leary, convinced.

"But I want to get the high hat in, somehow," said Tootles doubtfully. "Beside, it gives us two chances to sell it. I can be practical also."

"Wait." Dangerfield ran over the canvas and began hurriedly to draw in the three figures as determined upon. Then he burst into renewed peals of laughter, waving them back as they pressed forward curiously to watch his progress.

"There!" He gave them a signal, and stood off grinning, his head on one side, contemplatively, as they crowded about the composition.

Above the idealized figure of the Well-dressed Man, flanked in servile admiration by the Sphinx and Primitive Man, an Angel of Victory, floating down, after the uncomfortable manner of angels of Victory, was triumphantly blowing on a trumpet sustained by one hand, while with the other she prepared to crown the Modern Man, not with a wreath but with an immaculate silk hat, which was held just over his brow. The face of the

Well-dressed Man likewise expressed the serene flush that heroes must show at such monumental moments.

"Cracky!" said O'Leary, gazing in awe.

"Wimpfheimer will weep for joy," said Flick, delighted.

Tootles gazed at Dangerfield as the pickets of the Grand Army used to come to startled salute at the sudden apparition of the Little Corporal.

"You must sign it, too," he said, in a burst of fairness.

"It'll be a riot." said Flick, seeing visions of a golden shower. "We'll work it up until we have the whole clothes-aristocracy fighting each other for it."

"That's a beginning," said Dangerfield, who enjoyed the satire more than he dared show. "Beau Brummel can be about left center, examining him through a lorgnon, or better, indicating him to a belle in a powdered wig."

"You do think there ought to be woman-interest?" said Tootles.

"Sure! Appeal to the women — get the women's periodicals," said Flick.

"I think so," said Dangerfield, setting his lips. "Gives us a better chance at color. But start on this; that will come later."

When he had returned to the studio, he took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes, which were wet with repressed emotion. Inga, delighted to see him in this mood, stood smiling.

"It's the most wonderful take-off," he said, at last, when he could get breath. "You don't understand. I have made it a caricature of a superhuman ass I know — Tomlinson — who thinks he can decorate. It'll be the death of him when it comes out."

"You had a lot of fun directing them," she said, glad to find even this expedient to interest him.

The boisterous mood left him.

"Lucky devils," he said, with the smile still lingering about the corners of his mouth. "Wonder if they know their luck?" An expression of great kindness came to soften his face, as he stood there reflecting, which held her eyes and brought a smile of tenderness to them too. For him, the darkling walls, the strident, contending city no longer existed, the hard barriers of the present rolling away before the rise of remembered scenes — glorious attics and tables set with the appetite of youth.

"Reminds me of the time when we painted socks on Quinny's legs so that he could go out and call on a countess. What rackets we used to cut up then! And weren't we sure of the future! Well, that was something — to believe, even for a few years. The young are all geniuses. Why, Inga, I used to walk to the top of Montmartre just to look down over Paris and say to myself, 'Some day, all that, glittering below there, will know who I am!'" He shook his head, and added in a lower voice: "I used to think, in those days, I was going to be a great man."

"You are." She came to the side of the armchair into which he had sunk, and stood with her hand upon his arm.

"What?" he said, startled from his revery by the sound of her voice.

"You have the big thing in you!" she said insistently. "I knew it from the first moment."

He shook his head again.

"No; there are some who think I had — but I know better, I know — I know!" he said, with a rising emphasis. "That's the terrible time in the life of an artist, when he realizes he can go so far — and no farther. That's when he pays for all the triumphs others envy."

"I won't have it so," she said, with such a note of fury in her voice that it stopped him, and he looked at her eagerly, as though longing to be convinced. She was on the arm of his chair, leaning toward him, serious and wilful. Their glances met, and then gradually the seriousness of her look melted into a smile — a flash of white teeth and the slender oval face suffused with a light that seemed to envelop and warm him. He forgot what he had been saying, watching her, the craving for beauty in his soul fed by the tenderness and the youth of her eyes. He laid his hand over hers and stared into her face with that wondering, baffled look of his. Then his mind slipped away to the novelty of the orderly, harmonious room.

"You have made a spot for dreams here," he said, at length.

"I have only just begun," she said confidently.

"Don't!" he said, in a low voice, understanding her. "It's not fair to you; it cannot be done."

She smiled again, a smile that seemed to draw him up into her arms like a tired child, and laid her hand gently over his forehead.

"We shall see."

"Good heavens! Haven't you anything better to do in life," he said, all at once, "than to believe in derelicts?"

She did not answer for a moment, looking beyond him with a lost glance which he had noticed once or twice before. Then she answered slowly.

"But that — that makes me happy — to give."

"Inga, do I remind you of any one?" he said, with a suddenness that startled her.

"Why do you say that?" she said, drawing away and frowning.

"I feel it. Just now, as you were looking, and many times when we were arranging the room I had the feeling

— a strange feeling — almost as though there were some one else here with us — that all this — well, how shall I say — that you had been here before ——"

"Why do you say that?" she said, after a moment's hesitation. "I haven't asked any questions, have I?"

"You can — and besides, you won't need to, soon," he said, his curiosity aroused by the answer her evasion implied.

"No, no," she said emphatically; "what has happened has nothing to do with it. We are what we are to each other. All the rest — what's happened before — we want to be free of that. What right has that to come into your life again? That's what's rare in a friendship, to begin all fresh — isn't it?"

"You *are* queer!" he said, gazing at her profoundly, with a growing personal curiosity awakened by the intensity which she had put into this unusually long speech.

"Why?"

"So I am not to know anything about you?"

She faced him a long moment, and, despite all his curiosity, he could not divine what was passing behind her eyes.

"Wonder if I shall ever see into those eyes?" he said, wandering from his question. His gaze rested a moment on the sensitive nostrils and the delicate mouth with its poised upper lip; and, suddenly, he said, as though noticing it for the first time:

"You can be beautiful when you want to — why don't you?" Then he laughed and said in a lighter tone, "Inga, if I were ten years younger, I'd be madly in love with those eyes of yours."

"Would that help?" she said, her eyes filling with a sudden compassionate gentleness.

This frank question threw him into a turmoil. He seemed suddenly recalled to himself — to the imminence of some crisis dominating his freedom of decision. He went from her brusquely, turning about the studio with restless, nervous step, snapping his fingers with quick, irritated gesture, until, as she waited, he came as suddenly back and seized her in his big hands.

" Inga, whatever you do, don't get to caring for me — do you hear? " he said vehemently, with the stricken intensity of his disordered moods. Then each seemed struck with the strangeness and the significance of what they had been saying. He repeated: " Do you hear — do you understand — not that! "

She looked at him, yet across her eyes, as across her soul, the same misty curtain seemed to intervene. Then she shrugged her shoulders, as much as to lay the decision on the lap of fate.

" It will only bring you suffering," he said roughly, almost angrily.

" Yes, perhaps."

She nodded, admitting its truth, and her face clouded before a vision starting out of the shadows. Her arms drew closer about her body, while a shiver ran through it — a premonition perhaps. She repeated:

" Yes, perhaps."

XVI

TOOTLES had progressed along the arduous road to masterpieces to the extent that he felt a need of realistic detail. Flick, of course, was but a substitute, the center of the stage, as well as Wimpfheimer & Goldfinch's perfection dress suit, being now occupied by Belle Shaler, who gave a satisfactory rendering of the new hothouse variety of young man. Sassafras (when he could put the elevator out of commission) represented Primitive Man with impressive ferocity, but there was something lacking in the Sphinx of King O'Leary. O'Leary suggested many things, but he did not suggest the feminine mystery of that historic lady. Tootles felt this, and felt it acutely, when it suddenly occurred to him that, with a little diplomacy, relief might be at hand. Accordingly, one day at high noon, he went tripping down the stone stairway to the floor below and over to the door which was inscribed:

MME. THEODORA PROBASCO
SPIRITUALISTIC SÉANCES

He rapped gently once, and then once more firmly, with an uneasy glance at the darkened glass, that seemed to him of an unearthly obscurity.

"Who knocks at this door?" said a solemn voice.

"The one above," said Tootles, in an equally mysterious whisper.

The door was opened cautiously, and Madame Probasco's streaked curls appeared. From inside came the unmistakable scent of a pork chop frying.

"How do you do?" said Tootles, affably, with a radiating smile. "And how are all the little spirits?"

"Oh, it's you?" said Madame Probasco, descending to a conversational tone.

"Only me; and in distress — oh, nothing for the spirits to do, but I need a sphinx. Thought you might have one on the premises?"

"A sphinx? I have a sphinx," said Madame Probasco, ceremoniously.

"May I enter?"

Madame Probasco was still hesitating, considering the advisability of introducing such a visitor behind the scenes, when the memory of the pork chop decided her. She hurried back, followed by Tootles, who witnessed the rescue with an expression of sympathy, while seeking among the black-curtained partitions for the abode of ghostly aids.

"I hope we have done nothing to disturb the spirits," he said genially, at the first opportunity.

"It's not you — it's that Dutch yodler!" said Madame Probasco, taken strategically on flank. "He broke up a see-ance only last night and sent me into a fit of hysterics. It's an outrage!"

"Madame, have I your permission to speak to Mr. Schneibel?" said Tootles majestically.

"'Deed you'll save my life if you do," said Madame Probasco, with a fleshy sigh. "What was it you wanted — oh, yes, a sphinx," she added, turning toward the mantelpiece, where underneath gleaming death-masks and plastered hands was a collection of scarabs, elephants, and a bronze fragment representing the sphinx in the shadow of the Pyramid.

"One moment — don't move!" said Tootles, in an excited voice. "Hold that position — by Jove, that is marvelous now!"

"Heavens! what is the matter?" said Madame Probasco, startled.

"Madame Probasco, have you ever posed — has any one ever done your portrait?"

"There's Mooney, down on the second floor, did a colored photo that wasn't bad —"

"No, no; I mean did you ever have your portrait painted? By jove, just that moment — then I caught an expression — I say, do you know you *would* make a remarkable symbolic study of the Sphinx?"

"Really?" said Madame Probasco, smiling and fastening the brooch at her neck, which had become undone, with a reawakening of coquetry.

"'Pon my word! Tell you what I'll do: If you'll sit for the Sphinx, for a monumental decoration I'm doing, I'll make a special sketch and present it to you. Think of the publicity!"

On this basis, the bargain was completed immediately, and King O'Leary, vastly relieved, was promoted to the rôle of Paris, who, with one arm about Helen of Troy (Millie Brewster) a glave brandished in the air, was represented hesitating in his passionate flight to glance back at the symbolic vision of the modern ravisher of hearts in the person of the Well-dressed Man. Madame Probasco entered, in fact, so completely into the spirit of the conception, that the brooding realism of her frown brought cold shivers to the impressionable imaginations of Pansy Hartmann and Millie Brewster. The work went on gaily, as all great works of inspiration carry happiness.

The girls, since the night of the farewell dinner, had heaped coals of fire upon the heads of their admirers by an unlooked-for loyalty. Myrtle Popper had brought Mr. Pomello to the studio, a lonely little old man in loose clothes, who conveyed the idea of a shy species of cockatoo behind black-rimmed spectacles, and who accepted the introduction to "cousin" O'Leary with meek obedience. It was evident that he was all eyes for the brimming youth of the girl, and hurriedly seconded her suggestion that O'Leary should preside over the orchestra of one piano in the "continuous" below, from eight until eleven P. M. Belle Shaler, in her turn, succeeded in inviting the three friends to one banquet and two dances, which considerably improved their household account; while Pansy, as though realizing for the first time the heights to which Tootles might ascend, became almost docile, and if she still listened to the assiduous compliments of Drinkwater and others, at least she concealed the evidence with skill. The larder was not exactly overcrowded, but with O'Leary's salary and three mother-in-law jokes which Flick obtained in translation from Mr. Cornelius and modernized for *Puck,* the wolf was kept at a respectable distance, while Flick planned the killing on Tootles' masterpiece which would revolutionize the commercial arts.

Dangerfield came in twice again for a flitting visit and a few words of advice, but the first enthusiasm had vanished, or rather, he seemed obsessed by some distant preoccupation. A week had now passed since the episode of the interrupted boxing-match, and the heated discussions as to who Dangerfield really was and what were the mysterious complications in which he was involved had been going on with unabated excitement, when, one Sunday evening, without warning, he appeared at the door of the studio dressed to go out.

"O'Leary, are you free for about half an hour?" he said, without notice of the fact that Tootles and Flick were tidying up the supper-dishes; though by now they had grown accustomed to his abstractions.

"What can I do for you?"

"Can you come with me — now?"

"Going out?" said O'Leary, surprised, while the others looked up, for this in itself was in abrupt contrast to his late habit of never setting foot outside of the Arcade.

"Yes."

O'Leary slipped into his things and joined him in the hall.

"Where away?"

"I prefer not to go out of the Arcade — I have reasons," said Dangerfield, his voice pitched just above the normal. "We will go down a couple of flights and out through the apartment-house."

They descended, and by a bridge (one of the many mysterious byways of the Arcade) passed into an apartment-house that set upon the side street. Down this they went without word of explanation, O'Leary more and more intrigued by the behavior of his companion, who stopped at each landing to read the cards upon the door-plates, talking to himself the while. At the entrance below, as O'Leary was passing curiously out, he caught him with a sudden restraining clutch and a low admonition. Then he lit a match and studied the row of mail-boxes in the vestibule.

"No, no; that's all right," he said at last. "Old cards, all of them. No changes here." He blew out the match and looked back at the stairs lost in the dimness of the hall light. "Uncanny, isn't it? Anything might happen there. All right, now. Out, and turn straight toward Amsterdam Avenue."

"As you say," said O'Leary, struck by the restrained excitement in the other's voice and gesture.

They went down the block and up the avenue two streets, then eastward to Columbus Avenue, and prepared to descend. Opposite Healy's, Dangerfield stopped and said abruptly:

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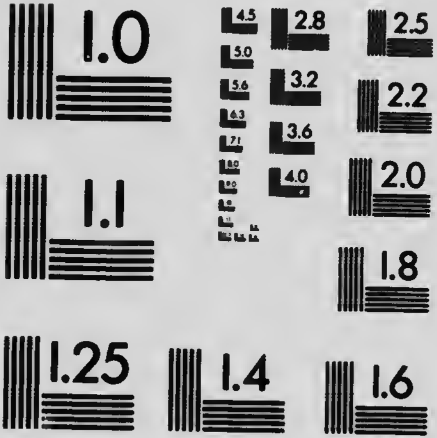
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)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"Now, O'Leary, keep your eyes open and if you see any one you have seen before —" He stopped short, and his eyes set suspiciously on the other's face.

"Any one I've seen before?" said O'Leary, frowning.

"Exactly — any one — who was downstairs the night you saw the car. Oh, it's all right; you didn't deceive me then — I know. That's not the point. I must know if any one's around."

"All right; but I don't understand a word," said O'Leary helplessly. "Just what are you driving at?"

But for all answer his companion smiled knowingly, shrugged his shoulders and said:

"You understand? Touch my arm if you see him. Come."

They crossed Lincoln Square after a careful reconnoitering of the surrounding spaces, and descending briskly on the Arcade, passed along the Broadway front and around the corner to the lower street, going in by the side entrance, past the stuffy halls of the animal fancier. The inner arcade, deserted in the barren calm of Sunday night, showed only the lingering figures of a group of newsboys and the half-lights of the telegraph office.

"All right; that's enough," said Dangerfield, looking apparently satisfied. "Mighty decent of you. Thanks."

"Don't see that I've done anything in particular," said O'Leary, following him into the elevator, "but at your service any time."

Nevertheless, mystified as he was, he concealed the details of their trip under an evasive answer when he returned to his room. However, the experience remained fixed in his mind, and he divined that Inga, by now, must have told Dangerfield in detail of his discoveries. The precautions taken to bar the door, the voluntary self-imprisonment, the brooding suspicion in the man himself, had spread an uncanny feeling of suspense in the upper hall, where, from day to day, each awaited some dramatic explanation. How near it was at hand no one, not even King O'Leary, had any suspicion.

On the following night, Madame Probasco gave a party "to meet the spooks," as Tootles expressed it. Just how it came to take place, or who may have put the suggestion into her mind, was never clearly defined. The fact of Drinkwater's participation left a certain suspicion in the minds of some, especially considering what happened later. At a quarter before midnight, being the witching hour, they came down, expectant and a little awestruck, to Madame Probasco's rooms. The black-draped passage, which had an aroma of heavy incense, was faintly revealed by a solitary green lamp, which cast uncanny hues over their faces and caused Pansy to take a desperate clutch of Tootles' hand.

"I can feel them spirits already," said Myrtle Popper, with a nervous laugh.

"Sh! sh! Silence!" said Flick, in a voice which caused Belle Shaler to stumble with a smothered cry.

Mr. Cornelius, Miss Quirley, and Schneibel, the last in the charge of O'Leary, who had given his word to restrain his volubility, pressed forward eagerly, while Millie Brewster, at the sight of the coffinlike passage, the green light, and the black-draped curtains, billowing as though with the passage of unseen shapes, gave a scream and fled precipitately. Inga and Dangerfield were likewise absentees.

At the door of the salon, a surprise awaited them. Madame Probasco was still behind the scenes, but in the center of the misty room was no other than Drinkwater, gaunter and taller than ever, in the midst of the deathmasks and plastered hands which set against the walls. A great white collar flashed about his neck against the somber hue of his face and his coal-black eyes.

"Madame Probasco will come on as soon as every one is seated," he said suavely, yet with a queer little break of excitement in his voice. "She particularly wished me to caution you that there must be the most absolute quiet. Any sudden noise might prove almost fatal to her in the intense mental concentration into which she must go for these experiments."

This revelation of Drinkwater's connection with the spiritualistic parlors came as a disagreeable introduction. Tootles gazed at O'Leary, rather undecided, with a vague sense of something ominous impending. O'Leary, for a moment, seemed on the point of breaking out into an objection, but before he could take a decision, from the other room the voice of Madame Probasco came floating in, in querulous complaint.

"Too much noise — hush!"

The wavering passed. They grouped themselves in a circle on the chairs which had already been placed. In the center of the room a great armchair was waiting beside a table on which were displayed two gray-and-white elephants and a plaster skull. Drinkwater passed to the door by which they had entered and drew it shut, and going to the window, flung across a second curtain. In the circle the bodies seemed to recede into a mist, leaving only the white faces distinct, faces white as the chalky death-masks that spotted the walls.

"Remember, silence; absolute silence," said Drinkwater, with his finger on his lips. He took a last precautionary glance and then stepped gingerly and softly to the door of the inner room, knocked three times, and announced,

"Everything is ready!"

Madame Probasco delayed her appearance for an interminable, creepy interval, and then, when they were least expecting her, came floating in, clad in long, fluttering garments of slatish blue, her hair bound with Greek fillets, her arms and neck laden with shining ornaments, her eyes half closed, hands extended in groping gestures. Drinkwater went to her side and piloted her to the armchair, amid a heavy craning-forward of her tense audience. She gazed fixedly ahead a moment, with blank, glassy eyes, her lips parted in short, troubled breaths. Then she bent her head suddenly and covered her eyes with one hand, while the other stretched across the dark table until it found the gray-and-white elephant that, in the dim light, seemed to have come into a grotesque distortion of life. At the end of a full ten minutes, during which Drinkwater, at her back with warning finger, cautioned all to immovability and silence, her hand jerked up rapidly in three commanding gestures, and she began babbling in a deep, guttural tone, a jargon without relevance or resemblance to any language they knew.

Drinkwater, as though he had waited for this stage, moved toward the expectant circle, hesitated a moment, and selecting Myrtle Popper, whispered:

"A handkerchief — anything — of your own. Yes; a glove — that will do. You've worn it? All right."

Madame Probasco immediately transferred the glove to her forehead, and the jargon increased in rapidity. Another interval, and all at once she swayed in her seat and began to talk intelligibly.

"Rivers — trees — a house on a hill — much snow — children, many children in sleighs — a great fireplace with a copper kettle boiling — a holiday — a holiday party of some sort. Who's that? A man — two men — a widower and a young man — a quarrel. I see discord — many quarrels — a journey to a church in a sleigh with the young man — no, no; something's wrong — I don't understand — it's turned back."

Here Myrtle Popper's voice was heard exclaiming:

"My God, it's true!"

The medium ran on more confidently.

"Discord — more quarrels — railroads — crowds, people — so many people —"

For a while, what she said continued broken and mystifying. Suddenly she seemed to pick up the thread again.

"Some one close to you will die within the year — a relative — no, not a relative — perhaps the old man —" She lapsed into the mysterious jargon and again came out: "Changes, marvelous changes — wealth by death, beyond your dreams; and yet your dream, the real dream, will not be realized — a woman — two other women — stand between you and that. This year — everything seems to come in this year — all the changes in your life — great fortune and great disappointments — journeys — new conditions — everything will be changed. That's all I can see — the rest is blurred."

With which, she flung the glove from her and sank her head in her arms.

Drinkwater selected Miss Quirley next, and after her Schneibel. Whether Madame Probasco was feigning or not, the outstanding fact was that the next experiments varied greatly in effectiveness. With some she began to prophesy immediately, and with others she refused to go on absolutely, declaring she could do nothing. The séance had been going on thus with alternate success and failure, when Drinkwater selected Mr. Cornelius. Now, several of those present, reviewing these events at a later date, believed that it had all been a carefully laid plan of the lawyer's to ferret into the baron's past and that the scene had been agreed upon with Madame Probasco. Yet others insisted that what she had said had startled Drinkwater almost as much as any one, and that indeed he had gone white and leaned against the wall. However that may be, as soon as Madame Probasco had received into her hands a watch-chain which Mr. Cornelius had given with the greatest reluctance, she cried, in excellent French, in a voice shrill and quite different from her own,

"Cinq mille louis sur la bande!"

The effect on the Frenchman was amazing. He half rose from his seat with a gasp of astonishment, and only the firm hold of his companions in the chain of hands kept him down. The next moment, Madame Probasco was running on in her usual guttural voice:

"I see a great house — oh, but a great, great house — tapestries — a great marble fireplace — and a woman — not there — no — not there — somewhere else — can't quite make out — only she is tall and her hair is like a flame — and there are lights, lots of lights all around her, at her feet, in the air — people are applauding her — flowers — I smell the scent of roses, always roses — yellow, pink. Why, I can't see her distinctly any more — what has happened? Why, she is not young — she is not beautiful at all — there's no one around her, and the room is dark — she leans on a cane." All at once her hands began to clutch nervously in the air, and she cried in more excited voice: "What's this? Blows are struck — high words — some one is choking him — some one has him by the throat, forcing him over a table, a green table — and now all the lights are back — oh, so many lights, my head is turned with the lights . . . *Le numéro quatre!"* she cried suddenly, or rather, the same shrill nasal voice cried from her. Then she began to tremble as she had at no time before. "No, no, I can't — don't make me tell what I see!"

"What do you see?" said Drinkwater suddenly, in a voice that made them start. "Tell us what you see."

The medium moaned and wrung her hands hysterically, her breath coming in quick gasps.

"No, no, I can't; I can't tell that."

"Tell it, *madame,* tell it — I command you!"

It was the baron, who, quite beside himself, had broken out into a shrill command.

"*He* wishes it! *He* does!"

"Yes, yes."

"I see — I see — blood," said Madame Probasco, shuddering.

Drinkwater started back against the wall, though Mr. Cornelius seemed, if anything, relieved, whatever it may have been he was afraid to hear, for he said rather indifferently:

"Now, or in ze future?"

"In the future; but near, very near. Not your blood — no; it's not on you, the blood — and yet, why it's —"

Whatever she might have said was destined to remain a closed secret, for, at this moment, the outer door was flung open with a crash that shook the room and Inga's voice was heard calling:

"O'Leary! Wilder! Quick — quick! They're kidnaping him! For God's sake, help!"

Instantly the room broke up into a seething mass. Madame Probasco was screaming and rolling on the floor, but no one noticed her. Drinkwater sprang to the lights, but O'Leary was too quick for him, and, with a sudden clutch at his shoulder, sent him rolling across the floor. The door was locked, and Inga's voice still screaming from the other side, as O'Leary flung his body against the frail supports and went crashing into the hall. Flick, Schneibel, the baron, Tootles came piling after him and up the stairs on the heels of the fleeing girl. In the corner studio, Dangerfield was struggling in the hands of four men, who had him wrapped around with cords and were trying to pass him out of the window over the roof.

XVII

At the moment when the rescuing party broke tumultuously through the door, the kidnapers had so far succeeded in their attempt that the helpless body of Dangerfield had been borne to the window for the route over the roofs. Two of the assailants were in the room; the rest had passed outside. The sudden interruption changed everything. The two within the room turned hastily to make front to the unexpected attack. The body of Dangerfield, thus released, fell heavily near the window-sill, while the assailants on the roof, alarmed at the hue and cry, hesitated but a second before breaking for safety. Inside, the struggle was of short duration. One man, the shorter of the two, succeeded in breaking through the crowd and escaping down the halls; the otl of more aggressive stuff, fought furiously against th until a grip of King O'Leary's flung him to the , where he lay stunned by a blow on the head.

e him up!" shouted O'Leary to Flick. "Never mind his head. Watch out he isn't faking! Here — take this!" He flung them an end of the rope trailing on the floor, and hurried over anxiously to where, by the sofa, Dangerfield was lying, surrounded by a gaping crowd.

"Here, air — give the man air!" he cried, pushing them back. "What is it, Inga?"

"Chloroform," she said, looking up.

"Nothing else — no black-jacking?"

"No; I'm sure."

"How the devil did they get him?" he said, kneeling and running his fingers over Dangerfield's head to assure himself that there were no contusions.

Inga shook her head.

"Some came through the door, and some over the roofs, I think," she said. "When I saw them struggling, I didn't wait."

The room was in a fearful state. One tapestry had been half torn from the walls; a picture-frame lay smashed across the floor; a chair had been shattered, while the great Florentine table lay on its side with candlesticks, books, and platters showered over the rugs.

O'Leary cleared the room of all but Flick, Tootles, and Belle Shaler, who stayed to help Inga.

"Suppose we ought to notify the police," he said, after Tootles had returned with the information that the party had driven away in an ambulance which had been waiting below.

"Perhaps — though I am not sure," she said doubtfully, gazing at Dangerfield, who had not come out of his stupor.

"It's a plain case —"

"I think I'd wait a while, if I were you," said a voice that startled them.

They peered at the sound, and found their captive looking at them maliciously, a hard smile over the strong lines of his mouth under the close-cropped mustache.

O'Leary went up to him and examined carefully the sturdy figure, neatly dressed, though, in the struggle, a rent had been torn in the coat where a pocket had been wrenched.

"I think I'd find out what the person you call 'Dangerfield' has to say about that," he said coolly.

Inga joined O'Leary, and together they stood, undecided, gazing down at the man who lay on the floor propped up against a great armchair.

"Nice business for a man like you to be in!" said O'Leary scornfully. "Well, you'll get time enough to think it over — up the river."

"Perhaps," he said, with a shrug. "Have you any objection to my sitting in a chair while you make up your mind?"

"What'll we do?" said O'Leary, turning to Inga in perplexity.

"Wait," she said, after a moment.

"You know best," said O'Leary, and, leaning down, he caught the man by the shoulders and lifted him to a chair. A splotch of blood showed on his head just back of the ear, where he had crashed against a corner of the chest.

"You might as well tie up my head," he said surlily, "for the sake of the carpet, if nothing else."

Inga took a basin, sponged the wound, which was slight, and placed a bandage. The man watched her intently, and at the end said gruffly:

"Thanks. You did that well enough. Suppose I have to thank you, young lady, for breaking up this little party?"

She paid no attention to his remarks, and, her work being finished, went back to Dangerfield, saying to O'Leary:

"Better make sure he's tied fast."

The man laughed outright, and, suddenly extending his hands, which he had somehow managed to slip from their fastenings, said:

"Do it better this time."

His feet being bound would have sufficed to hold him; nevertheless O'Leary took several hitches so vigorously that the prisoner protested.

At this moment Dangerfield, on the sofa, groaned.

"He's coming out of it!" said Inga.

"Well, if I've got to wait," said the man suddenly, in a sharp, professional manner, "might as well tell you what to do. He's had a good dose of it, that's certain. Lay him flat on his back and work the stuff out of his lungs. Raise up the arms and press down on the diaphragm regularly and slowly. Open up the skylight and get some cold air in here. He'll come around in no time."

"Oh, a doctor!" said O'Leary.

"Perhaps."

Under these directions, Dangerfield began to gasp and mutter, and finally, as they waited, opened his eyes and glared out of them with his characteristic stare of a frightened animal. Presently he rose to a sitting position, clutching the arm of Inga, who was supporting him, his glance set directly on the man with the cropped mustache, who faced him with a confident, indifferent smile.

"Who's that?" he cried, almost in terror, and the grip on her arm sunk painfully into her flesh.

"It's I, Dan — Jim Fortier," said the prisoner, with a sudden rough authority in his voice, as though he were indeed the master of the scene.

Whether the fumes of the chloroform had not yet left his faculties free, or whether he did not perceive the true position of Fortier, to their amazement Dangerfield seemed suddenly shaken with an unreasoning fear. He cried out: "Doctor Jim! Doctor Jim!" and covered his face with his hands.

Inga took him hurriedly in her arms, crying:

"Mr. Dangerfield, nothing's happened — you're here. It's Inga — O'Leary's here — we're all here!"

"Inga," he said slowly, and, already half returned to the land of confused dreams, he dropped his hands and turned his face toward her voice, a clouded, perplexed look in his eyes. She dropped on one knee and met his glance, smiling.

"It's all right; nothing's happened. You're in your studio, safe," she said, as though she were talking to a child.

"Safe enough for the time being," said Doctor Fortier, breaking in in quick, staccato tones.

Dangerfield shot around, gazed in the direction of his enemy, and putting out his hands as though to ward him off, collapsed.

Every one was impressed by the effect Doctor Fortier's voice had produced.

"Take him away, quick — to your room; keep him there!" said Inga, hastily.

"Come along, you!" said O'Leary, with a sudden tightening hold on the other man's throat, for he had begun to divine his maneuver. "And no tricks, or I might get to squeezing. Loosen up his feet — that's it! Come on!"

Tootles was stationed in the hall to watch the passage over the roofs, to guard against the possibility of a return attack, and only Belle Shaler remained, at Inga's direction seating herself in a further corner to give an instant alarm.

The fumes of the chloroform seemed to have closed over Dangerfield's consciousness once more. He moved and stretched out his fingers, seeking the glass of water she held to them to ease the heat of his throat. The cool draft seemed momentarily to bring pleasant intervals in his dream, for he began to laugh and to hum to himself, calling out names unfamiliar to her — brother artists, perhaps, of youthful days — the whole intermixed with snatches of French.

"Give me the brush — Violet socks with white polka dots. *A toi, mon coco! En charrette!* Quinny, get to work. *A nous, les anciens!* What a float, eh? Where do we rendezvous? Café Procopé? Every one there — Café Procopé, eight sharp! Du Bois and De Monvel, go first. *Parfaitement!* Gogo, *tu es épatant.*" He began to rock with laughter. "Look at Gogo! Isn't he a wonder! *Garçon, des bocks!* All together, now —

> "*C'est les quatz' arts,*
> *C'est les quatz' arts,*
> *C'est les quatz' arts qui passent,*
> *C'est les quatz' arts passés.*"

In his excitement he rose to a sitting position and began to beat time, listening to the volume of an indistinguishable orchestra in crowded halls. Then the air seemed to be shaken with frantic applause, for he began to bow to gay, whirling throngs, and all at once called out triumphantly, "*L'atelier Julian — premier prix!*" After which, reason seemed to flow back into his eyes, and he turned to her and said quite rationally:

"Water — more water."

"Lie down — rest quietly, Mr. Dangerfield," she said, serving him. "It will pass in a moment."

His eyes dwelt on her fixedly, seeming to grow larger and deeper as the consciousness faded. He smiled contentedly.

"Always you," he said quietly. In a moment he added: "I know everything that is passing; I hear everything." But already he was back in the delirium, in a jumble of painful, rapid reflections of the past, crying:

"Every one in the house dines with me to-night! Valentin, give me the bank. I take the bank for a thousand louis. Who plays? Baccarat!" And again. "Louise, Louise Fortier! Thank you — yes, it's my hat. Fortier? I know that name — from the south. That's my route — if you will allow me. . . . Once more; a bank of a thousand louis! Gentlemen, your turn's come. No, no; win or lose to the end! Well, a clean sweep. I take one card — as usual, baccarat! What color — Italy — see Italy and die. . . . *Bon jour, les copins!* I am back again — cleaned out!" He stopped suddenly and lifted his hand to his head, saying with a ceremonious bow to the glittering room of frantic gamblers which rose in his vision: "Gentlemen, I thank you. You have restored me to my art! *Cocher, Rue Bonaparte!*" Immediately a frown succeeded, and he said rapidly, in a hard voice: "No, no, and *no!* I permit you to love another — that is your right. I do not admit of vulgar deception. You will do as I say. You will do it, or I —"

"Mr. Dangerfield," cried Inga, laying her hand over his, which was whipping back and forth in uncontrolled excitement, "hush!"

There was a slight noise in the back of the room and the door clicked. Belle Shaler, fearing to overhear too much, had slipped away.

"Click!" said Dangerfield, snatching his hand away from the clutch of her fingers and shuddering. "Got me! No, no; it's not true! I know what you're trying to make me believe! But it's not true — *not true!*" he shouted vehemently. Then, as the echoes seemed to return to him on the silences of the night, he repeated in a whisper, "not true!"

"Water," Inga said.

He frowned, took the glass eagerly, and stared at her.

"Who's that?"

"Inga."

"You're sure?" His hand came creeping toward her and up over her hair, groping for her features. "The eyes — the eyes — strange eyes! Inga — Inga Sonderson — sounds like the sea rolling in. Only, you mustn't

— mustn't get to caring what becomes of me — it's no use."

"But I do care," she said, in her deep voice.

The mist that was wavering in his brain seemed to vanish at the sound of her words.

"What's happened?" he said slowly, frowning as though to bring back all his faculties. "Where am I?"

"You're here, in your studio," she said quickly, "quite safe."

"What's the matter with me, then?" he said helplessly.

"They tried to chloroform you — but that's passing away now."

"Tell me all."

"Do you think I had better?"

"Yes, yes; don't let me go back to sleep," he said desperately. "I remember something over my head, stifling me — the room full of people — darkness ——"

"That's true; they were trying to get you out of the window and over the roof when we broke in."

"They? Who? Doctor —" He hesitated, watching her sharply.

"Yes; Doctor Fortier."

"He's here!" he said, sitting up and staring about the room.

"Not now; there's no one here."

"Jim Fortier!" he repeated angrily. "Then it was what I thought. Who saved me — you?"

"No, no, I only got the others — O'Leary and the rest."

"They almost had me," he said slowly. A great weakness seemed to overcome him, for an unusual gentleness came into his voice, the quiet tone of weak convalescence. "You can tell me the rest — I can stand it. What happened?"

"Don't you think you had better be quiet?" she said anxiously. "It has been a shock."

"Yes," he said with a shudder, and his hand clutched her shoulder as though clinging desperately to it, while in the subdued torment on his face there was a sudden flickering passage of absolute terror that caused her to cry:

"Mr. Dangerfield, Mr. Dangerfield, don't look that way! I can't bear it."

Her face was so close to his, flushed with compassion and tenderness, that this imminence of youth and affection brought back into his eyes a touch of quiet and gratitude.

"Why do you care so much?" he said greedily.

"I do; I do," she said, gazing at him earnestly. "When you suffer, it just tears my heart."

He closed his eyes and smiled, and she was afraid that the tyranny of the chloroform was asserting itself again; but suddenly he opened his eyes and said, raising one finger as though in warning:

"You don't know what I am afraid of?"

Again there came into the intensity of his gaze the characteristic touch of the startled animal seeking to comprehend. It was a mood which she had learned to fear and avoid. She took his hands in hers, pressing them firmly, as though by the act transferring to him some of her abundant strength and courage.

"Some time you can tell me — not now. I want you to rest."

"Fortier *was* here, in this room, wasn't he?" he said at length.

"Yes."

"And now?"

"I had O'Leary take him into the studio until you could decide ——"

"Decide what?"

"Whether to let him go or to send for the police," she said, after some hesitation.

"They've got him — Doctor Fortier — a prisoner?" he said slowly.

"O'Leary was going to have the police in and turn him over to them, but I thought it was better to let you decide."

He turned and looked at her gratefully.

"It's queer; you always seem to know instinctively the right thing to do. No; not the police — never that. Whatever happens to me — never that."

"I am glad I was right," she said, smiling. "Will you follow my advice?"

"What would you advise?"

"Don't see him at all — let him go."

To her surprise, he acquiesced immediately. In fact, the night's experience seemed to have shaken him profoundly. He seemed mentally as well as physically exhausted, as though prostrated by the shock. He looked up at her as a patient at the attending nurse and said:

"Do what you think best."

The reply was scarcely more than a whisper, and immediately his glance wandered, as though the decision had passed from his mind. She watched him a moment as he stared past her, indecision, trouble, and perplexity written on his clouded look; and then, making up her mind, stepped to the door and beckoned Belle Shaler.

"Tell O'Leary to keep him until daylight, and then let him go," she said in a whisper.

The day was struggling through the curtains of the night as she came back. Dangerfield was waiting, his hand running nervously over the shawl she had thrown over him. When she came to his side he seized her hand instantly with a sigh of content and turned and looked at her with distraught eyes.

"Keep me quiet," he said, and his hand closed over hers in a tighter dependence. "Try to keep me quiet."

She looked down at him with her slow-breaking smile and, though the strain of the night had left her worn with fatigue, never had she felt such a complete sensation of happiness.

XVIII

At daybreak, King O'Leary loosened the ropes which held Doctor Fortier and signed to him to follow.

"Not to the police-station, I presume," said the other, smiling.

"If I had my way you would," said O'Leary, with bad grace, for the doctor's cool assurance had not ceased to irritate him.

"Doubtless; but you see there are certain cases which have to be settled in the family. You'll know more of this later."

"Next time, look out," said O'Leary grimly.

"There'll be no next time," said Doctor Fortier, with a shrug of his shoulders. "You may not believe me, but it is so. You can have that satisfaction. You can tell that to my precious brother-in-law."

With which he went off surlily enough under all his assumption of indifference. The knowledge of Fortier's relationship to Dangerfield was but small surprise to King O'Leary. In his own mind he had long arrived at a shrewd suspicion of the crisis through which his neighbor was passing. He called up Sassafras and put him on watch for any new attempt, improbable though it might be. Upstairs he held a consultation with Inga, who slipped into the hall for a brief moment, at the end of which it was decided to secure the aid of Flick's two friends in the pugilistic profession.

"The fellow claimed to be his brother-in-law," said O'Leary. "Do you think that's true?"

She nodded.

"I'm quite sure."

"Then that *was* his wife who was here, and she's at the bottom of it all," he said thoughtfully. "But why should they try to carry him off like this? What the deuce was their object? Have you any idea?"

He had been speaking his thoughts aloud. Now, as he looked at her, each saw in the other's eyes that the same supposition dominated them.

"You think so, too," he said, surprised.

"But there is no truth in it," she said, frowning, angry to have had her thoughts divined. "Whatever you do, O'Leary, don't say to any one what — what you believe. That mustn't be talked about."

"I sometimes wonder —" he said slowly, looking toward the corner studio.

"You are wrong," she said impatiently, "absolutely wrong."

He shrugged his shoulders unconvinced, influenced a little, too, by his jealousy. "I'm not so sure — anyhow, Inga, what's to come of it? We can't go on forever like this. If he won't turn it over to the police, sooner or later they'll get him — that's certain."

"It's not going to last," she said decidedly. "He keeps talking about the twentieth all the time. I have an idea that something is bound to happen then. I think this was a last desperate attempt on her part."

"The twentieth, that's day after to-morrow," he said thoughtfully. "I guess we can hold the fort for two nights."

As he was going she stopped him.

"Mind," she said anxiously; "be careful what you say. Think all you wish, but don't get the others talking. It's not their affair and — it might do harm."

"Aren't you sometimes a bit afraid?" he said abruptly.

She laughed.

"Never; what an idea!"

"I believe you can manage him," he said, watching her as she stood lightly, her head thrown a little back, and her eyes softened by a touch of amusement. "Say, take an hour's nap. Let me relieve you."

"No, no," she said; "I am the only one who can quiet him." And, conscious of the understanding that now lay between them, she added solemnly: "O'Leary, he is in a bad way. That's a fact."

It was not until well into the afternoon, after Flick had returned with the pugilists, that the memory of Drinkwater suddenly returned to King O'Leary. He gave forth an exclamation with such suddenness that Tootles bounded across the rug, saying angrily:

"For the love of Mike, man, don't do that — don't do it! My nerves won't stand it!"

"What the deuce are you going to do?" said Flick, observing him to rise, make for the door, and as abruptly return. The pugilists, who were being utilized as models for heroic bodies in the monumental decoration of Tootles, shifted and watched him hopefully as though scenting a call to arms.

O'Leary sat down and began to stare at the one-eyed bear on the floor with such impressive mental concentration that they watched him in silence.

"By George, I believe the whole thing was planned!" he said, striking his leg.

"Planned? Of course it was planned," said Flick.

"No, no; I mean our being away — out of sight and hearing. The more I think about it — why, if Millie hadn't got the creeps and run away, Inga never would have known where we were."

"That's right."

"It was Millie who told Inga," said Flick, with conviction.

"King, I do believe you're right," said Tootles. "It *was* planned; the whole floor was cleared out on purpose."

"But who did it?" said Flick. "Not Madame Probasco?"

"How about your friend, the lawyer!"

"Drinkwater!" said Tootles, rising in fury. "By Jove, of course — no doubt about it!"

"No; I don't think there is much doubt," said O'Leary. "Hold on there; you can't go out and demolish him single-handed."

"He had the door locked," said Flick reflecting, "and he tried to throw the lights off — Why, the low-down little pup!"

"Yes; I guess that's all true," said O'Leary slowly. "That's been his game for a long while. Well, suppose we find out a little more." He started toward the door again and stopped. "No, no; that wouldn't work. We must find some way to get him in here and try a little third-degree treatment. We might get him in to pose for Tootles — only he'd see through that. Best plan is to have Schneibel ask him into his place, and that won't be easy either. The fellow's no fool. . . ."

But as they were studying over ways and means, Myrtle Popper came in with fresh information by way of Sassafras. The lawyer had decamped during the night, for a messenger-boy had been sent up with a note calling for a valise which was in his room. This last bit of evidence was conclusive to their minds, already strongly prejudiced. Likewise, it made them fear a new attack, and, with this in mind, they prepared anxiously for the coming of the night.

When Inga had told O'Leary of her anxiety, she had not overstated the situation. Dangerfield had found a few hours' rest in the morning, a rest broken by scurrying, baneful dreams. When he awoke, though he seemed physically refreshed, the mind remained in a lethargy. Instead of the rapid change of moods with sudden outbursts of irritation to which she had grown accustomed, she found him all at once pensive, subdued, and given to long, staring silences.

"To-day is the eighteenth?" he said to her, without turning his head.

"Yes, the eighteenth," she answered cheerily.

"That's what I thought."

An hour later, he repeated the question without noticing the repetition. Later in the afternoon, he took up his interminable solitaire; but the movements of the cards were made mechanically, and he made many mistakes without noticing them.

"They're running very badly," he said querulously.

"Try again," she said, ensconcing herself on the arm of the great chair. "Here, I'll cut for luck."

He allowed her to take the pack and to spread it in deft lines. When the layout was completed, she clapped her hands.

"There you see — the six on the seven, and you have a space the first thing! Let's see the next card."

They began to play, and, leaning against him, she drew her arm over his shoulder, bending forward alertly to watch the shifting of the cards. But the luck which had been favorable suddenly changed, and after a moment, impatiently, he put out his hand and brushed the cards away, saying:

"No use." He stared blankly at the table and then brought his knuckles up against his teeth with a deep breath. "Wish I could get out — out of this — anywhere!"

"You will soon — in two days."

"Two days — yes, of course," he said, nodding. "I must hold on until then."

The hand which lay on the table opened and closed and opened again in helpless indecision. In all his brooding, the effort seemed directed against some internal danger, some struggle of the soul. She felt this, as she felt the trembling of the balance of fate, and all her reserve vanished before the needs of the man who, on his part, sought nothing from her.

"Mr. Dan," she said, passing her cool hand over the furrowed brow and bending over him, "Mr. Dan, can't I help? Won't you let me?"

"You can't — no one can," he said, shaking his head.

"I must tell you one thing: There's nothing to fear. We'll watch for you to-night — O'Leary's arranged that," she said rapidly, misunderstanding him. "He's got two men to spend the night — the men who were here that night."

"You did that," he said, and he patted her hand gently, while a smile came to his face for the first time.

"Would you like them in to-night? Wouldn't it be easier to have a party?" she said, looking at him anxiously, longing to stir him out of himself. "Wouldn't that occupy you?"

"No, no," he said, shrinking at the thought; "to-morrow, not to-night. You don't understand — it's quiet I want now, to stop this thing beating in here." His hand went to his forehead and his fingers strained there as though in the effort to seize some throbbing torment underneath and crush it. Instinctively her arm drew tight about his body, pressing him close to her, and she said impressively, tears rising to her eyes:

"Oh, Mr. Dan, why can't I help you? I would give anything — anything to be of some good."

"What's that?" he said, sudd[illegible]tting up, his head on one side, listening. "On the roof — just now — didn't you hear?"

She went swiftly to the window and looked out.

"Nothing at all," she said, smiling at him as at a startled child. "What a crazy idea!"

The moment she had said the careless words, she regretted it.

"Crazy? You think I'm crazy?" he said, jerking around.

"Why, Mr. Dangerfield," she said, distressed, "don't look at me that way."

"You think I'm crazy — you do?" He repeated his question, seizing her wrists, watching her closely with his sharp, short glances.

"No; you're not crazy," she said vehemently.

He continued to watch her, plainly unconvinced.

"I'm not crazy — no," he said, at length, wearily, "but — I could be driven to it. Yes, yes; lots of times that's happened. That's what they counted on, and if they had got me — if I had waked up in a cell — a padded cell —" He shrank back, recoiling at the picture which rose before him, his fingers twisting in his hair. "God, what might not have happened! Now you know."

"Yes; I've known that."

"You have?" he said, surprised.

"I mean, I've known what you were afraid of," she said solemnly.

"I am afraid, dreadfully afraid," he said, in a whisper, "but that — that's one thing will never happen," he added in a tone of deep conviction; "no, never."

"No; for I won't let you," she said firmly. "You shan't lose your grasp. When things are straightened out, you're going to begin a new life — a life of work."

He looked at her nervously, doubting, but longing to be convinced.

"I mean it," she said, and, as her eyes met his, the slow smile spread on her face, as she looked down upon him with deep compassion. He half yielded and then brusquely withdrew.

"Too late! Why didn't I meet you ten years ago?" he said, with a shrug of his shoulders. He rose, turned, and faced her, with a return of the old authority. "Inga, don't — what I've made up my mind to do — you can't change. It's got to be done — it shall be done!"

And in the tone with which he said this there was something so desperately resolved and hopeless that, for the first time, she felt a sinking sense of defeat.

Before she could rally, and while still Dangerfield's glassy stare was fixed on her, there came a cautious knock at the door — a scraping, sliding tattoo.

"Who's that?" he said hastily.

The knock was repeated.

"Better let me go," she said, with a warning gesture. She went to the window first, for a survey of the roofs, and then to the bolted door. Suddenly she drew back with an exclamation. Outside, the tall, thin form of Drinkwater was standing.

XIX

SHE shut the door and locked it with a hasty movement and came back.

"Who was it?" he said, with rising excitement.

"Only Mr. Drinkwater."

"Drinkwater! What can he want here?"

Neither had the slightest suspicion of the lawyer's complicity in the events of the night before. The scraping knock began again.

"We'll see him," he said, all at once, his curiosity whetted, and, in obedience to his signal, she went to the door and opened it cautiously — far enough to permit Drinkwater's slipping into the room. Dangerfield was at the further end, standing by the head of the table, where the light of two candlesticks lit up his round, shaggy head and deep eyes.

Drinkwater glided across the room until only the table separated them, before jerking his head backward to where Inga in the shadow stood guard at the door.

"Mr. Dangerfield," he said, "I have come here with a message from some one —" he stopped, blew nervously through his nose, and continued —" some one you may guess — some one close to you. The message is strictly private."

"Go on. I'll hear it," said Dangerfield, bending his brows down and playing with a paper-weight that happened to be near by. The whole attitude held so much threat that the lawyer's eyes calculated the proportions of the table that served him as a barricade.

"But "— he glanced a second time toward Inga with a raising of his eyebrows —" do you wish any one to be a third to our conversation? It is, of course ——"

"Inga, wait! I wish you to stay," said Dangerfield, as he heard in the shadows the slight rustle of her dress. "There is nothing to show that he has anything of importance."

"It is from your wife," said Drinkwater, with a smile, and his glance went down to his fingers, which were pressed on the black, glossy surface of the table as though in the act of striking some resounding chord.

"Perhaps I had better — I can wait just outside," she said hurriedly.

"No — no — if what he says is true," said Dangerfield peremptorily, "all the more reason. I want you to hear what passes between this man and myself."

"Very well." She left the door and, seeing the excitement which had begun to work in him at the lawyer's announcement, came to his side to control him.

Drinkwater's glance rose from the table and rested on them with a certain malicious enjoyment.

"First, I have a surprise, an agreeable surprise, for you," he said, with a flicker of a smile, and his manner of accenting his phrase made them feel that he had referred to them both. "Mr. Dangerfield, you are a free man; your divorce was granted this afternoon."

Of the two, Inga showed the more emotion. She started and drew away from Dangerfield as though suddenly conscious of the intimacy of their attitude, while her companion received the announcement with a shrug.

"That can't be true. And it is impossible for you to know it."

"It is true," said Drinkwater. "And to show that I have ways of knowing that may surprise you, the action was held in Rhode Island under a referee appointed by Judge Chough, of the ——"

"You know this!" exclaimed Dangerfield, in amazement.

"Don't worry — no one else will know," said Drinkwater suavely. "I know, because I made it my business to know."

"So you have been spying on me all this while," said Dangerfield, with a sudden contraction of the eyes that brought the brows down into a lowering, menacing line.

"I have been fulfilling my duties," said Drinkwater coolly enough, though he stopped to puff through his thin, hooked nose; "duties as an attorney retained by the interests of your wife — Mrs. Daniel Garford."

At this mention of his real name, Dangerfield's anger, curiously enough, seemed to subside. Indeed, in the succeeding quiet and the mildness of his voice, there was almost a premeditated cunning.

"Well, it is quite evident that you are well-informed," he said. "You say that the divorce was pronounced this afternoon — may I ask how you should be the one to inform me, instead of my own lawyer?"

"Because I received the news by telephone twenty minutes ago."

"And you have communicated the news to my — to Mrs. Garford?"

"I have not."

"You said you had a message to me from her," said Dangerfield slowly. "What is it?"

"That is not quite correct," said Drinkwater, and, for the first time, he displayed a touch of nervousness, for he did not answer directly. "First, I believe I have rendered you a service in giving this information."

"How so?"

"You have now, of course, nothing further to fear from any attempt on your wife's part to shut you up under plea of medical necessity," said Drinkwater rapidly, "an attempt that had a certain legal plausibility under order of a court for your committal for examination."

"What, there was such an order?" said Dangerfield, trembling with excitement. "They went that far?"

"I have reason to believe so," said Drinkwater, smiling. "Nothing more easy to obtain. You, of course, realize that the object was to prevent the granting of the divorce. As I say, much as Mrs. Garford or *others*"— he paused and glanced at them significantly —"or others might desire to have you out of the way, any attempt now would be a most serious offense. It will not be made. Therefore, you may be assured that you can now circulate without danger."

"Very probably," said Dangerfield, with a contemptuous smile, "it would please Doctor Fortier to have me make the attempt — to-night?"

"You do not believe me?" said Drinkwater, shrugging his shoulders. "You will be convinced to-morrow."

"What is your message from Mrs. Garford?" said Inga suddenly. She had been watching the lawyer with a growing apprehension, which had showed itself in her frequent strained listenings to sounds from the hall.

Drinkwater pursed his lips, studied solemnly the Winged Victory in the dark corner, frowned, and looked point-blank at Dangerfield.

"Mr. Garford, haven't I said enough to convince you of my familiarity with your affairs? I really must ask you to hear what I have to say without the presence of witnesses."

To his surprise, it was Inga herself who opposed him.

"I don't trust him," she said emphatically. "Don't see him alone."

"Quite right," said Dangerfield. "If you have anything to say to me, say it now."

This was plainly not to the other's liking, for he drew back and jerked nervously at his cuff, with an evil glance at the girl who, alert and watchful, kept her deep eyes on his every movement.

"The agreement was," he said slowly, "that your wife should marry —" He paused and looked at Dangerfield. "Shall I go on?"

"Go on!" said Dangerfield roughly, though he was plainly startled at the extent of the lawyer's knowledge.

"Should marry a certain party — a certain Mr. Bowden — you see I am informed — within forty-eight hours after the granting of the decree."

Dangerfield gazed at him in astonishment. Twice he started to speak and twice he stopped; finally he managed to say:

"You have come from my wife, that's evident. It must be some dirty work or she would not have sent you. What is it?"

Drinkwater, as though fairly in, took this remark without offense and said, in a businesslike voice quite different from the affectation of his former manner.

"Your wife does not desire this marriage. That is not news to you; but if you will relinquish your purpose, she agrees to forego all the settlements you have made on her and in addition ——"

"What! She sent you here to bribe me!" exclaimed Dangerfield, in such a voice that the other drew back instinctively.

"Mr. Garford, I haven't told you the truth," he said hastily. "I represent Mr. David Macklin."

"Who?" said Dangerfield, drawing back in turn.

"Mr. David Macklin!"

"Not a word — not a word!" said Dangerfield, in whom the name roused a sudden fury. "Don't you dare ——"

"My client offers you one hundred thousand dollars if you will not insist on this marriage to Mr. Bowden."

Dangerfield's anger, which for a moment had threatened to burst into a rage, turned all at once into something cold and ominously calm.

"My answer to your client — not Mr. David Macklin, but Mrs. Garford, is No! Mrs. Garford will marry Mr. Bowden within the limit I have set, or ——"

"Listen, Mr. Garford," said Drinkwater desperately, his eyes flashing greedily with the thought of escaping commissions. "Take my advice — refuse!"

"What do you mean?" said Dangerfield sharply. "You tell me to refuse?"

"Refuse! Refuse!" said the lawyer excitedly. "You have stripped yourself; you have made yourself a beggar for a ridiculous point of honor — refuse all offers, put yourself in my hands. I'll show you how to get revenge and mulct them, too. Then Mr. Macklin will pay not one hundred but three — four times that much — half a mill——"

"Ah, you vermin!"

Dangerfield, with a cry, had taken a frame from the table and brought it down on the greedy head, and as the lawyer struggled back, he caught him by the throat in a frenzy of rage and disgust.

Inga, terrified at what he might do, clung to him, striving to drag him from his grip. At the noise of the scuffle, O'Leary and the others came precipitately in from the studio, believing that another assault was on.

"Tear him away — oh, get him away — he'll kill him," Inga shouted, as they burst in.

"Hands off!" said Dangerfield, in a voice like a thunder-clap. "I know what I'm doing! Killing's too good for this scum. Make way there!" Still with his hand on the other's throat, he dragged him down the hall to the top of the stairs. "Go back to your clients and let them know what I'll do if they fail me by one hour!"

With which, as though the man had been an old shoe, he flung him down the stairs and returned like a stalking fury through the group which watched him breathlessly.

XX

Despite the probability that the lawyer had told the truth, the night passed in vigilant waiting. The two pugilists curled upon the sofa; O'Leary dozed in the big chair, while Dangerfield, at the great Florentine table, his chin sunk in his palms, stared ahead of him, the long periods of immobility broken only by brief nervous resorting to the cards. Inga, by his side, sought to occupy her mind with a novel. From the moment she had learned from the lawyer of the divorce, her attitude toward Dangerfield had taken on an unwonted reserve. It was long after midnight when he turned and looked at her. She raised her eyes — she had not been reading for some time — and met his.

"What is it?" she said, smiling.

"You had better go to bed."

She shook her head. "I couldn't sleep."

"But you are not reading."

"No; I was thinking."

He started to question her further and then stopped.

"You knew all along who I was," he said at last.

"Yes — from the first."

"And that made no difference?"

She shook her head, smiling a little, but not looking at him.

"A precious fine reputation I've got," he said bitterly. "Wait till you see what the papers will make of Dan Garford's latest escapade!"

She shrugged her shoulder impatiently, and checked a reply with a quick frown and a glance at the others, as though conscious of their sleeping intrusion.

"I think he told the truth," he said disjointedly, after a moment.

"Who? Drinkwater?"

"Yes; I'm sure of it." He pressed his knuckles against his lips and said, frowning, "Well, that leaves only one more thing to do." He said it quietly, but with an accent of deep finality. When she thought him quite lost in this mood, he surprised her by saying, "Why does it make a difference to you?" He turned, caught the look of astonishment on her face, and added: "Why would you rather that I should be married?"

"Why do you say that?" she said, genuinely amazed at his intuition.

"You are different — you are not the same — I feel it."

She waited a moment, and then said hurriedly, in a low voice:

"If I told you, you wouldn't understand!"

At this moment, O'Leary, probably disturbed at the sound of voices, moved heavily in his chair. Dangerfield waited a moment to assure himself that the sleep was still profound, before saying:

"I am not so sure I don't understand now." He looked at her keenly, albeit with gentleness, for there was a softness in his eyes and the smile that came to his lips was one of comprehension. He laid his hand over hers and said: "Isn't it because — before nothing bound you — you were free to go any moment. There's something wild in you — untamed."

"I don't know — I really don't know," she said, looking away.

"I've never misunderstood you, child," he said, nodding as though satisfied. "Don't worry. Men like me don't bruise —" he hesitated a moment, patted her hand, and said softly, "guardian angels."

"Oh, I never was afraid of that!" she said swiftly, turning impulsively toward him.

"I'm not going to put a cloud over your life," he said doggedly.

He rose, left her, and went to the window. She extinguished the light and came softly over to his side until her hand slipped through his arm.

"Why did you do that?" he said, feeling the sudden drop of darkness about them and then, answering his question, he added, "There is nothing to fear now — I feel that."

She stood silently beside him looking out, and the touch on his arm seemed gradually to grow heavier until her body drew close to his side. In the black night, one window flamed out, feverishly alive against a distant tenement.

"Wonder what's going on there, too?" he said moodily. "I wonder what poor devil's fighting out his fight there?"

She did not answer, and then all at once her hands closed about his arm, and she said,

"Mr. Dan, don't go away."

"What makes you say that?" he said, startled.

"Don't go away from me," she said, in her deep voice. "Promise me that."

"No; I can't promise that," he said, between his teeth.

"But you'll tell me first — just promise that," she insisted. He shook his head. "Oh, I don't know why I am like this to-night," she said impulsively, "but I know if you went away —" She stopped and something caught in her throat.

He gave an exclamation and caught her in his arms in a close clasp.

"Inga, Inga, don't; it's more than I can bear."

"Promise, promise," she said incoherently, and her hands fastened to his coat as she hid her head against his shoulder.

"I promise not to — to go without telling you why," he said, at last. "Will that satisfy you?"

She caught his hand swiftly and pressed it against her heart. Then she went back hastily to the table and lit the light. O'Leary suddenly aroused, started up. It was almost four o'clock.

The next morning came Dangerfield's lawyer, Judge Brangman, with his clerk, to confirm the news that Drinkwater had brought. The interview was private, even the clerk presently reappearing in the hall and departing. Judge Brangman was closeted a full two hours, and that the meeting was not without dissension was obvious, not only from the prolongation of the discussion but by the frequent rise of angry voices. Finally, the door opened on an evidently complete disagreement, for Dangerfield's voice was heard saying:

"Judge, this is not a question of law; it is something — permit me — that you don't seem to understand."

"I only understand," said the voice of the visitor, in high-pitched exasperation, "that you are beggaring yourself for a quixotic idea, and that I, as your legal adviser, have a right to protest."

"Possibly. But my mind's set. I like to *buy* the cur. See that the information is sent to me this afternoon — time and place."

"Dan — a last time — won't anything shake you?"

"Nothing."

"But we're not living in the Middle Ages. Men don't do such things."

"I do," said Dangerfield, with cold harshness, "and they know it."

"I give up," said the judge, with something like a break in his voice. "Go on; do what you want."

"Call me anything you want," said Dangerfield, with the same ominous calm. "Probably I am a fool; possibly I always have been one, but that's why I'm going to carry my point."

The judge put up his hands in helpless rage and went stumbling down the hall, while those in O'Leary's room heard him exclaim,

"Mad — perfectly mad!"

By this time, the Three Arts, so to speak, had come to the same conclusion.

"Wish the devil he'd get it over with," said Flick wearily, "whatever he's going to do. I've seen some sporting life, but, holy cats! this being on the jump all hours of the night and day is getting into my constitution."

"I say, Music," said Tootles, equally distressed, "why don't you loosen up and tell what you know. We've stood enough, don't you think?"

Thus confronted, O'Leary said cautiously:

"Well, what's puzzling you?"

"Puzzling us! That's good!" said Flick, with a loud laugh. "What we want to know is what's all this mystery-game — and, most important, when do we settle down and sleep?"

"Why, I don't see why I shouldn't tell you what I know," said O'Leary frankly, "specially as you must have guessed the same. From all I can figure, it's a family affair; friend in corner has forced a divorce; leastwise it must be so, for, from all we can put together, that's what brought the woman here that night to try and get him to give up the idea. Likewise, when that failed, looks as though they tried to get him jugged for a loony and put away."

"But why should she care about preventing the divorce?" said Flick.

"Question of money, I suppose," said O'Leary thoughtfully.

"But, then, Drinkwater?" said Tootles. "How was he in it? I know that he must have been spying around and carrying information and that he was in the plot to get us out the way — yes, yes — but this last business — what the deuce did he say that started Dangerfield off like a wild bull?"

O'Leary shook his head.

"Some dirty business — the fellow was double-crossing some one, perhaps."

"Well, when is it going to stop?" said Flick querulously. "That's the only thing interests me."

"I imagine it's over now," said O'Leary, who knew of the granting of the divorce but was ignorant of any further complications; "in fact, I'm positive."

"You are, eh?" said Flick incredulously.

"I'd take my oath on it."

At this moment, there came a sharp, rattling knock; the door opened, and Dangerfield walked in.

"Am I interrupting?"

"No."

There had come a change in the man which struck them at once; the indecision and groping weariness of the last days had lifted. He seemed alive with energy and action, and yet, as he stood there looking about the room, there was about him momentarily the same expression which had startled them on his first appearance.

"What can we do for you?" asked O'Leary naturally and heartily.

Dangerfield looked down abruptly, his face cleared, and he said in a matter-of-fact tone:

"O'Leary, will you do me one more service?"

"Sure."

"Will you accompany me this afternoon for about an hour to a place I am going? I shall know in a short while."

"Nothing easier," said O'Leary; but, under the ease of his manner, he was watching Dangerfield closely.

"Thanks." He started to go and stopped. "There'll be no trouble — and yet you might as well be prepared."

"I get you!" said O'Leary, with a nod.

Dangerfield returned to his room, leaving consternation behind. Tootles was so overcome that he upset a box of charcoal, while Flick gave vent to a prolonged whistle, adding sarcastically,

"Peace and calm descendeth!"

"What the deuce is up" said O'Leary, scratching his ear. "I don't get this at all!"

"Well, I know one thing," said Flick vehemently; "I think you're a bigger fool than I took you for if you start out on any gunman visit without knowing into what little pocket you're walking."

O'Leary evidently thought as much, for presently he wandered up the hall in search of Inga, but the girl was away, and before she had returned something else had happened. A messenger arrived with a letter for Dangerfield, which he read with evident satisfaction, for he came down to the studio and said briskly:

"O'Leary, can you be ready to start in an hour?"

"I don't see why not," said O'Leary.

"Four o'clock, then."

A few minutes before that hour, O'Leary, ready for the street, made a last attempt to find Inga, in the hope that she could throw some light on the errand on which he was embarked. But the girl was not in her room, and as he was turning away, Dangerfield came out alone. King O'Leary could not suppress an exclamation of surprise. The man stood before him in top-hat, a cutaway revealed through the folds of his fur coat. By the slender gray-silk cravat, caught in an old-fashioned ring, and the light gloves in his hand, he might have been mistaken for a bridegroom.

"I say, are we going to a wedding?" said O'Leary facetiously.

"Yes," said Dangerfield, rather taken back. "Just that, a wedding."

"A wedding!" said O'Leary, in blank astonishment.

"Now you know," said Dangerfield, who didn't seem particularly pleased at the disclosure.

"I don't know anything at all," said O'Leary, who followed him, grumbling and shaking his head, his imagination filled with the eccentric possibilities this might portend. "Wonder if he's going to be married himself!" he thought, gazing at him suspiciously. But the depression and moodiness on Dangerfield's face belied the surmise. The elevator came up, and in it was Inga. The moment she saw the two standing there, an expression of great alarm came into her face.

"What — you are going out!" she stammered, looking from one to the other. "It is for this afternoon, then?"

Dangerfield nodded, and something like a triumphant sneer, brutal and vindictive, quite foreign to his usual moods, appeared about his mouth.

"This afternoon, as I said!"

"You're not going alone?"

"No, no; O'Leary's with me."

The alarm which had seized her from the first seemed suddenly translated into another terror as she caught him by the arm, saying,

"One word — just one word first."

While O'Leary and Sassafras stood waiting, ill at ease, she drew him over the hooded bridge which connected the two wings of the Arcade.

"Mr. Dan," she said breathlessly, clasping her hands, "you'll come back?"

"Why, of course, of course," he said nervously, not meeting her eyes.

"You'll come back — you promised," she said, and as she put her head down and swayed against him, he felt her body trembling. They were hidden by the bend of the hooded passage, alone in the filtered light that struggled up the gloomy halls.

"Inga — Inga — don't make it harder for me," he said bitterly.

"You'll come back," she repeated, desperately clinging to him, her face upraised, her eyes searching his in terror. "Say it; promise it!"

"I — perhaps —" His hand closed over her fingers with the nervous tension that these last days of abstinence had brought him.

"Mr. Dan, you must not think you're alone — you mustn't say no one cares!" She slipped her arms about his neck, and he felt her breast shaken with the heave of agitated breaths. "If anything — anything — happened —" She shook her head and stopped, unable to finish.

"Happen — what do you think — why is that idea in your head?" he said, holding her from him.

She put her handkerchief hastily to her eyes and threw her head back suddenly, so that her look seemed to penetrate through his mask and search into his soul.

He repeated his question, but this time uneasily, conscious of the scrutiny under which she held him.

"Nothing," she said abruptly. In a moment she was back into the restraint of her usual self. "Then you will come back here — to me," she said slowly, "to-night. It makes no difference to me — understand that — in what condition you are. I'll be waiting."

He looked at her, rather startled by this, then profoundly touched, and his face showed the emotion she had aroused in him for he turned hastily away, saying:

"As you wish, then — and it's a promise."

They came back to the elevator hurriedly, each plainly upset, and separated with a brief nod. The mood into which Inga had thrown him possessed him long after they had taken a taxi and started across the park, for he leaned forward, seemingly oblivious to the presence of company, and frowned down on the strongly clasped hands which, from time to time, were pressed against his teeth in strained, convulsive gestures. O'Leary, who watched him in growing perplexity, decided to break the silence.

"If there's anything you want of me particularly, Dangerfield, you'd better tell me."

"What? Oh, yes!" Dangerfield came back to his seat with a start, ran his hand over his forehead, and said apologetically,

"O'Leary, I owe you my apologies!"

"Oh, that's all right!"

"I owe you more than that," he said, with one of his sudden smiles which had the effect of charming away all resentment. "I know it; I'm deeply grateful. If I don't tell you all details won't you understand that it's because the subject is too painful?"

"Don't say a word, then," said O'Leary.

"Besides — to-morrow — when the papers get hold of it —" He shrugged his shoulders. "Will it suffice you to know that I have asked you to assist at a wedding, a wedding for which I am peculiarly responsible?" The tones became cold and implacable. "In fact, you have met the lady before — as you perhaps have guessed, she is my former wife. There are circumstances which make it desirable for all parties to avoid as much publicity as possible. That's why it's being solemnized at the place we are going." He leaned forward and rapped on the window, signaling the driver to stop. "We'll get out here."

The taxi drew up in a side street at his orders. Up the avenue in that thronged district of the slums of the upper city which lies on the beginnings of Harlem, O'Leary perceived the tower of a church.

Dangerfield's moodiness had closed over him again. At a gesture of his, O'Leary followed him into the vestibule. Knowing what he had been able to patch together, he could faintly divine the storm of emotion which swept his companion as the door closed behind them and they entered the dimness of the chapel. There were a bare half-dozen persons — the minister, the couple standing before him by the pulpit, the whole far enough away to be unrecognizable; yet at the sudden letting-in of the noises of the street, each turned with a start. It was as though each had divined who the new arrival must be.

Dangerfield acknowledged the recognition with a short forward bendi[illegible] his head, but, instead of taking a seat, he remained st[illegible] by a pillar, arms folded, immovable; nor in the obscurity was it possible for his companion to judge what emotion predominated. The sounds of the minister's voice came to them in regular cadences until the decisive words, "I therefore pronounce you man and wife."

At this, O'Leary, with his eyes still on Dangerfield, saw the arms relax and the head thrown back as though a weight had slipped from the shoulders.. The next moment his companion had touched him on the arm and gone out, saying:

"That's all — come!"

On the sidewalk, Dangerfield seemed to be moving blindly, for he stumbled once and had started off in a direction quite different from the corner where their taxi was waiting, when O'Leary checked him on the arm, saying:

"That's not the way, man, to your taxi."

At his touch Dangerfield turned, without seeming realization of where he was.

"What — what taxi?"

"The taxi we came in that's waiting," said O'Leary impatiently, "or shall I let it go?"

"No, no."

They retraced their steps, but, to do so, they were forced to pass by the entrance of the church just as the wedding-party was emerging. Dangerfield stopped with an exclamation and drew himself up stiffly, while the press of the crowd brought them momentarily face to face with the bride and groom, as they came through the fringe of spectators. A curious pair they made for two who had just come from the altar. Each face seemed dominated by a sullen fury, and O'Leary, looking at them, mumbled to himself:

"'Deed they look more like they were waiting to knife each other than dreaming of wedded bliss!"

When they perceived Dangerfield, the man started back with something akin to fear in his eyes, while the woman, warned by his movement, looked up and, meeting the look of her former husband. caught her breath. For a moment the black rage which convulsed her face shook her so that she seemed on the point of breaking all restraint and turning on them. But at this dangerous moment, some one spoke to her in sharp command, seized her arm and hurried her into a carriage. O'Leary recognized Doctor Fortier.

A moment later, the whole party had disappeared down the avenue, leaving Dangerfield and O'Leary standing in the midst of a group of urchins, grocer-boys and nurserymaids, who, sensing the approach of a tragic coincident, were staring open-mouthed at the shaggy, bearlike man who continued lost in his reveries. It wasn't until O'Leary felt impelled to recall him by a touch on his arm that Dangerfield (to keep to the name which he had voluntarily assumed) came to himself, perceived the growing curiosity of the throng with a start, brushed them aside with an angry sweep of his arms. Half an hour later, without having uttered a word, he deposited O'Leary at the Arcade, dismissed the car, and strode away down the avenue, before his companion, taken off his guard, had thought to remind him of his promise to Inga.

At eleven o'clock, Dangerfield, led by some dramatic impulse, returned to his club, from which he had exiled himself for months. From the moment that the old tugging, feverish thirst for oblivion had swept him from O'Leary into the solitude of crowds and the electric heart of the city, he had been drinking blindly, impatiently, with a need of quieting the throbbing nerves which were rapping an insistent tattoo against his brain. A dozen men were in the lounge up-stairs, old friends, who started up with exclamations of surprise at seeing the familiar tousled head with the gray lock appearing above the stairs. Quite a crowd came thronging about the prodigal returned, the more enthusiastic in that they had never expected to lay eyes on him again. He stood among them outwardly calm and smiling, his brain fighting off the numbing, confused riot that raged within it. Several, divining his condition, stole wondering, apprehensive glances at him.

He was installed in a great armchair before the blazing logs in the fireplace in the light and warmth of familiar friendly regions, and, as he put out his hands gratefully against the heat, feeling himself surrounded by friends, it seemed to him that he was a prey to some tantalizing hallucinations of happiness that must vanish at a waking start. He remained deep into the night, drinking steadily, striving to beat down the iron control of his head which still held him cruelly to the realization of the actual. One by one the old friends were forced to leave, going silently, ominously impressed by the deliberate intensity of the man, the wildness in his eyes and the sudden fits of moody wandering. At two o'clock, all sounds had grown dulled and pleasant in his ears. He rose, walked into the office without faltering, exchanged a courteous handshake with a friend from the pool-table and asked for his account, discharged it in full, wrote out his resignation, and posted it to the board of directors. As he started to leave he found himself before the board on which was posted the list of members suspended for house-charges or nonpayment of dues. All at once, a sentimental idea came to him. He examined the list carefully, found in it the names of four men, old friends in straightened circumstances, and carefully wrote down the sums of their indebtedness.

" I think I should like to attend to these," he said politely, drawing his check-book.

Then he thanked the clerk, pocketed the receipts, insisted on buying a last round of drinks for the few late stragglers at the pool-tables, who, amazed, watched him depart without a single misstep. When he had received his coat and hat, he slipped a bill in the hand of Pedro, the Argus of the club.

" 'Gainst the rules," he said, in a whisper, " but not ordinary case. Wish you luck, Pedro! "

On the long, bleak way to the Arcade, he stopped at a drug store on Seventh Avenue, whispered a moment to a clerk in the shadows of the back counter, received a small bottle, and as he examined it nodded with satisfaction, and went out. He entered the Arcade and stood a moment in its deserted, oppressive silence, staring at the dim interiors of shops that showed like pale catacombs on either side, and all at once broke out into a short, bitter laugh, as though this end of all had struck him as the most incongruous thing in his fantastic life. He did not wake up Sassafras, but went up the long six flights slowly, sitting down from time to time and talking to himself, his head in his hands. The corridor was deathly quiet and dim, and the one struggling, bending blue flame in the gas-jet before his room seemed to him a beacon in far-off regions as he groped his way to it. The door was unlocked — the room faintly reflecting outlines in queer distorted shadows. He sat down and stared solemnly about him. Then he rose, fumbled a moment, and found the button. The lights flashed across the room. At the table, asleep, her body sunk into weariness of long vigilance, was Inga Sonderson. At the same moment she moved, saw him, and started up with a cry of relief, which she checked with a clutching of her hand at her throat. The next moment she came swiftly over to him, all surprise banished from her face, quick and matter of fact, saying:

"Slip out of your coat. I'll take it."

He backed away, rebelling at her presence and the will which was there to oppose his. All at once he remembered his promise, and a cunning loophole dawned in his foggy brain.

"Came back as I promised," he said solemnly, folding his arms in antagonism. "All right now, going out again."

Instinctively he comprehended the persistent opposition that lay in the slender body facing him, and sought to escape it. To his surprise, she did not object, but after a moment's thought nodded and went toward her room.

"What are you going to do?" he said roughly.

"I'm going with you," she said.

He laughed incredulously. The next moment she was back, enveloped in coat and muffler.

"You're going," he said frowning, "now?"

"Whenever you wish," she said, her dark eyes steadily on him, without reproach or criticism.

"We'll see," he said, resentfully, and he started down the hall. Without a word she followed at his side.

XXI

THE name of Daniel Garford had figured on many occasions in the scare-heads of the Metropolitan press, not only on account of the eccentricities of genius and the wildness of his youth, but from the fact that the name of Garford had been a social beacon for generations. Even before the Mexican War there had been a Garford who had sat in the Cabinet as Secretary of State, and from that time on, the family had progressed in power and wealth, a proud, intensely ambitious, self-willed, and dominating line of men, who, whatever their faults, were never accused of idleness. There was a restless, mental energy about these men which had driven them to the front, while the strength of the old Garford strain continued to show in their impatience of forms and traditions, their ability to originate and discover, and especially in their distinguishing trait of never being satisfied with success.

The Honorable Benjamin Garford, Daniel's uncle, whom he resembled, according to the incomprehensible vagaries of heredity in form and temperament, had been a clear example of this boundless craze for real achievement. Though possessed of an ample fortune, he had, from his youth, devoted himself to scientific research and discussion One of the most distinguished scholars of his day, honored by numerous European scientific bodies for discoveries in the field of electrical energy, his text-books accepted as standards, twice minister to St. Petersburg, and once to Paris, he summed up his life in one little phrase: "I die a disappointed man." This remark, incomprehensible to the multitude, should be retained as the key to Daniel's character — the passionate pursuit of an ideal linked to an inevitable moment of self-appraisement and disillusion.

His life had been enveloped in storm, a whirling, breathless existence, with strange reversals of fortune, never quiet, nor long continuing along obvious lines. The quality of genius had always been in him from the lonely, tragic days of his boyhood, but a disordered, tormented genius which had made him the sport of accidental influences. Dudley Garford, his father, in a moment of intense infatuation in his early twenties, had eloped with and married a beautiful Italian girl of distinguished parentage whom he had met in his travels, and this mixture of the virility of the Garfords with the warmth and color of the South had made a genius of the boy. To this fortuitous mingling of rich strains was added the awakening touch of early sorrow and a precocious comprehension of tragedy. What father and mother had consummated in a burst of wildness, they lived to destroy in bitterness. From the earliest years of their marriage, violent quarrels had broken out, due at first to the unreasoning espionage of passionate jealousy to which the wife subjected the husband, and, later, inevitably to a succession of rapid, volatile attachments into which the husband had been driven, first, by her intolerance, and second, by the brilliant pleasure-loving qualities of his own forceful personality.

Daniel and his sister Theresa grew up in this unruly household, wide-eyed, wondering spectators of daily storms, culminating in one tragic evening when the mother, face to face at last with the acknowledged proofs of her husband's infidelity, had abandoned herself to such a tempest of blind rage that the two children, cowering against the wall, too frightened to do aught but to cling to each other, were forced to witness the frantic struggle of their father with the mother who, in her hysteria, was bent on self-destruction. The scene (it had taken place in the nursery) remained in the boy's mind with the startling horror of a nightmare — the childish toys scattered on the floor, the words of hatred and anger which struck them cold, the frightful distortion on the face of their mother, the struggle for the possession of the knife, and then her exhaustion, the low moaning broken by hysterical gasps for breath. Then, weeks later had come the parting which he did not understand in the least, for which he could find no childish reason. The little sister and the stately, resplendent mother had gone out of his life, and loneliness and silence had crept through the great house.

The boy grew up in this abandonment, brooding over memories, his imagination precociously awakened, forced into a searching of himself; self-sufficient, wandering into long explorations of the realms of the fantastic, telling himself stories at night, the despair and terror of a succession of tutors. What he saw and dimly comprehended during this period was a curious awakening to the conflict of the greed and passions of the later world. Many a night, unsuspected, he had stolen from his bed and secreted himself in the little balcony that looked down on the great drawing-room, gazing down with a puzzled wonder on the tempestuous scenes of revel and license which hid the darker side of Dudley Garford's mercurial, triumphant public career. He saw his father with critical eyes, with an unhealthy knowledge beyond the weight of his years, and this hidden critical spectatorship made life seem to him like some whirling theatric *danse macabre* of riotous emotions and vibrant colors.

Already, the exotic multiplied sensations had become translated into the bent of his imagination. He had begun to model in clay, untaught, following queer fancies; struggling to the use of childish paints, understanding nothing of mediums but delighting his eyes with odd blending and contrasts of colors, violent and barbaric in his instincts.

One night, in the weariness of his watching, he fell asleep in the balcony, was discovered, and the next week was bundled off to boarding school.

His career at school was cut abruptly at the age of sixteen by the discovery of his infatuation for the daughter of one of his teachers, a woman many years his senior with whom he had fallen violently, desperately in love, with all the unreason and blind adoration of a first passion. Brilliant, unruly, proud, delicate in health, and too absorbed in reading and the pursuit of his beloved painting, he had still about him a certain illuminating magnetism, a faith in his future, a trick of saying things others would never have said, of thinking strange thoughts that had even reached to the heart of the woman. To do her justice, she had never thought for a moment of taking advantage of the boy's infatuation; yet the parting was difficult, and she herself suffered more than she showed.

For two years he was consigned to a ranch, to live in the open air, to harden to the weather and grow in muscle and sturdiness, roaming the great stretches, sleeping in the open, discovering that beyond the stone walls of the city, such miracles exist as the turning of the dawn, the riotous coming of the sun, the trackless map of stars, the restless stealing-in of the spring and the haunting majesty of the turning leaves. All these sensations sunk deep into his fertile imagination. An artist exiled in the fight for health gave him the first lessons, and put him through the hard grind of mechanical preparation. From the first he showed qualities which were to persist in his later work, an impatience with deliberate building and an impulse toward the dramatic interpretation of the instincts. His sketches were full of technical faults, and yet almost all held a certain charm, something quite out of the ordinary.

From this serene calm of the open plain and a life of simple moods, he was suddenly transplanted to college in the midst of a fast New York set, with possession of an allowance which was quite sufficient to send him headlong to his own destruction. The tendency to violent extremes which was instinctive in his character made him speedily the ring-leader in the company of those who burned the midnight oil — but not in the pursuit of knowledge. In six months Daniel had been twice warned by the faculty and had managed to run through the year's allowance. He applied for further funds to his father, who laughed and acceded, rather pleased, in his worldly way, that his son was sowing his wild oats in princely fashion. In his second year, his disordered existence had become so notorious that, after a certain episode which had figured prominently in the newspapers, wherein he had driven a coach over the front lawns of suburban Boston in the wee hours of the morning, he was summarily called before the faculty and given an opportunity to resign. On top of which came a telegram from New York summoning him to his father's death-bed.

A certain mystery surrounded the death of Dudley Garford, which was officially given out as the result of an aggravated case of appendicitis. It was whispered that he had come by a violent death, having been shot through the lungs by an outraged husband. Certainly the habits of his later life would not have made such a result an improbability.

Daniel had never known his father, conscious always in the rare moments of their intercourse of an insuperable barrier which lay between them in the memories of his boyhood. In the last months, they had even come to the verge of an open quarrel, when the father had discovered the strength of the son's artistic inclinations and had violently forbidden him a career which he looked upon with contempt.

Daniel now found himself his own master, with every avenue opened to his wish. He went to Paris. His mother, after the early death of his sister, had remarried and become the Duchesse de Senbach. Into this curious intermingling of international society which flaunts its vanities and worn passions, he entered with all the ardor of a healthy body and a lively imagination, still genuinely blinded with illusions. The artist in him, which divides life into sensations, again brought him into notoriety. He gave dinners as a grand duke might give; he lived in apartments with a retinue of servants, the cost of which was faithfully chronicled in the colored Sunday editions of his home papers with printed references to the rake's progress. He was surrounded by a crowd of sycophants, shoddy race-track majors, princes down at the heels, and Balkan aristocrats of the gaming-tables, who fattened on his prodigality and led him into fresh excesses. He fell violently in love with a favorite of the *Café Chantants*, Nina de Mauban, believed in her devotion to him, conceived the quixotic idea of lifting her out of the muddied existence she led and even announced their engagement.

The existence he had been living would have inevitably ruined him, when a new turn arrived with the panic of '93. In a fortnight, as a result of the treachery of an executor, he found himself bankrupt. The news made a sensation here and abroad. The army of friends melted away. Creditors descended on him and drove him from his palace, and the woman he had adored departed overnight in the company of a Swedish count. When the news was brought to him, he began by flying into a paroxysm of despair and ended by bursting into laughter. The next day, with the best of good humor, he packed up his effects and moved over into a studio in the Rue d'Assas off the Luxembourg Gardens. His mother gave him an allowance of one hundred dollars a month, which, in his new surroundings, was a fortune. In a month he had found his happiness in a life of work among these democrats of the soul.

If he did not at once forget the woman, the memory of his existence of luxury never returned to embitter him. For years he lived with his comrades of the *atelier,* adopting their flowing dress and easy customs, a leader in their revelries, but a madman for work, as completely divorced from his past existence as though he had died and been born again. The two experiences as a boy and as a man had left him distrustful of women or, at least, recoiling before the intense outpouring of emotion which love meant to him. During this long student period, no woman touched his heart beyond a womanly sympathy. In fact, his attitude was the occasion of numerous jests among the more catholicly inclined, while those of more romantic persuasion did him the honor to ascribe it to the tragedy of a "*grande passion.*" His studio, which was magnificent for the quarter, became the refuge of the whole tribe of models and others whose living was even more precarious. At any hour of the day and night, they arrived for a bit of food, a night's shelter, or to give him their tragic confidence, and these flitting children of the sidewalks, cynical, hardened, and sly in their dealings with other men, would melt into tears or burst into angry tirades against the injustice of established order, sitting alone with him into the long night. They taught him much of their dreadful vision of mankind and suffering in such hours of confession, which he would never have known had he approached them differently. At the bottom, pity was too deep in his soul to have permitted any other sentiment. All adored him and one, Pepita, a little

Spanish model, loved him with the love of a dog for its master. For his part, he took no credit for this open charity. As a matter of fact, it was a privileged glance into a hidden life, that interested him intensely, that roused in him long periods of meditation and revolt, that was as much a part of the architectural structure of his artistic conscience, as his boyhood, his life on the prairies, his wildness at college, or his rapid plunge through the dissipations of the brilliant world. He became known not only as an artist of bold and daring originality, but as a man who thought and reasoned.

In his third year, an event came which occasioned a new outburst of public curiosity. An aunt died and left him a legacy of fifty thousand dollars. He reappeared in society in a brilliant renaissance, took up his old habits, just as though nothing had happened; reassembled the former acquaintances, gave dinners and balls, and won enormous sums at baccarat. This lasted for almost two months, at the end of which a streak of luck set in against him and he found himself again bankrupt. Seven weeks after his departure from the studio of the Rue d'Assas, he returned penniless but happy, and announced:

" Now, if no more aunts die, I shall become an artist."

His return was made a gala night; the quarter packed in to hear his adventures, and, in the end, the renegade was received back into the sacred enclosure, while his dress clothes and the offending hat were burned with imposing ceremonies.

When the death of his mother brought him a fortune, he remained true to his oath and the left bank of the Seine. By this time he had won his medals in the Salon and had achieved the honor of a private exhibition of water-colors which he had brought back from Algeria and the East. There were some critics who complained of the theatric quality of his art, but all conceded the individuality and the boldness of his new conceptions. His sudden spring into fame was as instantaneous as all the other phases of his existence. Everything seemed to open ahead of him for a long and brilliant career of highest achievement, when fate, which had played him a dozen queer turns, returned to intrude once more into his existence.

He was motoring along the Riviera, on a trip he had long planned to Venice and the galleries of Florence, when, as his car swerved out and around a jutting corner of rock, a sudden gust of wind caught his hat and whirled it into the lap of a young woman who was passing in a phaeton. This gust of wind decided his whole life. He fell in love with her at the first sight of her wistful Madonnalike face and trusting eyes, that strangely enough reminded him of the idealized vision of his boyhood. She was a divorcée, scarcely twenty-one, from the South, who had resumed her maiden name, Louise Fortier. He knew absolutely nothing about her except the story she told of childish innocence and the whims of a selfish libertine. Two weeks later, they returned to Paris, engaged. He had thrown himself into this new experience without the slightest distrust, with the rapturous idolatry of the boy he was. He would not have permitted her to be discussed even by his most intimate friends, though, in fact, several made hints which he was too blind to perceive. They were married a month later. One painful incident occurred. Pepita, the little Spanish model who had been devoted to him for years, attempted to take her life by swallowing poison, and though her act was detected in time to save her, the occurrence cast a shadow over the wedding.

During the first months, he found himself incomprehensibly, riotously happy. He was charmed and bewildered by his wife. They made a romantic trip through

Italy and into the East, during which she assumed subtly a great influence over his moods and ambitions. When they returned to Paris, he was more in love than ever; only, there was one thing which had gone completely out of his day, of which he never thought — his work. Their coming to New York was her suggestion. The return home was a triumph for him. For the first time, he tasted the completeness of personal success. His friends of the quarter who had returned before him hailed him as a leader. He became a personality; his eccentricities of speech and thought, the dramatic wildness, even, of his past life were now registered in his favor. He took a studio and began to work, and success continued his. Yet, at the bottom, he became conscious of a growing restlessness, of an inability to enjoy what he had won.

Gradually, the obsession which had clouded his vision began to lift from his eyes. He saw her as she was, this woman to whom he had chosen to fasten the chains of his existence. He was proud of her, of her charm, of the magnetism she exerted over other men, of the admiration she evoked in the brilliant formal society into which she had led him, but he perceived at last that she neither understood what he was working for nor was able to assist him in the least. He found himself divided against himself, as it were, leading two opposite lives.

He began to ask himself questions. He said to himself that he was famous and envied, that everything he did succeeded, and that yet he was not happy. He sought in himself some explanation. He recalled two sayings, one that of his uncle who, at the end of a life heaped with honors, could say: "I die a disappointed man," and the remark of his old professor: "In art, the critical age is forty, up to then one can promise, after then one must achieve." He began to feel this crisis in his life, to ask himself whether he had in him the strength to revolt or whether he would renounce the ambitious flights of his old ideals in the easy satisfaction of what the public called success. For he perceived clearly that the fault lay in him, that he no longer lived in his art, that he served two gods, and that in this divided allegiance lay the death of all his struggling toward true greatness. He sought to make his wife understand and found a blank incomprehension. Then he tried to order his life on new lines, to divide the year into two parts, and to regain in solitary summers on unfrequented islands something of the old enthusiastic concentration.

But he found that the habits of home, of pleasant friends, of the woman who held him by mysterious impulses, were too strong, and he came to the day when he understood his uncle, and said to himself:

"It is ended. I shall not do what I want to do. It is beyond me, as my life has been cast."

A profound melancholy came over him and, in his secret heart, undivined by his closest friends the cancer of disillusionment began to grow. His eccentricities increased. He had scenes with his wife in which he burst into violent tirades or scornful laughter which she could not understand. Though he never accused her, he repeated often bitterly to himself that his career was a sacrifice to the woman, who neither appreciated nor perceived the sacrifice.

During these years, he had never, for an instant, entertained the slightest suspicion of his wife. He gave her absolute faith. His theory of marriage was not as a reciprocal tyranny but as a free union. He did not claim any right over her actions or attempt to limit her interests in other men. In the beginning he had explained himself at length.

"If the day ever comes when you find that you love another man, come to me and tell me," he said. "I shall not stand in your way, no matter how I may feel. Marriage exists only so long as it is voluntary on both sides. All I demand is that there should be no deceit, that each should remember the dignity of the other."

"If you say that you don't love me!" she said, laughing, but a little anxious.

"You are wrong; I love you in my own way."

She was silent quite a while, watching him.

"And if — if the other thing should happen," she said, pretending to make a jest of it. "If I did deceive you, what would you do?"

"Don't joke about such things," he said, frowning; "I am serious, Louise."

Several times, as though to tease him, she came back to this question, but each time peremptorily he refused to discuss it.

He was not jealous, or, rather, he held jealousy unworthy of him. He would have scorned to exercise the slightest supervision over his wife's actions. On one occasion, when he had taken up a branch telephone, he had cut in on a conversation which would have aroused any one but a man as blind or as loyal as he was. He had replaced the receiver. He would have been ashamed to listen, and even referred to it jestingly, without notice of the alarm which showed in her eyes. One afternoon, coming home contrary to his habit, he let himself into his apartment and stopped at the sound of voices from his wife's salon. He listened and discovered, without shadow of a doubt, that the man with whom she was arguing was her lover.

XXII

THE discovery of his wife's infidelity was so swift, so convincing, so utterly unexpected that every mental function seemed to stop. Garford stood still, a long moment, doing absolutely nothing. Then his whole body was seized with a confusing fever; his heart seemed to swell within him and to leap against its walls. In a flash, his head cleared as though swept by a gust of wind. He felt a tingling, throbbing sensation throughout his body, accompanying this abrupt mental clarity; all other sounds without him ceased. It was as though only one thing existed, something which echoed through his brain — one question: "What am I going to do?"

If he had gone in, he would have killed them, then and there, under his hands, one after the other, blindly, unreasoningly, in brute instinct, without knowing just what he was doing. Only a door stood between him and a crime. At this moment, the bell rang. On such trivialities destinies turn. The shrill, piercing sound recalled him to the outer world. He was able to add to the obsessing question in the hollow of his consciousness one other thought: "Some one is coming." Registering two perceptions, he became again a reasoning man. He withdrew softly, mounted to the mezzanine floor of the apartment, and went out.

When he had, in some measure, recovered control over his reason, the first emotion was one of complete stupefaction. Why had she done this? He had given her everything. He had given her even the sacrifice of his deepest ambitions without ever reproaching her. And he had been rewarded by the lowest deceit.

"Has a woman no gratitude?" he asked himself, in man's eternal miscomprehension of feminine motives.

This was the one thing he could not comprehend. He could not forbid her loving another. This was something in the domain of the instincts which might conceivably happen. But he had a right to demand that she should not strike him in his private honor. At first, no other thought came to him than that his wife loved the man whose voice he had recognized. That she could have been actuated by any other emotion was too horrible to contemplate. Yet he could not comprehend the choice.

"She loves him — Reggie Bowden — Bowden, of all men! How is it possible?" he kept repeating to himself.

Of all the men who surrounded her and paid her court, the discovery that he had been betrayed for young Bowden wounded him most. For Bowden was of the type he particularly detested, a trifler in all things, drifting through life on a family name, a sm[illegible] face and a well-groomed body, social jester and leader of cotillions, a tyrant of the ballroom. That this man could be preferred to him curiously enough humiliated him more than if her choice had been one who was her intellectual equal. The more he analyzed the situation, the more a tormenting doubt returned. A hundred trivial incidents of the past thronged to his memory with a new significance until he felt he should go mad unless he knew the truth.

In three months, it lay before him in its multiplied, shameful detail — not only the present but the past, the record of her first marriage and even before. He went to the friends who, he remembered, had dropped vague hints and forced from them what they knew or suspected. Then, for the first time, it flashed over how his name had been bandied about, a thing of mockery and light contempt, even to the point that he might have been held cognizant, and he said to himself in dull rage: "I was wrong; I should have killed her — that would have been my justification."

During these three months there were moments when he felt himself perilously close to the borders of his sanity. Added to the disillusion and melancholy of the artist, the blow to the man himself had been so crushing and so penetrating that every illusion had gone as completely from his mental outlook as though, at a stroke, all colors had been lifted from the visible world. Only one thought upheld him — the idea of vengeance and the cleansing of his name. When he was completely satisfied with his investigations, he left ostensibly on a hunting-trip, returned to New York secretly, and advised by his detectives, came to his apartment-building at night.

He tried the door with his latch-key and found it barred. He mounted to the mezzanine floor, tried the door, and found it locked. At that hour, the servants would have left the apartment. He descended, had himself taken up by the service elevator and entered by the kitchen. He knew where he would find them. On the second floor was a little salon which gave into his wife's bedroom, from which it formed the only exit. They had just returned from the opera; the young man's coat and hat were on a chair, the odor of a cigar in the corridors.

Bowden was alone, in an armchair by the little lamp, skimming a paper while waiting for Mrs. Garford to return from her bedroom. All at once a sense of something unusual in the air made him lower his paper and glance up. At his side, the husband was standing. He started to his feet with a smothered exclamation, but a hand restrained him.

"Not a sound; I want to give her a surprise."

There was a smile on Garford's lips as he laid his finger across them in warning, but this smile terrified the lover. He felt himself trapped, unable to warn the woman, forced helplessly to await the moment of her reëntry and the shock of her surprise. He did not make a sound because he still hoped and because he was a coward. The two men remained thus a full five minutes, without moving, awaiting her return. All at once, from the further room, a light voice began to hum an aria of the evening, broke off, and called out:

"Getting impatient?"

At these words, Bowden felt the blood running out of his veins. Then there came the rustle of a dress and Louise, in an Oriental negligée of gold, blended with greens and reds, came lightly to the door.

Garford had placed himself so that he could observe Bowden's actions in the reflection of a mirror, while turning his back to him. The young man's hand went up in frantic warning.

At the sight of her husband, she stood transfixed, unable to move or utter a sound, and the color went out of her face so abruptly that the dabs of rouge on her cheeks stood hideously out.

"Quite a surprise, isn't it?" Garford said with a laugh.

She murmured something inaudible.

"What! You don't kiss me?"

She looked at him a moment, looked at Bowden, and came slowly across the yellow Chinese rug, a long moment when she felt her knees sagging under her.

"He knows!" she said to herself. "Will he strangle me?"

And she reached him and offered up her cold lips. He kissed them. At the moment his arms touched her she could not repress a shudder.

"What's the matter?" he said, looking at her.

"You frightened me," she said, in a whisper, her hand to her heart, for the test had been almost beyond her strength.

"What! I frightened you?"

"You know sudden surprises affect me like this," she said, trying to recover her wits.

"You don't ask me why I have come," he said quietly.

"Bad news?" she forced herself to say.

"You might call it that."

This gave Bowden his opportunity. He rose hastily.

"I hope it's not serious," he said glibly. "If you'll permit me —" He offered his hand. "I know you wish to talk this over alone. Mrs. Garford, I hope your headache will be better to-morrow. It was a shame to miss that last act."

He had quite recovered himself with the prospect of a flight that providentially opened to him. He bowed a little doubtfully to Garford, but the husband nodded and sat down. Bowden exchanged glances with the wife, slipped on his coat, and took up his hat. The woman looked at him in terror; she saw to the bottom of his soul and comprehended that he was deserting her. Garford, meanwhile, had risen, gone to the table and turned, his arms folded, leaning against its side.

Bowden made a final bow and went to the door. Almost immediately he came back.

"Why, it's locked!"

"What's that?" said Garford, lifting his head.

"Why, it's locked!" said Bowden, who felt the room beginning to reel about him.

"Yes; I locked it."

Despite the uncanny sense of terror which began to creep over him, the young man managed to blurt out:

"But why — what does this mean?"

The woman, who understood by this time that she was fighting for her life, joined in his remonstrances.

"Dan — are you crazy — you can't act this way — what do you mean?"

Garford returned to the chair, and this nervous shifting did not escape her, or the straining of his clasped fingers held against his lips as he answered, with forced calm:

"You should know."

She tried, while gaining time, to turn it off lightly while assuming an attitude of frankness:

"Surely, you don't object to Mr. Bowden's coming in here for a nightcap and a cigar! You are not as prudish as that, and if you were, you know I have done it a hundred times; that would be too ridiculous, Dan! You aren't going to make a scene over this!"

"Is that all you have to say to me — that I should know," he asked, when she had finished.

She bit her lip, tried to answer, and succeeded only in staring at him. She also began to be horribly afraid.

"And you, Mr. Bowden?"

The young fellow had an answer ready, glib on his tongue, but, at the look in the husband's eyes, it vanished. In the palms of his hands the perspiration began to rise. Before the avenging dignity in the glance of this man whom he had so many times smiled at in the satisfied disdain of the social freebooter, he felt himself all at once insignificant, as a chip of wood swept under a great surf. She understood that she could expect no help from him and desperately began to counterfeit anger.

"I will not be insulted like this," she cried furiously. "I demand that you open that door and end this absurd, this humiliating scene. I ——"

"Stop!" he said roughly, and she comprehended how completely he dominated the scene by the cold weakness, the powerless sense of inaction which fell on her at the sound of his voice. "Tell Mr. Bowden what I laid down to you as the rules of our marriage."

"What do you mean?" she stammered.

"Tell him what I have told you I expected from you as my due."

"But I don't understand why — why ——"

"Tell him."

"Why, you said, you said," she faltered, "in case either of us found — no — no, this is too absurd ——"

"Either of us found we had come to love another," he took up; "go on."

"That we should tell the other," she said, hardly able to get the words out.

"Honestly and loyally," he broke in, "and that there should be no restraint on this liberty of choice as there could be no deceit out of respect for the other. Is that right?"

She nodded, staring at his arms and great hands, fearing their brute strength.

"You did not tell that to Mr. Bowden," he continued.

Bowden, who felt himself cornered, advanced, and said with a last show of courage:

"Mr. Garford, I don't understand this scene in the least and I must insist — *insist*, do you hear — that you open that door."

Garford rose, and, though his voice still maintained a certain calm, his hands twitched at his sides, as he said,

"Bowden, you don't think this was an accident, do you?"

"Why, what — what do you mean?"

"I *know!*"

As he said this for the first time, the rage in his soul came thronging into the exclamation. He caught at a chair to steady himself. Bowden recoiled in terror; the woman, shrieking, flung herself at the feet of her husband, crying:

"Don't kill me, Dan; don't kill me!"

He stood swaying under the shock of her body against his knees, recovering his self-control, with a smile of contempt at the young coward shrinking against the wall, a moment that paid him back for the humiliation of months.

"I am not going to kill you — not yet," he said slowly. "Get up!"

She obeyed.

"This man is your lover, then?"

She looked at him, did not dare to equivocate, and bent her head in acquiescence.

"That is so, isn't it, Bowden?" he said, without doing him the honor to look at him.

"Yes."

"That is all that is necessary," he said; but the shock of the answers had been so intense that it was a moment before he could continue. "I shall trouble you only a moment. The case is quite plain. I am the third. You would have saved us all this if you had come to me openly."

Then she understood his object. She put out her hands frantically.

"You're going to divorce me," she cried hysterically.

Bowden, by the table, still weak from the imminence of the horror which passed, took out his handkerchief and began to mop his brow.

"No. In our set whatever happens, we do not fasten that stain upon the woman," Garford said. "You will divorce me — and at once. The cause will be desertion. After which, within forty-eight hours you will marry this man. These are my *orders!*"

"Marry — marry *him!*" she cried, suddenly perceiving the pitfall. "But I don't want — you can force a divorce — but you can't ——" Her voice broke. "You can't do that!"

Bowden, aghast before the prospect, cried:

"Absurd — no, no — absurd!"

"What!" said Garford, in a voice like thunder; "do you mean to say you don't love him?"

She looked at her lover, bit her lip, started to speak, and all at once sat down, crossing her arms and looking at her husband as though she could murder him. She saw in a flash the completeness of his revenge, and she admired him that he could be so strong. Bowden, who did not seize the significance of the question as quickly as the woman, saw only the ridicule that would face him in a marriage with a woman whose intrigues had been common gossip. The fear of ridicule gave him a touch of courage which nothing else could have aroused. He broke out furiously:

"This is too ridiculous — and it's none of your business!"

"Bowden, look out!" said Garford, beginning to grow hot. "Do you mean to tell me that when I eliminate myself you refuse to marry her?"

"I refuse," he said doggedly; at which the woman swung about, mortally humiliated, and gave him a look of undying hatred.

"You refuse?" said Garford between his teeth.

"I do."

"Then, just what have you been doing here, Mr. Bowden?" he said slowly, and gradually, with his eyes on the other, his feet crept over the rug. All at once he saw red, caught the young man as he turned to escape, and, his hands at his throat, bent him backward over the table as though he had been a straw. Louise, even at such a moment with the dread of society before her eyes, was shrieking:

"Don't kill him; don't kill him, Dan!"

Bowden's eyes began to bulge and his face to go purple.

He made a frantic sign of surrender and fell choking to the floor.

"Well?" said Garford.

"I will — anything — anything!"

"Within forty-eight hours after my name is freed, you marry this woman! What she does from then on will be on your name — not mine." He looked a moment, even with a fierce leap of triumph, at the cringing body of the man who had humiliated him in his secret pride. "I'm not going to take any promises from you — but I think you understand now what I will do if my orders are not carried out to the hour!" And as Bowden made no answer, he put out his foot in a crowning insult and stirred the abject body. "Do you?"

"Yes; yes!"

"Good!" He turned to the woman, who had waited this outcome in stubborn terror. "I have made certain investigations. Would you like your future husband to know what I know?"

"Quite unnecessary," she said, looking down.

"That means you will do exactly as I say."

She nodded.

"As for what you are thinking," he said, with a final quixotic disdain, "don't worry. You will not need for money. The day after your marriage, I will settle my income on you." And as she looked up with a start she couldn't restrain, he added, with a scornful gesture of his thumb at Bowden: "I am buying him for you — to keep my name clean!"

XXIII

The reaction from the finality of this scene drove Garford into a high fever. The shock to his nervous system, already under constant pressure, during the preceding weeks, had culminated in the outburst of that moment when he had held Bowden's head in his hands and watched it go purple. For a week, the pulsation of his heart increased to such an alarming velocity, filling his lungs as fast as his gasping breathing could discharge the air, that the doctor, fearing for his life, had him conveyed to a hospital. It was here that Doctor Fortier, working behind the scenes of the consultation-room, had made his first attempt to have him placed in an asylum.

His wife's brother had consistently remained in the background. He had seen him only at rare intervals, and always with a sensation of dislike which amounted to a physical antipathy. Between the sister and brother, each a daring climber, filled with the contempt of petty obstacles, there were queer, unspoken comprehensions. Doctor Fortier had branched into other fields beyond the narrow limits of his profession. His name had been associated with land-development schemes and promoting syndicates. He had prospered, grown wealthy, risked too much, been bankrupted, and had slowly wormed his way back along the speculative highway. He made no pretense at morality, disdaining, in the boldness of his nature, the cloak of hypocrisy that others assumed before the world. In the present case, he flung himself into the battle for his sister's future without a restraining scruple.

Among the crowd of admirers who surrounded Louise Fortier was a certain direct and unworldly person, David Macklin, made rich into the millions by a casual freak of nature which stored treasures of oil beneath the tax-ridden farms of his ancestors. Louise Fortier, with the instinctive sense of defense of the woman even toward the undivined dangers of the future, had assumed toward this blunt and simple nature an attitude of grateful comradeship. She consulted him on trivial decisions; she assumed the frank intimacy of a privileged confidant, and she confided in him the burden of her imaginary woes. He had the self-made man's contempt for conventionalities. When he fell in love with her, he thought of only one thing: carrying her off, breaking the chain that bound her, of a divorce that would make her free for him. She checked him, well pleased, satisfied for the present to have him in reserve. When she had seen the apparition of her husband, after the first cold fear for her own safety, even mingled with her terror had been the thought, "If I can only escape, there is still Macklin." Hence her horror when she had perceived the full extent of Garford's revenge and the ridicule which would fasten on her with a marriage to a social idler ten years her junior.

The crisis which faced her astute, practical mind left her under no illusions. She understood the society in which she moved, the enemies she had made, and the revenge they would attempt. With the gossip already clinging to her name, marriage to Bowden meant also social ostracism. In the catastrophe which threatened, she needed a cloak of at least twenty millions, for there are well-defined degrees in society's tolerance. To save herself by Macklin she was ready for anything — any lie or any humiliation.

Doctor Fortier, consulted, had immediately evolved the daring plan of having the husband declared insane, a course not so difficult as it seemed, on account of the many known eccentricities of his character and the final disorder into which the discovery of his wife's true character had thrown him.

A chance remark of one of the attending nurses, the mere dropping of Doctor Fortier's name, had aroused Garford's suspicions. He questioned adroitly and learned that his brother-in-law was of the hospital staff. Once on his guard, he noticed the constant surveillance over his actions, his words, habits, even to the silent moods of the day. He divined the pitfall and the danger not only to himself, but to his cherished scheme of revenge, suddenly calmed the fever of excitement, and ended the torturing nights of insomnia. To the surprise of every one, his pulse became normal again; he slept, and all signs of mental irritation vanished. Three days later, he walked out of the hospital, apparently cured.

The realization of the peril he had escaped left, however, a haunting memory, even an inner dread of the possibility of a mental breakdown. The shadow of Doctor Fortier seemed constantly close to him, spying on his movements with cynical exultant expectancy, biding the opportune moment. Two further attempts had been made to seize him by force, one at the bachelor apartment where he had taken up his residence and the second at his home, where he had been decoyed by an urgent me sage from his wife. Each attempt had failed — the fi due to the accidental arrival of friends, the second to a warning which had arrived to him from some unknown source, from a servant, perhaps, to whom he had been kind. In the suspense in which he was living, he plunged into the oblivion of dissipation at a pace which only his extreme impulses could carry him, until his excesses had become notorious. His lawyers represented to him that such public outbursts could not fail but play into the hands of his enemies, who would be able to demand his commitment with every degree of plausibility. He then resolved to pursue his galloping way to destruction in some convenient hidden outpost of the city, and, seeking to hide his identity under the name of Dangerfield and to disappear completely, had come to Teagan's Arcade. Despite the pleadings of his lawyers, he had insisted on the full quixotic program of flinging his fortune into the faces of those who had wronged him, knowing well that they would humiliate themselves to the point of accepting it in some convenient disguise. Also, he had come to hate the very idea of money, which had never come into his life but to disorganize it, which had so often dragged him from the inspired simplicity of his artist's isolation into the disillusioning and fatiguing notoriety of the brilliant rushing world.

The suit for divorce had been forced on his wife by his threat to bring an action himself with all the consequent publicity of details. She recoiled before this and accepted the inevitable. As a matter of fact, she comprehended that a divorce was necessary; indeed, she had welcomed it in her new-found ambition to marry Macklin. She hoped that, with time, the determination of her husband would turn from the ultimatum he had delivered, particularly as she knew that his lawyers, in their effort to save the quixotic artist from robbing himself, were urging him to be satisfied with a divorce which would carry with it no financial imposition. When gradually she perceived the character of his obsessed resolution, she determined on a decisive step. Whatever the advice of her counsellors she had never, for a moment, the slightest doubt what he would do in case she dared to disobey him. This was the situation the night of the boxing party when the door had suddenly opened to Dangerfield upon the unwelcome figure of his wife.

The last visitor had crowded awkwardly out of the studio; the door had closed, and they remained standing, face to face. She turned, drew the bolt, flung back the heavy veil which protected her, and said gently:

" Put on your things first, Dan."

" What do you want? Why do you come here?" he said frowning, lowering angrily at her, the clumsy gloves still on his hands, his body red and white under the glare of the top light.

" To throw myself on your mercy," she said, dropping her hands in a hopeless surrender. " To do anything you want."

" Anything but one," he cut in.

" Anything but one," she said, in a whisper, and her hands closed in tension at the slender throat.

The evil passion of revenge momentarily possessed him, at the thought that this woman who had so often mocked him in her heart as an easy dupe, had, at last, come here to taste the bitterness of humiliation herself, in order to escape the fate he had commanded. He wished to enjoy this reversal of the rôles, and, in an ugly mood, turned his back on her, walked over to the couch, and flung himself into a sweater. She watched him, without moving, until he had returned and faced her, and, from the cruelty in his eyes and the smile over his lips, she comprehended how hopeless was her mission. An inspiration came to her. She said rapidly:

" Wait until you understand why I have come."

" Why have you come?" he said, smiling, expectant of the lie.

She was able to shudder, counterfeiting a physical repulsion so finely that he was half-deceived.

" First, to tell you that I will not accept a cent of that money from you. I may be everything — but I am not — that!" she said, looking down to avoid his eyes.

"You can make me marry Bowden, but, if you do, I shall never touch a cent of your money."

"So you have made up your mind to marry him?"

"If you insist, I have no choice," she said, without resistance.

He thought:

"H'm, this is the first stage." Aloud, he said, "My dear Louise, if you do not marry him, you admit that you are a ——" He hesitated, in his disgust before the word to characterize her action.

"I admit it all," she said.

A flash of anger shook him at the thought. He said angrily:

"You may. I do not. I do not admit to you, to Bowden, or to the world that the woman who bears my name can be such a creature. That is the point."

She sat down on the edge of a chair, checked at her first attempt, staring at the carpet, her lips compressed, her agile mind racing ahead, conscious of the cruel enjoyment with which he watched and waited.

"There is no use in going on," he said, after a moment's silence. "This interview is very painful to me."

She made no answer, though her slender eyebrows came into a closer contraction which sent little furrows shooting over her forehead and brought drawn lines down to her lips. He did not insist. He was curious with the sense of some impending danger. Why had she come — the true, the final reason which would emerge at the end?

At this moment, she raised her eyes and fixed her glance on him in a long, penetrating stare.

"She has come to see if I am drinking myself to death." The thought flashed over him. He smiled and said coldly: "Never fear — I shall hold out!"

Whatever the thought in her mind, she rose, glanced around the room, and her fingers closed over her throat as though overcome with emotion.

"It's too frightful for words!" she said.

"What is?"

"What I have done," she said, in a whisper. "To find you here in such a place." She went to the window which gave over the roofs, raised the shade on that forlorn prospect, and pulled it down again with a shudder. Prepared as he was for duplicity, he did not, at that moment, suspect the motive of this reconnoitering. She came back, drawing her hand over her eyes.

"I deserve no mercy," she said, staring away from him.

"But you have come here to get it," he said cynically.

"Yes."

"It is useless."

"If I agree to the divorce — it is as good as granted — why do you insist on my marrying Bowden?"

"For the honor of my name," he said angrily. "I do not deny you the right to love another; but I do not acknowledge that you can soil my honor by a vulgar deception. If I had believed otherwise that night, I should have killed you."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Then kill me now."

"Then what you were had still power to hurt me," he said coldly.

She fell into silence again before this check to the outburst she had prepared. At the end, she said slowly:

"Is it to punish me or to cleanse your name?"

"To cleanse my name," he said emphatically.

A ray of light appeared to her.

"You wish whatever I do in the future to be under another name but yours."

"Precisely."

"Very well; I am ready to marry immediately, in the forty-eight hours as you require — but not Bowden."

He was caught unawares. He asked himself rapidly who it could be whom she had been able to dominate thus in her moment of peril, and, carried away by this curiosity, he said:

"Who is it?"

"Mr. David Macklin wishes to marry me the moment I am free."

"Macklin!" he exclaimed, his astonishment so visibly naïve that she was hard put to it to check a smile. "Well, that is a surprise."

"Why?"

"I had not counted on Macklin," he said cynically. "If he is another one, I knew nothing of it."

"He has never been my lover — really — if that is what you mean," she said quickly.

He looked at her, at this strange woman who had lived so many years by his side, and even as she in the scene of her confession had yielded him an involuntary tribute for his mastery of the scene, he felt an almost animal admiration for the genius of fascination in her which could achieve such a stroke in the moment of her humiliation.

"I wonder what story you could have told him," he said, yielding frankly to this impulse.

"That is not the point," she said indifferently. "But, first, I want you to know me as I am. Your detectives have told you much. It is nothing to the reality."

"Is it possible there is more?" he said coldly.

"You shall judge; I shan't withhold anything," she said heavily, and lines of age and weariness came into her face as she doggedly came to her decision. "You will loathe me, but you will understand why I am as I am. I don't ask you to take me back; I admit I cannot be true to any man."

Deceived by his silence, counting on the gentleness and charity in his nature, seeking the dramatic appeal to his sympathies, perhaps with a wild hope that she might paint such a picture that he would turn from his revenge by the very revulsion of his loathing, she began a story of a distorted childhood, of a corrupt and venal home, a terrible, incomprehensible history which he, held though he was by the whispered tragic procession of ghoulish memories, did not entirely believe. The first leaden, sullen attitude continued in the mechanical, colorless recital. The tears, one by one, rose in her eyes and traveled slowly down her cheeks, without a note of suffering breaking into her voice. He listened, fascinated, incredulous, asking himself if human artifice could invent such a history.

"That was my childhood. The rest? — nothing else matters," she said, with a shrug of her shoulder. "You know the rest — half of it. Could you expect anything else?" She took out her handkerchief — her voice had not risen — and carefully suppressed the tears gathered on her eyes. Then she extended her hands in a little movement of appeal.

"Well?"

There was a long, tense silence.

"What a monster!" he said at last.

She believed that she had won, that she had humbled herself so low in this hideous confession that she was now beneath his contempt. She flung herself at his feet, clinging to them, crying:

"Dan, Dan, let me go — let me go — don't drag us both down!"

"Drag *you* down!" He burst into a wild laugh.

She rose, abruptly disillusioned, and looked at him as though she would spring at his throat.

"Keep on looking at me like that," he said coldly. "Now we have the truth!"

"I swear —" she began vehemently.

"Don't," he cut in. "I don't believe you, and if I did, a thousand times more reason why you should have played square with me."

She knew that she had lost, even at the moment when in her self-admiration for the *tour-de-force* she had invented, she had felt that success must be hers. She saw a side of the man she had never suspected, the side which no woman perceives until she is on the point of losing the man who has lived at her side, and she said to herself: "I have underrated him."

"Louise, I told you a lie," he said. "I wish to punish you. That is the truth. I have that in me, too." He felt the rapid mounting of his pulse, the inner raging excitement starting up, and he checked the cruel words which were on his tongue, afraid of where an outburst of passion would fling him, saying instead: "Are you through?"

She looked at him and began to laugh.

"That is better," he said cynically.

"I did not lie to you," she said abruptly.

"Perhaps not entirely."

"You won't change, then?"

He shook his head.

She drew a long breath, went over to the dressing-table and rearranged her hair which, at the moment when she had thrown herself at his feet, had become disarranged. She took her time, adjusting many little trifles, assuring herself that all trace of her emotion had disappeared. When she returned to where he had waited motionless, she said:

"I'm sorry. It's all very foolish. You are ruining yourself." He took up her coat and held it for her. "I shan't trouble you again," she continued. "It is final, isn't it?"

He opened the door, aware of the hammering at his heart and the dangerous tension of all his nerves.

"Too late — I've said it — you've got just four days more."

"I've been a fool. It is useless to ask you to forgive me. I do, though," she said bitterly enough, yet to him the motion seemed counterfeit.

He laughed a scornful laugh.

"With all your cleverness you're not clever enough. You should have known the man you're dealing with."

The next moment they were in the hall, and he perceived that they had been overheard.

The rest is known; her attempt to lure him downstairs to where Doctor Fortier and his aides were waiting (an attempt frustrated by the intuition of Inga and the interference of O'Leary). Dangerfield's alarm at the menace he felt about him; his enforced abstinence, and the obsession that gradually took possession of him that he was being watched, an obsession which was justified by the subsequent attempt which nearly succeeded in delivering him into the hands of Doctor Fortier. The constant thought of the outer danger raised up in his soul the fear of the inner thing, that something worse than death which, at times, in his physical weakness seemed to cry out in the hollow of his brain. When he had whispered to Inga the thing he feared, he had but hinted at the inner torment through which he was passing. To hold on to himself a little longer, to realize the vengeance he had determined was his sole engrossing thought, and then, one way or the other, to pull the numbing clouds of oblivion about his head and sink out of sight — a failure. For he had reached that utterly hopeless point in the life of a man of talent when he has seen everything, been everything, hoped everything, and come to utter disillusionment, too profound in artistic vision to trick himself into vain hopes, too keen in worldly knowledge not to perceive the tragedy of what might have been. Had the wreck of his home come before the surrender of his vision, he would have reacted, forgotten all in the return to untrammeled simplicity and dedication to work. The contrary was true, and, in the whole world, there was nothing to fall back on — no object, and no living person. With Inga, he felt strange actions and reactions. In her presence, the quiet, unquestioning devotion of her personality roused him sometimes to moments of vain regret. He had even said to himself that such a personality, absolutely devoted, demanding nothing but to serve him, unflinching in her loyalty, would have been the companion he craved and needed. He often thought bitterly that it was the final irony of fate that, in the end, in such an abandoned corner of the world, he should have found her — too late.

Yet he was not conscious of any feeling of love. She was still an unknown and uncharted land to him, to which at times the instinct of self-preservation blindly inclined him. Nor could he fathom the feeling that had sent her to his assistance. He was grateful, to the point that he would not for the world have left a bruising memory on her young life, and yet, at times, at the thought that in her silent watching, her unquestioning devotion, there lay a deep unfaltering determination to turn him aside from his fixed purpose, he felt a fierce revolt, an angry antagonism at her growing ascendency. This was the situation on the night when, mercifully confused in memory and perceptions, he had stumbled back into his studio, mocking at destiny, and found her waiting.

XXIV

In his present numbed sense of outlines and of jumbled conceptions Dangerfield had obeyed a sullen instinct of revolt when he had drawn Inga from the studio to plunge again into the heavy slumber of the city. He had a confused idea that, in this groping flight through deserted midnight regions, he would find some way to discourage her, to shake off this uncomplaining obstacle to his liberty of decision. The long flights of stone steps down which they groped their way, put forth hollow, echoing protests which mounted behind them as they sank deeper into the cavernous descent, until they emerged into the arcade, wan and still with its faint, watery glass sides and dipping vines, and ahead, Broadway yawning at the entrance.

Dangerfield strode on, seeing neither to the right nor to the left, and, following the whim of the moment, turned westward toward the river. A late car roared down the long vista and fled, retreating in softening rumbles. The street was empty and the acute sound of their steps struck in fantastic distortion against the city of silence. A policeman from the shadow of a doorway studied them with suspicion. Above them, mysterious leviathans — swollen gas-towers — spread black bulks against the sprinkled night. He stopped and turned on her, seeing her white face dimly in the flickering street.

"So you are following me?" he said angrily.

"Please."

She moved a little closer, her hands clasped and at her throat, in her voice that low almost guttural note of soothing appeal which she knew had the charm of quieting him. He stared at her blankly, confusing her with other voices and other memories, and, in the end, with a nervous shake of his head, strode away, apparently oblivious of her presence.

The tenements closed in over them, putting forth their heavy, crowded smells. A random fruit-stand glowed at their sides, its drowsy guardian snoring behind glass partitions; beyond him, a senseless body, wrapped in rags huddled in the warmth of a " family entrance "; shouts, curses, laughter rolled out from a blinded back parlor, and, all at once, a stream of yellow shot across the oozing black of the street. They stopped abruptly; from the doorway an old man reeled forth, and by his side, guiding his hand, a child — an unearthly child with an aureole of golden hair. He came opposite, lurched almost on them, touched them with a groping hand and passed, grumbling. He was blind. Dangerfield began to laugh with that short, blood-freezing laughter of his, which was the cry of all the bitterness within his soul. She shuddered and momentarily clung to his arm, turning to watch the child and the drunkard fading into the gloom.

" Afraid? " he said triumphantly.

" No, no — memories," she said involuntarily.

" You? " he said, staring at her.

She nodded, her grip on his arm tightening.

" I remember," she said, in a whisper.

" She remembers," he repeated to himself, incapable of ordering his ideas, vastly impressed by an emotion he could not have defined, for he added, " She, too — leading me." And as though the figure of the child had become merged into the hundred and one shifting memories which walked, dissolved, and returned to his side, he stalked on, his hand on the girl's shoulder, heavy with his weight. Everything became confused in his mind, Paris, Rome, Florence, London, New York, the crowded boulevards, the Thames Embankment, and the outer fortifications. The blurred uprise of the gas-works settled into the age-worn outline of the Forum, and the next moment, with the wet breath of the river on his face and the vigilant lights of the Palisades bright in the air, he was skirting the Arno, with Fiesole mingling with the stars.

The cold touch of the river wind momentarily revived him. Slowly the Arno faded from his vision. He stood, in puzzled, dawning comprehension, on the long waterfront, with its sleeping docks and nodding mastheads. Beyond lay the tragic depths of the river, rolling away like the tears of multitudes, luminous insects crawling back and forth. At his feet, straggling trucks were rumbling heavily; a few all-night cafés, far-spaced, streaked the broad avenue with their gleaming fingers. He shrank back into the city, into the phantasmagoria which closed over his eyes and roared on his senses, back on Broadway once more, with its occasional taxi, bright with late revelers.

At Sixty-first Street he halted before the revolving facets of the entrance to Costello's. The footman without saluted him and called him by name. A few parties, with sudden bursts of white satin and colored brilliance, were leaving the noisy salons. Others returning from earlier rounds of gaiety were pressing through, like fluttering, many-tinted butterflies.

" I'm going in," he said sullenly.

" If you want to," she answered.

He had expected resistance. Compliance irritated him. The next moment, they were in the anteroom, dazed by their abrupt transition from the bleakness of the slums into this fragrant warm nest of indolence and luxury, aware of perfumed currents, glowing bodies, and the seduction of rioting rhythms. They mounted in an elevator to a privileged room, where all sensations seemed mingled in the confusion of the awakening senses, where, for a moment, she was uncomfortably conscious of the dark, incongruous blot her sober attire made against the swarming flood of color. A waiter, unimpressed, was preparing a hostile answer when Costello himself came up with hand outstretched at the sight of Dangerfield. He turned to the girl, greeting her cordially.

"Glad to see you here again; haven't seen you for a long time."

"A table, Costello."

"Get you one right away, Mr. Garford."

At his magic touch, they found themselves advantageously placed by the open floor where the dancers crowded and swept against them. Dangerfield ordered a bottle of champagne and turned to her.

"Funny mistake Costello made."

"What?"

"Acted as though he knew you."

"Yes; I used to come here — it amused me occasionally."

"You, Inga?"

"Why not?" she said, opening her eyes.

"After all, why not? Queer though," he said stupidly but he continued to stare at her, as though this were a manifestation stranger than the riot of cities and visions through which he had come.

She did not refuse the glass of champagne he poured her, but, after raising it to her lips, put it down and did not touch it again. Among this incredible crowd made up of the extremes of society — women of the world seeking refuge from boredom, and courtesans, giving themselves the dignity and manners which, in their covetous ignorance, they associated with conventional society, there were many who knew Dangerfield, who stared in impudent amazement or discussed him in whispers, with sidelong glances. A number of men came up and greeted him boisterously.

"Want to dance with them?" he asked, nodding to her.

She shook her head.

"Not to-night."

The spectacle began to bore him. He complained of the champagne and changed his order. She gave no word of suggestion, watching him with occasional stolen glances, wondering at his control. Her elbows on the table, her little curved chin on the backs of her hands, rather Egyptian in the immobility of her pose and the baffling quality of her expression, she followed the dance without distinguishing the dancers, quite unconscious of the curiosity she awoke, serious and on her guard. When friends of his sought her as a partner or tried to engage her in conversation, she answered in a few quiet words without looking at them. They soon understood from a glance at her companion what her rôle must be, and importuned her no further.

When she least expected it, Dangerfield rose impatiently and departed.

"How futile that all is!" he said angrily, when they were again on the sidewalk. "Think they're having a good time — bah!" He swayed for the first time and caught her shoulder, drawing his fingers tightly over his temples. "My brain is rocking," he said.

"The air will do you good. Walk a little."

He made an effort, took a long breath, and opened his eyes.

"You still here?" he said, frowning.

She nodded.

"Why do you follow me like this?" he said peevishly.

"Because I care what happens to you."

"That is ridiculous!" he said loudly.

He stared a moment at her with his wild-animal stare, and, all at once, as though he had found a way to get rid of her, started down Eighth Avenue. They arrived at Columbus Circle with the first muddied grays of the dawn creeping in above the whitening electric signs, then passed under the elevated as a train shrieked and roared above them in its burning flight. A touring car went whirring past them, defiant of speed-laws, skidded dangerously, righting itself, and disappeared.

Scavengers were already turning over the refuse in waiting ash-cans, as they struck into a side street and stopped before an iron grill under the colored electric sign, " Mantell's." A little man with ratty eyes and black wisps of hair streaking the bald dome of his head, shuffled to the gate and squinted at them cautiously before slipping the chain.

The low rooms were swept with drifting gray-blue smoke clouds, upholstered benches were against the walls, where oldish women, worn with the fatigue of the night, were smiling their red smiles at fatuous youngsters. Three or four foreign-looking groups, swarthy men with enormous women, were in corners placidly engaged in their own affairs as though this were the most respectable of family resorts. A mechanical piano in a further room drummed out hideous dance-music to swirling groups in frank abandon. Dangerfield was no longer conscious of anything but an angry determination to revolt, to be free of all encumbrance. It seemed to his fuddled imagination that it was no longer Inga at his side but something strangely akin to his conscience, defiantly pursuing him out of the past of his youth and illusions, malignantly and maliciously clinging to him. Somehow, somewhere, he must rid himself of this impossible burden, crush it down, and cast it aside.

The more Inga continued silent and without remonstrance, the wilder his resentment mounted. He continued to drink of the poisonous rank beverages served at extortionate prices. Many stared at them and discussed them openly, but no interference was offered. There was something so combustible and wild in his attitude, that, there, at least no one was under illusions as to the danger. In half an hour the spirit of restlessness in him drove him out into the streets again. He was so befuddled now, that he could not remember her name, calling her Pepita, imagining that she was the little Spanish model of the Latin Quarter who had tried to kill herself.

All at once a horror of the city, of its sham brilliance paling against the graying sky, of its oppressive stone prisons, possessed him with a longing for flight. He strode down into the subway and took a West Farms express. In the car which they entered a score of persons were wearily grouped, half of them asleep, a few heavy-eyed laborers, two men in evening dress, a girl with a heavy coat buttoned over a ball dress, arms folded, and gazing stolidly ahead. Dangerfield seated himself in a corner, nodded, and went to sleep. When they reached the end of the line Inga awoke him with the help of the guard, and asked him what he wanted to do.

He got up suddenly and walked down the long steps to the street. They were in the open spaces of the upper city; a few milk-wagons were passing at rare intervals, about them was the feeling of the rediscovered earth in long, empty, grass-grown lots. He had not spoken a word. Suddenly he stopped and turned, with a new menace in his voice.

"Well — had enough?"

"I'm not tired," she said, shaking her head and meeting his look steadily.

"We'll see," he said, and started off so furiously that, for a time, she was put to it to keep up with him. At the end, from the need of taking breath himself, he stopped and wheeled on her.

"What — you're still here!"

"Yes."

She forced a smile, and this smile completed his exasperation.

"Why won't you let me go?" he cried, in an outburst of rage. "You let me go, do you hear? Dogging and sneaking about me! What right you got — what business is it what I do! No one shall stop me — no one, do you hear?" He advanced threateningly on her. "Had enough of interference — d'you understand? You let me go now — let me go, or I'll —"

Midway in a gesture as he raised his hand to seize her, his legs shook under him, his voice stopped in his throat, he heaved forward, backward, then down on his face, and lay still in a crumpled mass.

She bent down swiftly, examined him, perceived that he was completely drunk and rose to look for help. It was nearing six o'clock but the houses were still closed against the night. Near her at a corner saloon, a studded glass sign announced:

Bostweiler's Private Hotel

She hesitated a moment before the squalor and sordidness of the hotel entrance, divining the hideousness into which she had chanced, shuddered and rang the night bell. A colored doorman, sleeping somewhere in the green-lit hallway, called sleepily:

"Come right in!"

She knocked again and again with insistent, angry knocks, until he came stumbling and rubbing his eyes to the door. He smelt horribly of cheap whisky. With his aid she got Dangerfield in and up-stairs. The watcher grinned knowingly and, rather than enter into explanations, she hastily thrust a bill into his hand and dismissed him. Dangerfield on the bed was still unconscious. The room was tawdry, the carpet in shreds, the gas-fixture bent, and the blistered furniture covered with cheap, soiled imitation lace. She locked the door and drew a sofa before it, opened the windows, and sat down in a rocking-chair, her head racked with weary pains, watching the drabs and grays as they scurried before the gorgeous cavalcade of the victorious sun.

All at once Inga awoke with a sense of danger. Dangerfield was standing at the foot of her chair, or rather the specter of Dangerfield looked down at her with drawn lips and pasty face, with twitching nerves. It was late afternoon.

XXV

For a moment, startled out of a confused succession of restless dreams, Inga could not realize where she was. Then the squalor of the room, the haggard, tortured face of Dangerfield looking down in remorse, the memory of the long night of struggle came back in a flash. She sprang up hastily.

"I went off to sleep — heavens, how late is it?"

"It's after three — I've been waiting for you," he said, in a low voice.

"Oh, why didn't you call me?" she said hastily, struck by the new note of pain and contrition.

He brushed her question aside, staring at her.

"How was it possible — Good God, how could I have brought you here?" He stopped, shuddered, and glanced around at the room.

"You didn't. I brought you," she said quickly. "You had — had collapsed."

"Sit down," he said.

He drew a chair opposite her, took both her hands in his, and looked at her so long that she began to be embarrassed. Then, all at once, his lips twisted, his eyes filled with tears, and he buried his head in his hands.

"Don't mind me, Mr. Dan!" she cried in her distress, bending over him. "Don't think of me!" And, as he continued to dig his hands into his cheeks against the long pent-up emotion, she added: "I'm only happy to have helped you. Really I am."

He rose suddenly, fighting down a sob, overcome by remorse.

"Good God, where have I dragged you?"

She came to him swiftly and seized his hands with an imperious gesture.

"What do you think I care about that?" she said, with such anger that it shocked him into attention. "To make a man out of you, I'd go through anything — anything, do you hear!"

He searched in his pockets at a sudden remembrance, found the bottle he had bought at the druggist's the night before, and looked up at her.

"Then why didn't you take this?" he said curtly.

"What good would that have done?" she said impatiently.

He stared at her a moment and, with a gesture of contempt, flung the bottle against the floor, where it crashed to pieces.

She swayed with a cry of joy and clung to him, her head pressed against his shoulder, as though a sea of perils had returned him safely.

"Why the devil should you care what happens to an old derelict, you queer little creature?" he said slowly, surprised at the trembling in her body.

"Care! Why, if anything had happened —" She broke off, caught her breath just at the moment when she could no longer control herself, and dug her nails into the palms of her hands in an effort to regain her self-control.

"Don't move — stay where you are — near me," he said gently, and he drew one arm about her shoulder.

Through the leaden, racking burdens of the night, a flood of cleansing light entered his soul, a passionate thirst for life once more. The world outside was good, full of vibrant, joyful sounds — children's voices, laughing as they danced to the music of a hurdy-gurdy, the long chatter of scolding sparrows, tiny sounds and yet teeming with life, its curiosity, its health, its response to sensations, pleasant, intense, and intoxicating. The arm he had

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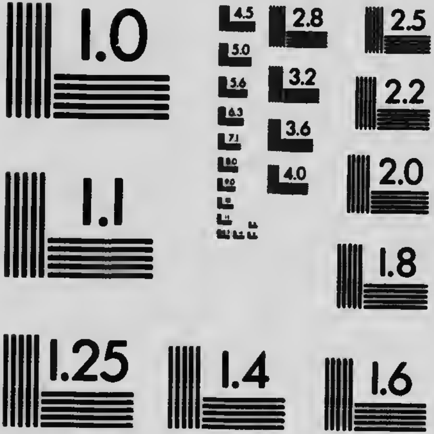
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drawn about her tightened as though clinging to its salvage in the storm of his mind. Warned by some subtle intuition of the heart, she did not attempt to move away. Instead, one hand crept up until it lay against the rough cheek.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Dan," she said, in a whisper. "Why, you never could have harmed any one — I know it! I know it isn't your fault — it couldn't be!"

"No; it isn't my fault," he said mechanically, but his thoughts were of the outer world with its insistent call back to life, to the life which rose in him from the perfumed contact of her straight, young body, the scent of her hair, the softness of her protecting arms, and the warm notes of her whispering voice. All at once he held her from him so that he could look into her flushed face and said solemnly, sadly:

"Inga, have you the right to do this? Don't you know it's a grave responsibility you have taken — to force me to go on living, hating everything, hoping nothing — for that's what you're doing?"

"You must — you must!" she said tremulously.

His eyes were on her every expression now, and in them was a longing to question and to be answered.

"Why did you come to me — why do you stick to me now?" he said eagerly.

"It's just so," she said nervously. "I can't help it. I couldn't have let you go out alone — Why, if you saw a child drowning you'd have to save it, wouldn't you?" He nodded gravely. "Well, that's the way with me. I just couldn't be otherwise."

"I have taken heavily from you," he said slowly, "long, long, racking hours, and you've never complained. You have given me so much and I have had no right."

She smiled.

"Those were the happiest moments."

"And after all that," he said, "you still want to go on — giving to me?"

Her hands came together eagerly as she raised her eyes in supplication.

"Please — oh, you wouldn't take this from me now!"

"You don't know, child; you don't know what you are undertaking," he said bitterly.

"I want it!"

"And you do all this because ——"

"I believe in you."

He turned away, not quite satisfied, and yet the feeling of what he had contemplated the day before was so coldly insistent that the revulsion urged him to cling to what she offered.

"It's too much to ask," he said, hesitating.

"You say that because you do not understand!" she cried, coming to him eagerly, her hand on his shoulder, standing behind him. "You don't know all it means in my life to have the feeling of really counting." She stopped as he turned, wondering if, at last, she was going to speak of herself. She wavered and then continued resolutely, "It's all so useless — being alone — so starved! If you knew what it meant to me, to count, to give to some one, to fight for something, you wouldn't talk of its being hard on me."

He looked at her and wondered. He had known women like her before, women of the Northlands and the Old World who never complained, whose joy lay in sacrifice and redeeming. He thought of Pepita, the little Spanish model whose adoration he had not suspected until too late, and, thinking of Pepita, he wondered about Inga. What was the true feeling in her — as much as he would ever understand her? Did the girl love him? He wanted to believe it so keenly, in the weak reaction from the dread decision of the night, longing for something to cling to, that he hesitated, afraid to dissipate a fragile illusion by too brusque a question. Yet, if she did love him? At the very possibility, a new belief in himself awoke, bringing to him that sensation of life at its fullest in the power of inspiring love.

She saw the thronging, tumultuous thoughts which came crowding to his eyes, and nervously turned away. Her retreat frightened him, as such trivial symptoms can instil terror in moments of intense hope. He put his hands over his eyes to repress the too frank questioning in them, and walked to the window to regain his calm.

When he came back to her, determined to discuss matters rationally, he was conscious only of a longing to believe in her, to go forth into life and the sun once more. Yet he strove to be honest.

"This is all very well for now," he said hurriedly, hardly trusting his voice, "but after — when we are calm, when we can see things as they are, when I face what is ahead, when you realize what you have bound your life to — a derelict —"

"And if I can make you what you were before," she said, in simple faith.

"You can't — men like me don't come back," he said bitterly, sinking into a chair. "It isn't simply to live — that's what you must understand. It's — it's to have the power to do what I used to do, and to do that, one must believe in oneself; only that is so hard — once you've lost it!"

"That is what I want, Mr. Dan," she said impulsively. "I feel what there is in you. It comes to me just by your being in the room. I felt it that first night, even before you opened your eyes. I couldn't help myself. I had to come to you to do what you wanted, to serve you. Do you think I'd have done that if you weren't something big, something really worth while?"

He looked at her, only too impatient to be convinced, forgetting all his mental whys and wherefores in the instincts toward faith and joy which came to him in the spell of her intimacy.

"I wanted to end it," he said wistfully, yet already the thing was far away, incredible. "I'd made up my mind."

"Won't you let me try?" she cried passionately. "Mr. Dan, let me try — it would be such a big — big thing in my life!"

"Try," he said impulsively, with a glad leap of his senses, and, even at this moment, it struck him how incongruous, in this sordid interior, was this sudden release toward the beauty and the faith of things.

"And now," she said hurriedly, "let's get out of here — out of this awful place!"

He sprang up hastily, cursing himself for his obtuseness, and came face to face with the worn image of himself in the murky mirror. A sudden loathing seized him.

"Good Lord, do I look like that?" he cried.

"Come," she said smilingly. She stood in the doorway, her hand on the knob, opening the way to him until he came and stood beside her, looking back in revulsion at the tawdry room. "That's the past — we'll shut it out forever," she said softly, and closed the door. "Now give me your hand."

The hallway was dark. She took his hand and guided him through the musty, oppressive darkness down the creaking, uncertain stairs, never releasing her hold until she had found the door and led him, dazzled, into the mellowness of the day.

The lights were coming out on the avenue one by one when they returned to the Arcade. He stopped, suddenly solicitous of her, on the point of suggesting that she might prefer not to be seen returning thus. But, when this return of the worldly instinct was phrasing a question, she deliberately slipped her arm through his in a closer intimacy. He laughed contentedly.

"Why do you laugh?" she said, waving her hand to Myrtle Popper, who was on guard at Joey Shine's window.

"It was an honest laugh," he said evasively.

The naturalness and the directness of her nature, the simple force of her emotions, unfettered by self-consciousness, in contrast with the worldliness in which he had moved, overcame him, as the clear breath of the open fields sometimes is too overpowering to those who seek it in city weariness.

And so, arm in arm, defiant of the world, they returned to the Arcade where, only a few hours before, he had come in despair and surrender, seeing the end of all things. For a moment, the whole pack of cringing doubts — of himself, of her, of the waking realism of the morrow, of distrust for the enduring quality of dramatic moments — doubts that often caused him to laugh aloud in bitterness, came howling around him. Were the tingling sensations of awaking curiosity, the delight in singing sounds and thronging life, the overwhelming passion to be, to know himself still alive, but the mirage of a fool's paradise? She felt the inner trouble in him, and drew her arm closer to his, saying, with already a beginning of proprietorship:

"What are you mumbling to yourself like that?"

"Call it a prayer," he said, half in earnest, half in jest.

XXVI

"AND when in the grave
Her laddie they laid,
Her heart then broke,
And she fervently prayed:
O God in Heaven,
Let me go, too,
And be wi' my laddie — so guid and true!"

So sang Millie Brewster in her faint, pleasant soprano, while O'Leary, at the piano, nodded encouragement, and interpolated brilliant roulades into the accompaniment. The skylight was open in deference to the first warmth of the spring, as March went out like a lamb. Tootles, in overalls, so splashed with variegated tints that they might have passed for an impressionistic landscape, was giving the last tender touches to the completed canvas of the Well-dressed Man Contemplated By The Ages. Schneibel, who had stolen up between appointments, in his white dentist's coat, was dividing his admiration between the contemplation of Tootles' masterpiece and that critical attention which one great singer bestows upon the performance of another. Mr. Pomello, his high hat pushed back from his forehead, his hands on his cane, was sitting in judgment, with a view to giving Millie a trial performance at the Gloria, the moving-picture theater below, where King O'Leary thundered nightly on the piano. Flick, who had organized the demonstration with the express intention of capturing Mr. Pomello, sat well forward, nodding his head in a romantic, melancholy way, occasionally clearing his throat to convey emotion repressed with difficulty.

"Bravo!" said Tootles loudly, when the lass of bonnie Dundee had been laid away in true ballad form.

"You had me going," said Flick, rubbing his eyes industriously, while King O'Leary patted the frightened girl on the back in rough encouragement.

"How about it, Pomello?" he said, wheeling on his stool. "That ought to take the house by storm."

At this moment, a pounding was heard on the wall, followed by several "Bravas!" in Dangerfield's deep voice.

"I like that better than the first thing she sang," said Pomello; "got more stuff to it."

"Sure — the first was just fireworks — grand-opera stuff — opens up the voice," said O'Leary.

"Well, I don't know anything about singing, but I know what I like," said Pomello, who, by this phrase, doubly barred himself from the sphere of the higher criticism. "Sing something more, something sentimental."

"What would you like?" said Millie.

Pomello reflected. His acquaintance was limited.

"Sing 'The Rosemary.'"

At the end of the song ("The Rosary" was then only in the beginning of its devastating march), which Millie, with her eyes on O'Leary, sang with surprising fervor and pathos, great tears were rolling down Pomello's wrinkled face. He was delighted. He hobbled over and shook Millie by the hands, and the engagement was ratified, to the joy of every one.

As a matter of fact, his indecision had only been a pretense. The question had been decided from the moment that Myrtle Popper had indicated her desire. During the last month, Pomello's infatuation had become public property, though few, perhaps, divined the seriousness of it.

The party broke up, Schneibel fired with enthusiasm, yodeling his way back to the realities of dentistry (than which nothing is more real), while Flick escorted Mr. Pomello with ceremony to the elevator.

"Well, Millie, you're a professional now, all right!" said O'Leary, laughing. "Monday night's the night."

"I could sing anything if you were there," said Millie, with a grateful glance, "when you're at the piano, it's just as though you had your arm —" She stopped, confused at a shout from Tootles, who poked his head around the corner, saying:

"Oh, don't mind me, Millie!"

"Well, you know what I mean," said the girl, blushing fiery red under O'Leary's laughing eyes. "You just make me sing."

"Sure, I'll make you sing, all right," said O'Leary.

"You're awful kind," said the girl, holding out her hand. "I know it was you got Pomello interested."

Now, O'Leary had carefully concealed from her the fact that it was Myrtle, who, in the bigness of her heart, had persuaded him to this act of generosity, divining, p haps, the mute jealousy slumbering behind Millie's quie At this moment Myrtle Popper came in tumultu-

urrah!" she cried. "I've heard the news! Won't it be grand? I'll make Pomello pay real hard cash too."

"*You*'ll make him?" said Millie, drawing back. She glanced at O'Leary, bit her lip, and became suddenly very quiet.

"Take a look at the great work, Myrtle," said Tootles, hastily coming to the rescue. O'Leary began a furious procession of ragtime up and down the piano, while Myrtle, unconscious of the jealousy she had aroused, passed behind the canvas.

"Gee, but that'll go big!" she said, in admiration, seeing only her own portrait, which was indeed flattering.

"Pomello couldn't take his eyes off it," said Tootles maliciously.

"Honest, it's wonderful! Say, isn't Pansy cute, too?"

"Rather good of 'the baron'— looks no end of a swell, doesn't he?"

"Sure; you ought to make a million dollars out of that!" said Myrtle, and, after a moment, she added, "Couldn't you put a ring or two on my fingers — that hand of mine looks awful bare."

"Flick's got a couple of the Ready-Made magnates fighting for admission," said Tootles, ignoring her criticism. "Soon as we land one, won't we have a celebration though!"

Meanwhile, Millie Brewster had leaned over O'Leary and whispered:

"King, if this is her doings, I won't have a thing to do with it — do you hear? I won't take favors from her!"

"Thank you for nothing!" said O'Leary, assuming an offended air, while his hands descended upon a resounding chord in the bass. He managed to look so fearfully angry that the girl's heart sank at once.

"I'm sorry," she whispered contritely; "but I won't be patronized by her."

"I suppose I don't count," said O'Leary, who seized the strategic attitude. "Millie, I'm ashamed of you!"

But at the moment when the girl was humbly imploring him with her eyes to forgive her, a new bombshell was exploded by Myrtle's emerging and saying:

"King, something I want to say to you — excuse me everybody!"

O'Leary shrugged his shoulders, arose, and followed her.

No sooner had they left the room than Tootles advanced with a reproachful air.

"My dear girl — playing the game wrong — that's not the clever way! Keep him guessing. Crude, very crude!"

"What does she throw herself at him that way for?" said Millie miserably.

"Whatever she does, don't *you* make a scene," said Tootles, still in his superior manner. "Don't be such an idiot as to show your jealousy."

"How about you?" said the girl rebelliously.

"How about me — what do you mean, how about me?"

"And Pansy?"

"Miss Pansy Hartmann is nothing in my life," said Tootles, classically cold. "I admire her, but that is all."

"Well, that's a blessing — for I saw her yesterday lunching at Healy's with that Portuguese lawyer!"

"You saw her with Drinkwater?" said Tootles furiously, dropping his brushes in his excitement.

"Yesterday."

"And she swore to me —" said Tootles, who began struggling out of his overalls in such indignation that the rest of the sentence was lost.

"No use — she's out," said Millie hastily, as Tootles bolted for the door.

"You saw her?" said Tootles wildly. "The little vixen, and I believed her, yes, believed her smiling, treacherous eyes!"

"Mr. Kidder, Mr. Kidder," said Millie, now genuinely alarmed at the fury with which Tootles flung paints and paint-brushes on the floor and stamped on them, "you mustn't take on like that!"

"That ends it — this is the end!" said Tootles, whose usually genial face was contorted with rage. "I wouldn't believe her again if she swore on her mother's grave."

All at once, he gave a prolonged "Aha!" seized a knife, and rushed to the canvas. The girl in horror flung herself on him, crying to him not to destroy it.

"No; I won't destroy it, but I'll destroy her!" said Tootles wildly. "Let me go!"

"What are you going to do?" said Millie, still clinging to his arm.

"I'm going to paint her out," said Tootles, as savagely as though he had said, "I'm going to have her blood."

He flung away the knife, and, with an exclamation of delight, sprang for his brushes. In five minutes, in place of the glowing complexion of Pansy the tantalizing, the swarthy, copper-colored hue of an Ethiopian emerged!

"Good heavens, what have you done now?" exclaimed Millie, aghast.

"I have blotted her image forever from my memory!" said Tootles.

"You've ruined it," said Millie, wringing her hands. "I didn't mean to tell you — honest, I didn't!"

Tootles, without conveying to her how easily the transformation could be effected back to the Caucasian, assumed the air of one chastened by suffering and said nobly:

"It is over. I thank you."

Meanwhile, O'Leary had followed Myrtle into the hall, rather puzzled by the anxiety he had read in her look, not at all annoyed at being quarreled over by two pretty women.

"Suppose she's going to make a scene, too," he thought.

But, to his surprise, Myrtle, without seeming to have taken the slightest notice of what had just passed, said directly,

"King, you've got to take me out to dinner to-night — alone!"

"What's up?"

"I've just got to talk to you. There's no jolly — it's dead serious."

"Can't you tell me now?"

"No, no," she said hastily and, with some confusion, she came closer and wound her fingers in his coat. "I've never asked you to take me anywhere like this before, have I?"

"No; that's a fact."

"And you don't think I would now if there wasn't something I just had to talk over with you," she said impulsively. "You're the only living soul I can come to for advice, and I need it bad and quick."

O'Leary looked at her and drew his eyes together.

"Is that straight?"

"Dead straight."

"All right; it's a go," he said solemnly. "But I've got to be at the theater by seven-thirty."

"I'll be ready in an hour."

He nodded acquiescence, more and more puzzled by her manner, and as she ran down to her manicuring, he hesitated at the door of his studio, made a wry face, and went down the hall to Dangerfield's. The door was open. Belle Shaler was on the model-stand in the garb of a street urchin, hands on her hips, hair tousled, bare-armed, and throat revealed through the ragged blouse. The great yellow rug had been rolled to one side, and two easels were pitched. At one, Inga was working, while, at the other, Dangerfield was filling in a rapid sketch. He paid no attention to O'Leary's entrance, bending eagerly to his work, clad in loose-flowing corduroy that bore the marks of a hundred skirmishes of the brush, and a gray-flannel shirt.

"Hello, King! Ain't I a Venus in these mud-rags?" said Belle, with a shrug of her shoulders, for the reasons of this pose, which obliterated her natural graces, were beyond her comprehension. "Say, how did it go? Did Millie land him?"

"Hooked him clear through the gills. Monday's the night."

"Hold that pose!" said Dangerfield sharply. Inga sent a warning glance toward O'Leary.

"'Scuses!" said Belle hastily. In Dangerfield's presence she was unaccountably subdued.

King O'Leary moved silently behind Inga, with an exclamation of pleasure at the charm of her arrangement. Under her deft fingers, the urchin on the model-stand had been blended into the dainty color-scheme for a magazine cover, and, instead of the shabby reality, a fragile, idealized figure with grape-vines and clustered purple grapes greeted his eyes.

Then he turned to Dangerfield's easel with renewed curiosity. Against the white canvas, a figure stood out in glaring boldness, done in flowing, powerful lines, a figure all human flesh and greedy life, defiant, common, vital, astonishing in the power of its ugliness, which no longer had the quality of ugliness, so alive and instantaneous was the unifying spark of the actual which held it together. And King O'Leary understood.

"God, that's it!" he exclaimed.

"Rest — finished," said Dangerfield. He glanced a moment at the sketch and turned away without further interest.

Belle Shaler strolled down, gave a look at the canvas, whistled, and sauntered over to Inga. It was plain to see which picture she preferred. Mr. Cornelius, who had been curled up in an easy chair reading, came up, smiling and nodding.

"What strength of a brute, and still what *finesse*, eh?" he said, admiring it as a true connoisseur.

O'Leary nodded silently, and was joined by Belle, who tried to comprehend what they could see in it, not realizing that the artist had revealed to them secrets of which she herself was ignorant, the soul of a child of the people, tolerant of hardships and tragedies, smiling down the giant, useless fabrics of conventions and laws, fatalist and stoic, indomitable in her curiosity and enjoyment.

"He's coming back fast," thought O'Leary, watching from the corner of his eye the sea-blue eyes of Inga lighting up with an overwhelming joy.

Dangerfield returned for a second inspection, head on one side, his thumb to his teeth. He started to take up a charcoal, then shook his head, and, lifting the canvas, put it aside.

"Yes; she's bringing him around," said O'Leary wisely to himself. "No doubt about it — but he's far from tame yet."

XXVII

At six o'clock, Myrtle Popper tucked her arm under King O'Leary's and tripped out as joyfully as though she were carrying him away forever into regions of blue skies and green islands.

" Now you've got me, where are you going to take me, or, rather, where am I going to take you? " said O'Leary warily, for he had pondered much over the object of the evening and had become suspicious. Myrtle's light-heartedness and her eagerness did not fit exactly into the rôle of a maiden in distress. Still, you could never tell with women.

" Sure, are you objectin' to a good-looking girl hanging on your arm," said Myrtle, laughing with the delight of having accomplished her object. " Shall we go down the stairs or wait for that poky old elevator? "

" Thank you; we'll take the elevator," said O'Leary hastily. " You're a deal too dashing and flashing to-night, Myrtle darlin'."

" Now, just what are you insinuatin' by that? " said the girl, her glowing eyes belying the sternness of her words.

" I mean that I wouldn't be down the first flight but my arm would be slipping around your waist. Now, don't be looking at me like that; it's yourself is to blame."

The color came suddenly into her cheeks.

" You don't really care? " she said softly.

King O'Leary laughed and pressed the electric button a second time so that the buzzing sound filled the shaft, while his companion stamped her foot and turned away petulantly.

Sassafras emerged with rolling eyes.

"Our chauffeur is waiting?" said O'Leary, adopting the methods of Tootles.

"Yassir — yassir," said Sassafras, whom nothing astonished. "And Mrs. Van Astorbilt am reclinin' in de car."

"Well, what *are* you going to do with me?" said O'Leary, continuing in the light tone as a precautionary measure until the attack had shown its purpose.

"Do I have to tell you where to dine?" said Myrtle scornfully.

O'Leary performed a careful search of his pockets.

"We might buck the high places, if you ain't too ravenous!"

She shrugged her shoulders, and, disdaining to answer his levity, led him down Columbus Avenue to Rossi's, where, it being early, they found a deserted corner, and O'Leary took up the menu with an occasional stolen glance at his companion, who had become strangely silent.

"*Minestrone* and — hello, here's luck!" he said. "*Gnocci Milanese!* Ever tasted them? They're grand!"

"All right; I don't care," said the girl, without shifting her eyes.

"*Ravioli* and a sweet, and don't annoy us with any olives," said O'Leary to the waiter. "Quite a place!"

He turned for an inspection of the restaurant known to a chosen few. Across the room, a party of Italians and Spaniards from the Opera were finishing an early supper.

"Say, that's Marino and de Segga," said O'Leary, in a whisper, indicating the reigning tenor and the famous baritone.

"I don't care," said his companion sharply.

King O'Leary, perceiving that the issue could no longer be avoided, said:

"Say, you do look awful serious."

"I told you it was serious, didn't I?"

"Yes; and you've got me guessing!"

Something in his tone made her draw back and consider. Presently she said:

"Wonder just what you thought I could have meant by — serious!"

O'Leary balanced his knife on his finger thoughtfully, and finally decided to answer.

"I was kind of worried."

"How so?"

"Well, I didn't know," he said slowly, "but what you might have been getting in — in too deep."

"Into trouble?"

"Yes; into trouble — you see a queer side of life. It isn't every girl can steer a clear course."

"Yes; I've taken chances," she said and stopped. She looked at him with anxious scrutiny. "King, suppose it were so?"

"What do you mean?" he said, frowning.

"Suppose I have got in too deep — deeper than I mean to go?" She looked down at her hands. "What then?"

He looked up sharply, then smiled.

"It ain't so."

"Suppose it were?" she said breathlessly.

"It ain't so," he repeated quietly. He leaned over and patted her hand. "I know you, girl; you're not that kind."

"There's lots of temptations."

"Not for you," he said, reassured in his conviction. "You're straight, and you've got a good head on your shoulders."

"That doesn't always hold."

"It does with you. Whatever you'll do, Myrtle, you'll do just what you've planned out and what your head tells you to do."

"I don't know as I like that," she said, frowning at the implication that she was not of feminine frailty.

"Well, it's true."

"You don't think I can be carried away, then?" she said, with a heightened flush. "You're the last to say that."

Luckily, the arrival of the *minestrone* broke in upon a delicate subject, and the conversation, subject to the censorship of the waiter, became desultory. Dinner over, she leaned forward, her elbows on the table, her eyes full on his face, and said:

"King, shall I marry Mr. Pomello?"

He was so astonished that she herself could not repress a smile.

"Say that again," he said, bewildered.

"I want your advice. Ought I to marry Mr. Pomello?"

"What the devil do you want to marry an old crutch for?" he said, more irritated than he would have believed possible. "Has he asked you?"

"Twenty times — I've been putting him off. It's got to be yes or no to-night, and that's no jolly. It's take it or leave it."

"Why the deuce do you come to me?"

"Because," she said softly, "you're the only one I can go to, and, King, it's a big decision."

"I don't see why you want to marry him," he said slowly. "He's got money, I suppose." She nodded. "Much?"

"How much should you say?"

"Oh, forty or fifty thousand."

"More than that."

"A hundred."

"Higher."

"Come off!"

"King, Mr. Pomello's worth between three and four hundred thousand. Say, I'm not throwing a bluff. Straight goods. He told me so, offered to prove it."

"How the devil ——"

"Made it in moving pictures. He got in on the ground floor, and, King, if I marry him, he'll make a will and leave it all to me."

O'Leary was silent, staring at her. The thought of the price she might command seemed to make her a thousand times more desirable. He even felt a pang of jealousy.

"Gee, this is serious!" he said, and, being in a quandary, he rapped loudly on the table and selected the biggest cigar which was brought him.

Myrtle Popper was watching him with excited glance, her breath coming and going more rapidly as she noted the perturbation caused by the announcement.

"Of course, it ain't a question of love," he said more quietly, as he felt himself fortified behind a cloud of fragrant smoke.

"Not on my part."

"Do you think you can carry it through?" he said, with frank curiosity. Down in his heart he was wondering at the insensibility of women in the very things in which men give them the greatest reverence.

"He's kind, very kind," she said, reflecting. "He'll do anything I want, and, King, it sounds cold-blooded — but he's over sixty, and he ain't strong at that."

"Gee!" said O'Leary.

Neither spoke for a long moment.

"It is cold-blooded," he said, at last.

"It's a bargain," she said abruptly, shrugging her shoulders. "He wants me; he's getting what he wants. If he sees it that way, why, it's square enough."

"Does he see it that way?"

"I've been honest. I've told him what I tell you. It's understood like that between us."

"Why do you even hesitate?" he said.

She stared beyond him.

"It would be hard," she said simply, and looked at him with half-closed eyes.

He was so astonished at the disclosure that she had made that he felt like repeating his questions, to convince himself that what she had told him could be true, that this girl manicurist from Joey Shine's barber shop could, for a nod of her head, leap forward a dozen generations.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said, at last.

"I don't suppose many girls in my position would have put him off this way," she said meditatively. "There ain't much to look ahead to in the manicuring line — a few years of good looks and being taken out, and then just sitting around."

"And if you marry, why, it means even more work, don't it," he said, "cooking and the housework — and the kids. No; I can't see as there are two sides to it."

"There are two sides, though," she said, and she drew a great breath that went through her young, glorious body. She drew back and stretched out her arms as though every muscle had risen in protest. "But a girl can't be doing the askin', you see."

He remained frowning at the cloth so long that she said:

"Did you hear what I said?"

He nodded.

"And you remember what I said to you that afternoon about settling down and home and all the rest?"

"The afternoon I kissed you?"

Her face went red, and she turned away all at once. A wave of pity went through him that he should have been tempted by his vanity, for he knew that it lay no deeper than that. He swore at himself and said:

"So you've come to me for advice?"

She turned quickly.

"And what do you say?" she said, so low that he could scarcely distinguish it.

"Do you mean if I told you not to do it, you'd chuck it to the winds?"

She started twice to answer and stopped. Finally, she said:

"If you told me your reason — I would."

"Myrtle, you did right to come to me," he said decisively. "This is my answer: Placed as you are, with what's ahead, there's no two ways about it — it's too big, too wonderful. Marry him!"

She did not move. The words seemed to have left so little impression on her that he was wondering if she had understood them, when, all at once, she looked up and said:

"You mean that?"

"I do."

She rose, nodded to him to follow, and went out of the restaurant. They walked home in silence, and she did not take his arm. In the Arcade, by the brass entrance of the Gloria Theater, he turned to her abruptly, conscience-stricken, and yet fortified by the thought that he had been square enough not to stand in her way.

"What are you going to say to him?" he said anxiously, taking the hand which she gave him heavily. She turned and he saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"Look here," he said miserably; "I've been honest with you, Myrtle."

"Yes; you've been that," she said, and, with a nod, she hurried away.

XXVIII

King O'Leary had made no mistake. Dangerfield was far from being tamed, and no one understood it better than Inga Sonderson. The day after their return to the Arcade had come the revulsion she had feared. When she had entered, he had looked up without sign of recognition and turned moodily to the solitaire which lay spread before him. She remained half an hour without a word passing between them. She went out and presently returned with a mass of yellow roses, which she distributed about the room, and resumed her waiting attitude. Finally he said:

"Seen the papers?"

"Yes," she answered, though she knew only of the sensational details of the Garford history through Belle Shaler. But she did not wish to have him discuss them, for she comprehended how keenly the man must be suffering in his vanity.

He laughed his short, bitter laugh, the laugh which sounded like the bark of some wild animal, which was characteristic of his rebellious moods. To her, it was always a danger-signal. She rose and, moving easily, stood before him, young, awake, and smiling. He considered her thus with set glance, plainly resentful.

"Wonder if you know what I'm thinking," he said, at last.

"I think I do. To-day you must hate me," she said solemnly. "I'm sorry."

His face showed too much surprise.

"No; I don't hate you," he said shortly, "not you — all the rest."

"Yes; me, too," she insisted. "I don't mind. I understand it."

He rose without notice of the flowers she had brought in timid offering, and, going to the desk, took up a newspaper, stared at it, and handed it to her. She glanced at it long enough to get the full significance of the photograph and the head-lines:

DAN GARFORD IN THE
LIMELIGHT AGAIN

Then she deliberately tore it into pieces and threw it into the waste-basket.

"It's time for lunch; let's go out." He shook his head. The suggestion irritated him. "The walk will do you good."

"Are you going to order me around?" he said, frowning.

"To-day, yes, because you can't make up your mind," she said, coming to him with his coat. It was rarely that she took a determined stand. He turned, resenting it.

"We must come to an understanding," he said irritatedly. "I don't intend to be told to do this and do that. If I want to cut loose, go wild, I'm going to do it!"

She faced him resolutely.

"Don't worry; I'm not asking you to do anything — no promises." She considered a moment, and corrected herself with a smile. "Only one promise."

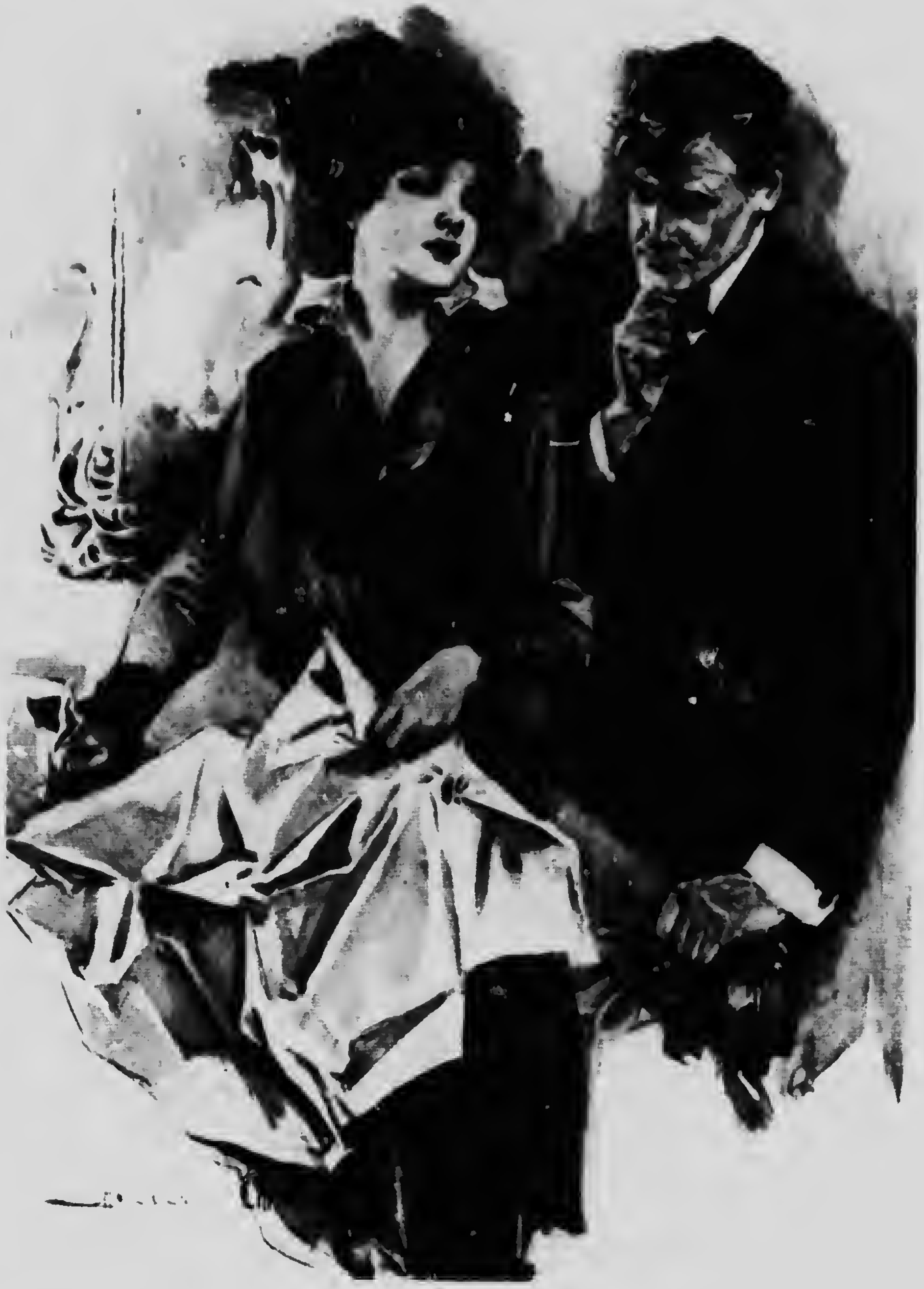
He drew back, prepared for an issue, frowning.

"What one?"

"Whatever you do, wherever you go, I am to go with you."

He glanced at her sharply — the blurred look on his face that she dreaded.

"What! Even nights like night before last!" he said cunningly. That inward struggle which he had been



Then she deliberately tore it into pieces. *Page 276.*

fighting all morning completely transformed the usual kindly look in his eyes, bringing back the glare of a caged animal.

"Especially nights when it's hard," she said, in her low, musical voice.

He laughed.

"There'll be a lot of those!"

"I knew there must be," she said, laying her hand on his arm as though to calm him. "Perhaps it's best that you should let go sometimes — at first."

"What!" he said loudly. Then he laughed again; but already under the controlling pressure of her hand, the laugh had a softer note. "So you're not going to reform me?"

She shook her head.

"No, no!" She thought a moment, "I'm just here to help — when you need me."

He was so surprised at this unexpected attitude that he walked up and down, deliberating. Finally, he turned and stared at her.

"I understand you less than ever."

She smiled and shook her head.

"I'm not so difficult."

"Well, what do you want me to do now?"

"I want to get you away from here."

He took up his things and followed her moodily. He was thinking of the head-lines which had startled him, of the mockery of the truth which had been published. Whenever they passed a news-stand, his glance went furtively to the papers displayed, dreading to see his name in the black, leaded spreads. She guessed this shrinking within him, and changed her position to shield him. Curiously enough, his mood led him toward the river-front, over the route past the gas-towers, where they had gone in the silences of the night. If he remembered anything of that fantastic journey, he gave no sign.

They wandered by the docks amid a confusion of trucks, greeted by strong, pungent smells, lingering lazily on a packing-case to watch the cranes, sweeping up their cargoes for foreign ports. Late in the afternoon they stopped in a sanded-floored restaurant for a bite of luncheon. A few loitering groups were at the tables, sailors in jerseys, with down-turned pipes and ruddy faces worked by sea and wind, queer types of briny adventurers.

Inga drew his attention to the men.

"Sometime you must paint a group like that. Wish I could," she said, her eyes dwelling on the strong masses and deep colors. "There's so much in New York — isn't there? — if you'll only look."

He looked up, and, being in a momentary mood of tolerant amusement, smiled at her artifice.

"Want me to be a painter of the slums?"

"Why not?" she said defiantly. "Isn't it realer than painting pretty pictures — simpering, sugary women — the same old thing again and again? Oh, if I were a man who could — who really could do what I wanted — I'd love it — to get down into the people themselves, to reflect what's going on below, the color and the soul of the people! It's only in places like this, where life is natural, that you feel one thing is different from another!"

"What a long speech!" he said, with an amused look. Then he turned serious and thoughtful. "Good sense — you don't talk much, but when you do ——"

He nodded to himself, put out his hand, patted hers, and, though he said no more, he began whistling to himself, his head aslant, his eyes narrowing as he studied the group across the sanded floor.

Then there were the dark moments, feverish days of aimlessness and regret, of heavy forgetfulness, long periods of taciturnity, with sudden, irrelevant speech — speech that came without warning, which seemed rather the man in the mists of his groping, taking counsel with himself. Sometimes what he said was only querulous, thrown out in anger or bitter self-hatred. At other times he seemed to be standing off and looking at himself, viewing his past dispassionately, analyzing his career without prejudice. Once he said to her, as they sat waiting for the dusk to enter the studio:

" Some people like life, like it for the sake of living — at least, I suppose it's that — to find your rut and run on it smoothly, the same thing to-day as yesterday — routine."

" Most are like that," she said, not yet seeing where he wished to come.

" Most — yes. But if you're not satisfied with that — if you want something — want to create something, to get somewhere — to some fixed object, then you've got to face the thing in the end."

" What thing? "

" The fact that you've got to recognize to yourself, whatever you're hoping for, that you've gone as far as you can go." He thought a moment. " If you could only fool yourself! Some do — that's where conceit comes in — a mighty saving quality that, to be wrapped up in vanity, not to know when you've stopped."

She was so puzzled by this and the tense introspection which she felt in him that she ventured a question.

" What *are* you talking about, Mr. Dan? "

He turned and said:

" Remember once I told you how I used to climb up Montmartre and look down on Paris, and believe the day would come when I'd set them all talking about me — when I *believed* I was going to be a great man? "

She came and settled on the ground beside him as he sat in the great armchair, looking gravely into his face.

"Remember?"

She nodded.

"Well, it's great to believe that, even for a year, to be working passionately, hungrily, sure of where you're going," he said, smiling back into the past. "It's worth — even what comes after. But you pay for it — Lord, but you pay for it! — when you look at yourself in the end, and know the time's to come when you've got to stand still and watch others go on."

"But you are going on — you are!"

He took her head in his hands, as she sat there close to him, and said:

"If you could only make me believe that, child — if you could even *fool* me into believing that — you might get hold of me. You see, that's what you're up against. There's nothing to get to. Oh, the rest doesn't count! I've had notoriety, what some people call fame. Do you think it means anything to me to paint what I have been painting, do it over again and again?" He shook his head. "It's not the knocks that's the trouble. No; I'll be honest. If this — this thing that's ended had come ten years — five years ago, it might have done me good."

She nodded her head eagerly.

"It will now — I know it!"

"No; not now. It wasn't what others did to me; it was what I did to myself. Five years ago, I should have run away; I should have been cruel. I didn't. I was a sentimentalist. I didn't want to do another harm. I stayed and sacrificed the other thing — the thing that can't be shared. I made my choice then; now it is too late."

"But why? You can work now as you want."

"Yes; but the power to dream isn't there, and that's the whole of it. And that doesn't come — it just doesn't seem to come," he said nervously, his hands twisting, and a blank look coming across his eyes.

She understood now the depth of the task before her, as she understood, too, how much he wanted to disbelieve the things he announced. And there rose before her clearly that the only way to reclaim him was to put a purpose into his aimless life.

"Mr. Dan," she said softly.

His eyes came back to hers.

"Pretty hard task you've got, Inga."

"Please be patient — just a while longer. I know it'll all come back."

"Wish you were right."

"It will; it will. I've even seen it in your eyes, the way you look at things, that group in the restaurant, the old woman with the newspapers."

"Seeing is one thing; doing is another."

"But why don't you try?" she said hesitatingly. At this, he turned and glanced longingly at the easel in the corner.

"Oh, if you only would! I'd pose for you all day long!" she cried eagerly.

But at this he shrank back, a tortured, doubting look passed over his face, and he sprang up angrily, crying,

"No, no, no!"

At other times, he would fix his dull glance on her and say, without kindness:

"See what you've dragged me back to!"

These were the secret black hours, when he lay in stupor after periods of heavy, obstinate drinking. For something had come which frightened him. He had boasted, in the wild days when he was new to the Arcade, that he did what he did because he wanted to do it, proclaiming scornfully that he could stop it whenever he chose. And, in his pride, he believed this. Now he came to the frightened realization that this was no longer true, and that there lay before him a struggle against a dark and shapeless enemy which filled the day with its crushing shadow.

At first, he deluded himself with the thought that he was seeking relief, a numbed forgetfulness out of the vacant world — that it was his right to escape the depression in his soul, and that this seeking was deliberate. This delusion was the stronger in that he believed he was testing the girl, challenging her right to reclaim him by a last obstinate rebellion. But Inga, neither by word nor expression, made the slightest criticism. This patient acquiescence, this mute devotion that followed where he went and watched the inevitable moment when he called her in his weakness, at first surprised him and then awoke his latent chivalry.

The day came when, in remorse, he turned to take up the fight himself. Then he found that the dark companion that he had called upon so often to shut out the aching reality could no longer be thrown aside, that, instead of a servant, he had found a master. He found himself gripped in with a hunger he had not realized. At times, frightened, he recoiled and sought to struggle, as though his body were sinking into a lurking quicksand that drew him down, down, and ever down.

There was yet a darker thing which hung shapelessly in this gradually settling obscurity, a thing of dread that waited beside the other shadowy comforter. For, at times, he came struggling back to life with a feeling of blurred, vacant spaces behind, where something had slipped from him, when he had been but a shell inhabited by muddled desires and gropings.

These were days of rough going, of tense straining on every nerve of the girl who watched him. Strange, opposite flashes, the sublime and the ridiculous of the man's soul, shifted and whirled before her. At times, from long periods of inner torment, there came a sudden pitch of exaltation, wild, colorful moments of eloquence, when he discoursed on life and art, justice and morality, when he analyzed mercilessly established prejudices and beat through to a clearer verity — when she listened breathlessly, enthralled at his dramatic tossings. Then, when the prophetic rage had passed in its fine fury, the reaction would come, and for hours he would lie clinging to her hand, shuddering in the dark at terrors he did not dare to phrase. These moments of groping weakness, of intermingled bombast, wisdom, and cringing brought her always to the same *impasse* — either she must instil some object into this denial of life, or see him slowly crumble, morally and physically, before her eyes.

XXIX

How did she manage to reclaim him? In part by the unquestioning service which she yielded him, without weariness or discouragement, until, out of pity for her, he began to fight with himself, and, in a minor degree, through unforeseen influences, trivial in themselves, yet working together to restore his interest in those who lived about him. Tootles and the difficulties of his masterpiece drew from him a wild outburst of laughter, but he stayed to criticize and suggest, until gradually he came to the moment when, in his amused enthusiasm, he took up the brush himself. He had come to the point now where he could not bear to be alone, never content unless Inga were at his side. She transported her easel into his studio for the morning's work, with Belle Shaler serving as model for the magazine covers which she drew with a certain deftness and charm.

During the first mornings, Dangerfield paid them scant attention beyond an occasional glance. The third day, he criticized a pose of Belle Shaler's, and rose to superintend the readjustment. Then he glanced at Inga's work and nodded.

" Pretty and delicate."

The second week, Belle being engaged elsewhere, Inga had recourse to a model she sometimes used, an Italian mother, heavy and a bit dowdy, but picturesque and vital. He noticed the substitution with surprise and a long, contemplative stare. All at once he sprang up, brought out his easel, took a canvas, and began to draw. Inga, afraid to notice this unhoped-for development even by a word, continued a simulation of work while watching him from the corners of her eyes. He worked rapidly, humming to himself, frowning occasionally and stepping back to study the result with dissatisfied glances. In the end, he stood back, his head on one side, scowling.

"Atrocious!" he said abruptly. Then he laughed, returned, replaced the canvas by a fresh one, and started again.

"Come and behold!" he said grimly, when he had completed the second study. "Let's see how good an artist you are. Which?"

He placed the two sketches together and stood back as Inga came eagerly up. They were done in a manner so opposite that they might have been by different hands — the last graceful, charming, inclining to the sentimental; the first trenchant, direct, almost cruel in its reality.

"Which?" he said, watching her gloomily.

But almost before the words were on his lips, her answer had come. She went past the thing of grace and charm to the first drawing he had made.

"That's wonderful!" she said, with outstretched finger.

"What! You prefer that?" he said savagely. She faced his look and nodded.

"Any one can do the other; but this, this shocks you — it's so savage and yet so convincing!"

He came to her side and viewed the canvases, trying to see them with her eyes, to feel a glimmer of her enthusiasm. So pathetic was the effort she saw writ on his clouded face that she longed, in a rush of maternal pity, to take him in her arms and cry.

"But it is good; it is!"

At the end, he said curtly:

"You don't know — if, indeed, you really meant it."

"But, Mr. Dan, I do; I do," she said, seizing his arm. "You've done something unusual — something different from the way others do."

"My dear child," he said impatiently, "they are both hopeless. One is a pretty fake, and the other is as hard as rocks! Don't argue; I know."

He lifted the canvases and set them down with a crash against the wall, while she watched him, with a sinking heart, go and stand by the window in a brooding revulsion. The test had come which she had striven for, prayed for, waited for, and it had failed. She had a moment of intense, hopeless despair.

That night, matters were even worse. Dangerfield relapsed into his wildest mood, as though he, too, had felt the finality of the test and knew that nothing was left to hope for. He managed to slip away without her noticing it, and when he staggered back, late in the night, he was in such a frenzy of remorse, depression, and weakness that she did not dare to leave his side an instant.

Yet, by noon of the next day, when he had recovered his poise, by one of the miracles of which his extraordinary constitution was capable, curiously enough he did a thing for which she would never have dared to hope. He went over to the canvases which he had discarded so fiercely, chose the one Inga had preferred, and placed it on the easel.

At this moment Mr. Cornelius, coming in, expecting to find Dangerfield prostrate after the night's debauch and perceiving him actually standing before his easel, burst into an exclamation of delight.

"Monsieur Cornelius," said Dangerfield (he, of all the floor, never called him "baron"), "tell me what you think of this?"

"The baron" went lightly across the floor, picking up his feet and glancing in wonder at Inga, until he reached the easel, and adjusted his glasses with nicety. Then he looked up suddenly.

"You did this — you, my friend?"

"Yes; yesterday. What do you think of it?"

Mr. Cornelius examined it with care, nodding, raising his eyebrows, pursing his lips.

"I did not think you so strong," he said slowly, and the look of wonder with which he examined Dangerfield had more flattery in it than his words. *"C'est fort; c'est plus que fort — c'est du vrai!"*

"Yes; there is something in it — something odd," said Dangerfield slowly, to Inga's amazement.

"You did not see things like that in Paris," said "the baron," still nodding. *"Cristi* — but it's astonishing what you make a line do; what modeling!"

"Yes, yes," said Dangerfield breathlessly, "it's bold; it has audacity; it is not trivial, at any rate. Curious thing — last night — I thought it insufferably bad. I even preferred this!"

He held up the other sketch with a guilty laugh. Mr. Cornelius did exactly the right thing. He put his foot through it.

"Mon ami, you are one colossal ass! Now, isn't that a nice damn thing? A man who can do what you can to behave so badly. If I could do that, the whole damn family could go cut their throats; *je m'en ficherais complètement!* That means, *mademoiselle,* the rest of them too can go right to the devil!" He turned on Dangerfield and shook his fist in his face in Gallic enthusiasm. "You stop being the *big* fool; you get to work! You draw; you paint! Where is the model?"

The model, in truth, had been postponed as a result of the previous night's dissipation. Inga started up, seeing the eager look in Dangerfield's eyes.

"I'll run out; I'll get one right away."

"Pooh!" said "the baron," and, to the surprise of them both, he strode to the model-stand, his violet dressing-gown floating behind him, and installed himself in a chair. "Paint me — no compliments — just as I am — Don Juan in old age — Beau Brummel in poverty — *le vieux boulevardier.* Paint me, and I don't see nothing till you be satisfied. Now, paint like ze devil!"

In truth, he made a striking figure in his black-felt slippers and white socks, his loose, yellowish trousers, a flash of white at the throat above the faded violet of the dressing-robe, which set forth strongly the aristocratic features; the eyes still alert and compelling above the crinkled sacks which had formed about the hollowed cheeks; the defiant rise of the Gallic mustache, as saucy, as obstinate, and as proud in adversity as in the halls of revelry. Dangerfield exchanged the chairs, giving him one of barer outline, arranged a cold gray background over the screen, and added a faded red footstool. In another ten minutes he was feverishly at work, while Inga, at her pad, strove in vain to catch the spirit of the pose — yet thoroughly content.

The incident sank deep into her understanding. Dangerfield had rejected her sure instinct, and yet, a day later, had been convinced at the first word from Mr. Cornelius. She comprehended, not without a pang, all that lay in the feeling of caste, what power Mr. Cornelius, of Dangerfield's own world, might have over him where she might strive in vain. At once she began to reach out for his assistance, to study the reticent, kind old man, to flatter him subtly, to please him by a dozen little attentions, and draw him into the intimacy of the studio.

What pleased her most was that Mr. Cornelius had the power to make Dangerfield talk. Often now, in the dark, after the day's work was done, the easel put away, and the rug rolled back, the two men would stretch back, puffing on their pipes, and discuss art and life and the thousand and one affairs of the world which may always be better regulated in conversation. Dangerfield was still far from being tamed, as O'Leary had put it, but something had come now to aid her in the struggle, a new curiosity still unsatisfied, a wonder whether the months of disappointment had not left a compensating gift in a clearer vision. There were bad moments, when he found that old habits had set their yoke over his will and aroused thirst of the flesh that rose up at times and overwhelmed him in dazed nights of defeat. But the dawn had broken at last through the clouds, and, little by little, hoping, doubting, he had begun to believe in himself.

The Arcade dwellers, under Inga's deft guidance, flocked in to the studio, surrounding Dangerfield with youth, movement, and bubbling spirits, and if there were times when he sat apart listlessly, he was always grateful to the spirit of comradeship which they flung about him as a protecting mantle. He made frequent visits to the adjoining studio, emerging uproariously after a delighted contemplation of Tootles' work of art. He even visited Schneibel's home galleries, and stood in awe before the rainbows descending into the valleys, the showers draping Roman temples, and the mechanical cows which seemed to be skating over slippery green meadows. So salutary were these visits, that, at times, when his own work lagged or a fit of moroseness was impending, he would look up grimly and say:

"The blue devils are around, Inga. Let's go down to Schneibel's and cheer up."

Meanwhile, Millie Brewster had made her début at the Gloria, frantically applauded by the assembled Arcadians. The affair had verged perilously close to a disaster, for the girl, suddenly brought before the footlights with the many-headed monster stirring beyond, had faltered and sung false. Already there were titters and murmurs in the audience when O'Leary saved the day by plumping out savagely:

"Millie, you can do better than that! Now do it!"

In her astonishment, the girl forgot herself. She looked down at O'Leary and beheld his face, that had always looked upon her with kindness, so set in fierce disapproval that straight away, all else forgot, she began to sing like an angel, with the result that the audience, always sensitive to dramatic changes, burst into applause. But the work ended, no further engagements resulted, the truth being that, though she had a certain girlish charm and a pleasant though thin voice, she was completely lost in front of the footlights.

On top of this came the announcement of Myrtle Popper's engagement to Mr. Pomello, which sent the floor into a fever of excitement. To the surprise of every one, Dangerfield offered his studio for the ceremony and asked the privilege of providing the supper. Schneibel, not to be outdone, assumed the responsibility of Mr. Pomello's farewell to bachelordom, which was to be conducted on certain original lines of his own. Dangerfield threw himself into the spirit of the celebration with such zest that his good spirits reflected themselves throughout the hall, and everything seemed now to be fair sailing when a new complication arose.

XXX

For the last weeks, Inga had been aware of a change in Dangerfield. His moments of abstraction, of inner brooding, grew less frequent. Instead, she found him with his eyes set profoundly on her, until she became uncomfortably conscious of this increasing curiosity. At times in his work, he would begin singing to himself snatches of old French songs, and occasionally, when he was pleased with what he was doing, he would break out full-voiced into the marching-chant of his student days.

C'est les quatz' arts,
C'est les quatz' arts,
C'est les quatz' arts qui passent;
C'est les quatz' arts passés.

By the wall were the first two drawings he had made, and at the end of the afternoon's sketching, he would take each new canvas and compare it with the two that now represented to him the parting of the ways. If it passed the inspection, he would nod contentedly, trill out a gay refrain, and replace it on the easel for further study. But occasionally, when old habits tricked him back to the easy, graceful, superficial method, he would burst into a roar of anger and bring the offending canvas to Inga, crying:

"*Nom d'un pipe;* here I go again! Inga — quick; execute justice!"

And Inga, laughing, with a flash of green stockings, would send her pointed slipper through the canvas. Sometimes she would protest at the judgment, but he would remain obdurate.

"Not half bad, perhaps — but that's not what I want. No more mawkishness, no more sentimentality. I know now what I want. Come on; one, two, three!" Then, as the little foot reluctantly tore through the canvas, he would glance down admiringly and say, "And that's a better fate than it deserves!"

Two and three days in succession this execution would take place and then there would be sure to be long periods of restless depression, sometimes ending in a wild spree with the consequent grim reaction. But gradually these backslidings grew less frequent, as his feverish love of work increased with his growing confidence. The mornings were spent in rigorous drawing, Madame Probasco, Sassafras, Schneibel, uncle Paul of the pawn shop, every model of strong and unusual picturesqueness being impressed into service, again and again, until the canvas yielded to his satisfaction the quality of penetrating analysis he sought. Tootles' easel made the third in these mornings of merciless criticism, and, under Dangerfield's stern guidance, the young fellow began to reflect some of the enthusiasm of the master and to make genuine progress. In the afternoon, Dangerfield returned to the portrait of Mr. Cornelius, always grumbling, always dissatisfied.

With Inga came a more docile mood. In fact, it seemed to amuse him to say:

"Well, young lady, what are your commands for the day?"

He began to talk to her, to discuss seriously as he did with "the baron." In truth, he was now alertly curious. What did she understand; what had she read, seen, and experienced? He recalled certain criticisms which had come unexpectedly from her lips, and wondered from what source she had acquired such views. Between them, it was agreed that there should be no recalling of the past, but the very embargo whetted his appetite. He remembered darkly the sequences of his midnight wandering through the city with Inga; yet enough remained to suggest sides of her life that seemed incongruous with the present calm routine. He knew, also, from the gossip of the Arcade that there had been another, Champeno, his predecessor in the studio, who had dropped out in disaster; but to what extent he had come into her life, whether profoundly or only as an agreeable acquaintance, he could not divine. He recalled the strange feeling which had come to him in the first days that there was a third in the studio, a figment of the memory which seemed to rise before the girl's eyes when she came to him in his hours of weakness; and, remembering this, often as he studied her, he wondered, yes, even with a sense of irritation, a restless beginning of jealousy. So marked was his contemplation, that Inga said to him one afternoon:

"Why do you look at me so?"

"I'm thinking, wondering many things about you, Inga," he said.

She looked into his eyes swiftly a moment and then turned hurriedly away, busying herself with the stowing of her easel, for the light had died out in the overcast sky of April showers, and the afternoon's work was over.

"Suppose we wander up into Harlem, where the new Jewish quarter might give us some types, and try our luck for dinner," he said, watching the lightness of her movements, the grace of her pliant back as she stooped, the flitting note of the green stockings.

"It's showery," she said doubtfully.

"All the better fun, tramping in the rain."

"Want me to get ready?"

"Not yet — come here!"

He came back, drying his hands, still in his loose working-costume, a serious light in his eyes.

"Do you know that was a good idea you gave me over in that water-front restaurant that day — about getting down to realities, expressing the world of the masses," he said gravely. "I've been thinking a lot about it."

"Oh, I do mean it!" she said, her face lighting up with the rare enthusiasm that gave it the touch of animation it needed to make it bewildering to his eyes. "No one seems to paint New York — to look for what he can find here. They're all painting and sculpturing as others used to do hundreds of years ago."

"Inventing and not interpreting," he said, nodding.

"Yes; that's it — you express it better than I can. But that's what I mean — an artist ought to interpret all he sees around him, express his time, its manners, its customs, the joy and the misery of the streets. It's not only that, but when he does that, when he lives with the people, he can't lose his enthusiasm."

"And if he does the other thing, gets into society, society only comes to prey upon him, to exhaust him, to waste his energies and corrupt his imagination — that's what you mean?"

She nodded.

"Just that!"

"Inga, you're right," he said abruptly. "That's the trouble with us all over here. We don't keep to ourselves; we aren't savage enough. Our aim, after all, is the same as the business *parvenu;* we want to do the things others do at the top — what we call the top! No: it's wrong, all wrong. Art was not produced like that in the great days. Artists should live to themselves — yes, be savage about it. The two things can't mingle — don't I know it!"

"Mr. Dan," she said, her face aglow, "don't you see that you have got rid of all that?"

He was silent, moody. Then he placed his hand on her shoulders with a smile.

"Inga, I believe you're going to win," he said slowly.

She smiled and, looking at him, nodded confidently.

"Lucky you got hold of me when you did," he said, in a burst of confidence. "Something else was getting a pretty tight grip on me — might have been too late soon." How completely the longing still awoke in him at times, he did not tell her. His mind went back to the thoughts she had just expressed, and he said, "You know, your ideas surprise me."

"How so?"

"Wonder where you got them. After all, though, that's human nature, woman nature," he said, with a reflective smile, "to take knowledge from one man to help another."

"What do you mean?" she said, drawing back.

"You've heard others say those things, I suppose," he said. "W[illegible] his name, the young fellow who was here before. [illegible]ampeno, that's it. I suppose when you straighten me out, you'll go on to the next with what I've taught you."

The question, which came with the swiftness of a sword-thrust, and the quick concentration of his glance visibly upset her, so much so that he hastened to say:

"Why, there's nothing wrong in my saying that, is there?"

She frowned and finally said: "But I don't see what reason you have for thinking such things."

"I'm frankly curious about you, Inga," he said abruptly.

She turned away, plainly disconcerted. "I don't like to talk about myself."

"You don't remember some of the things you said to me that night."

"What?" she asked steadily.

"The time we passed the child leading the drunkard, and you said it brought back memories."

"I didn't think you remembered," she said slowly.

"And at Costello's — Costello's greeting you."

"What is there in that?" she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"Why, nothing, of course, except — well, I don't like to think of your being out with other men — I suppose that's it." She opened her eyes in such astonishment that he added point blank. "No; I don't like the thought — just jealousy, that's all."

She drew back and her face flushed red, but before he could go further, Tootles came down the hall.

The next afternoon Mr. Cornelius was unable to come for a sitting and Dangerfield was in high dudgeon, for Madame Probasco and O'Leary were away and Sassafras fixed to the elevator.

"You wanted to sketch the oyster-man behind his bar," said Inga, referring to a picturesque bit of human nature which had caught his fancy the night before. "Why not take this afternoon?"

"I wanted to paint," he said, like a spoiled child.

"Am I ugly enough to suit you?" she said, with a bit of malice.

He laughed at her rejoinder and the prospect of a busy morning, and in a moment had her posed and fell to work. Presently he looked up scowling.

"Something's wrong — don't look natural; let's try something easier."

Twice he changed the pose, and, finally, in a fit of temper, broke the brush and threw it on the floor.

"Darned if I know what's wrong! It's not you — that's all." He stood with folded arms, studying her angrily. "You don't look *you!*" he exclaimed suddenly. "Sounds idiotic, but it's true. I believe it's the hair — something wrong there. It's stiff — constrained, and you're not conventional. Yes, by Jove, that's it! Take it down and try it some other way.

She hesitated, her fingers to her lips, and reluctantly unwound the braids that she wore about her forehead in a Swedish coil. Then, with deft fingers, she shook them loose while the man came suddenly close to her, his eyes studying her face in surprise. The long black hair, released, fell about her shoulders and softened the marble coldness of her features, fell in black rippling waves like the mysterious depths of the sea on a summer's night. She seemed like a released soul, something soaring and on the wing, far-distant as the wild fjords of her native Scandinavia.

"Is this better?" she asked, smiling with a new archness as though within her too a spirit had been released.

He was too startled by her sudden loveliness, to answer. All at once he came to her and held her head between his hands, gazing into the dark face where the blue-gray eyes shone forth with an easy light.

"Inga," he said tempestuously, looking at her so intensely that, for the first time, she dropped her glance, "What are you? Where do you come from? What is behind those eyes of yours? Do you really care for me, or is it just an instinct in you to help? Sometimes I think that's all, that if I were not in such need of you, you would disappear in the night like the elfin thing you are."

"You are wrong," she said, shaking her head.

He laughed and turned away.

"Put up your hair. I'll paint you like that — but some other day."

When she had braided and coiled her hair about her forehead and come to his side, he took her hand and raised it to his lips, in more genuine emotion than he had shown.

"Inga, you're much too good for me with my cranky ways, my bad temper and worse. If I'm rough — I'm always sorry for it."

"I know that, Mr. Dan," she said softly.

"Child, you must be starving here," he said gently. "You weren't meant for this; you were meant for the woods and rocks, the rocks that run into the sea — something tempestuous and free."

"I should like the sea," she said eagerly, and her eyes lit up as though touched with phosphorus.

He took a long breath and glanced out of the open window, drinking in the mild air laden with the stirring perfumes of the spring.

"We must get away," he said joyfully, "from men and machines! You've given me back life and ambition, child. Now I want to get away to my own thoughts, back to the things that are eternal, the things that heal." They stood by the window. He raised her hand again to his lips. "I've waited long enough to be fair to you — now I'm going to carry you off!" he said, with a suddenness that took away her breath.

The next moment his arms had snatched her up and she was looking up into his steady domineering eyes. And, seeing his look, she understood.

"To carry me off?" she said faintly.

"Yes, Mrs. Dangerfield."

"You want me to marry you!" she said, staring at him.

He laughed out of the fulness of the joy in his heart.

"So quick it'll take your breath — and then to get away!"

"Wait — no, no — wait!" she said breathlessly, as she felt him drawing her up to him.

Something in the tone caused him to look at her suddenly and then to release her. She stood, the picture of distress, her lips parted, her eyes filling with tears, looking at him, one hand at her throat as though to press back the sorrow that was there.

"Oh, I was so afraid you'd say that," she said at last. "Why did you, Mr. Dan — why did you — why couldn't it go on just as it has!"

"Why?" he cried, in amazement, but before he could break into a torrent of passion, she had turned and fled from the room.

"What in the world did I say that was wrong?" he thought, and he began to search in bewilderment. At the end of a long, puzzled self-examination, a light flashed over him. "What an idiot I am! Of course! She's made up her mind I asked her only out of gratitude! Poor little child!"

He hastened to her room to repair his fancied blunder, but though he knocked long and loud, no answer came. The next day, a slip of paper lay on the floor under the crack of his door, where she had thrust it.

DEAR MR. DAN:

I've gone away for the day. When I come back I'll explain and you *must* understand — and it isn't because I don't care.

INGA.

XXXI

The day was interminable and wasted. He spent the morning fidgeting at his easel and lecturing Tootles with such severity that all the smiles fled from that young reprobate's countenance and he sat gloomily on his stool, his head sinking into his collar, turtle-fashion, for one glance of displeasure from Dangerfield could plunge him into the caverns of despair. In the present case, the unexampled duplicity of Pansy, whom he had seen with his own eyes on the arm of the unthinkable Drinkwater, combined to send his thoughts wandering among such appropriate subjects as suicide and graveyards.

"What the deuce has he been up to?" he said to himself, watching Dangerfield, who was switching up and down in front of his easel like a circus leopard. "Drinking his head off last night, I suppose."

"Hold the pose," said Dangerfield spitefully.

"I ain't doin' nothin'," said Sassafras, startled.

"You shifted that left leg! Throw it forward! More, so! Now hold it."

"Hold it; hold it," muttered Sassafras to himself. "Mighty easy to say 'Hold it; hold it!' Like to see some one else stand on one leg a whole mawnin' and 'hold it, hold it!'"

Sassafras glanced over indignantly, but Tootles shook his head in mute warning.

"What the devil's got into the charcoal!" said Dangerfield presently. He flung aside the piece he was using and selected another, but a few minutes later he broke out into an exclamation, and taking the canvas, brought it down savagely across his knee and flung it across the floor, after which he broke into a short, nervous laugh.

"There — I feel better — can't work this morning — not in the mood — you go ahead — I'm through!"

He hesitated, picked up his hat, and went out. His mind had run away from him. Try as he might, he had not been able to fix it on the work before him. He felt upset, disorganized, restless, and immeasurably irritated that he should have lost control of his impulse at the very moment when he had been confident of a new birth of inspiration.

He wandered restlessly through ways which he had gone with Inga, ending up for luncheon at the little restaurant with the oyster-bar, where he had sketched with such avidity. Only, nothing interested him. The curious types of pedler and hybrid politician, the melancholy of the old régime, and the audacity of the new generation, which he had seen and studied with avid eye and awakened imagination, to-day bored him immeasurably. He saw neither color, character nor life. They were dirty, cheap, and commonplace. The waiter, a young student from the University of Moscow, a year over, with whom Inga and he had had long interested conversations, came up eagerly, only to be greeted with glum monosyllables.

To some men, Inga's evasion would have aroused eager senses of pursuit and possession. Not so, Dangerfield. All his instincts rebelled at this sudden disquieting and disorganizing intrusion across the slow ascent toward reclamation which had lain so clearly before him. Whatever her reason for her abrupt flight, he resented the loss of the morning's work, the interruption of the happy impulse which had reordered the universe for him. He was angry not simply at the incident and the memories of past discouragement it awoke, but for what lay ahead — the fear of the future, the wonder whether he had not reached that period in his relations with Inga when his equanimity and the precious poise of an artist were to be constantly upset by the necessity of following vagrant moods. For he realized now how necessary the girl had become to him, to his restless mind that took fright at a moment's solitude, to his awakening ambition, ready at a moment to sink back in discouragement, and to something deeper than mind or temperament — to the spark in him that still clung to his youth through the glorious youth in her.

"Why were women sent into the world, anyway?" he thought savagely, spearing a loaf of bread as though he were demolishing the whole sex. "Why have men been given a hidden spring of sentiment that makes a woman's sympathy a necessity? And why must woman always come into man's life to divert him from his object?"

What most irritated him was that he had thought Inga of different mold, and now she had suddenly been revealed to him as profoundly disquieting as her frailest sister. This feeling of resentment increased as the lack of her presence in his day made itself felt. He resented that she should have fastened him to herself. He resented that she should have shown a feminine capriciousness, and, most of all, he resented the fact that he should feel such resentment.

He was in this gloomy, destructive state of antagonism, amounting almost to revulsion against Inga, when he looked up and saw her entering the restaurant. She perceived him instantly, stopped, and made as though to withdraw. The movement roused a fury in him. His face grew stern and his glance remained coldly fixed.

"If she thinks I am going after, she's mistaken," he thought bitterly.

Perceiving that he had seen her, she checked her movement of flight and presently came over to his table, nodded, and sat down. He saw the furrowed pain on her face and the torment in her eyes, and divined the day of suffering through which she had passed. A sudden lightening of the spirit flashed through him, scattering the bitter clouds of dejection. He felt an uncontrollable gaiety, a leaping of the pulses, a need of laughter, of singing out loud, of music, and of sunlight. All his doubts vanished in a pervading sense of peace and serenity. For he knew that she loved him.

Yet they did not speak a word of what lay nearest to their hearts. Gregory, the young student, served them, and tarried to discuss political developments in Russia. Dangerfield, in fine feather, disputed eloquently, opposing his Tolstoyan theories of non-resistance. The transition from moroseness to ecstatic gaiety was so swift that he felt an impulse to work.

"What a pity I haven't a sketching pad!" he said ruefully.

Gregory hastened to supply him paper and pencil. He laughed and began a series of rapid sketches of the oyster-openers; Mother Trekanova at the counter; a silhouette of a young Jewish girl in tinsel finery with an old rabbi watching in critical disapprobation. Inga, her hands clasped in front of her, continued to stare at the tablecloth, scarcely raising her glance.

Dangerfield completed a dozen sketches and sprang up lightly and satisfied, his mind busy with projects for paintings. Everything attracted him; the whole world was rich with points of interest — a black-haired woman leaning out of the window drying her hair, two young mothers with babies at their shoulders chatting before a kosher shop, a public school pouring out its color-flecked stream of alien races — all these notes of humanity seemed to him vibrant with the teeming will to live, to enjoy, and to drink in sensations to the fullest. He began to talk in long, loquacious periods, as he seldom talked in his sober moods — of the things that lay about him to paint, of the new quarters which they should explore, planning what they would do in the spring and the summer months, eager to be off. For, of course, he took it for granted that her opposition had ended. His enthusiasm was so obvious that she could not fail to comprehend the cause. Several times she glanced at his radiant face, wistfully and seriously, then looked away over the house tops or deep into the city crowds. When they came to the Arcade, she stopped him, and looked him full in the face.

"Mr. Dan, you don't understand."

His face clouded abruptly.

"Understand? What do you mean by that? And why —" he glanced impatiently at the tenanted Arcade — "why say this to me here?"

"Go up, I'll come in an hour. I want to think," she said gently. "Please don't, don't look at me like that."

"Very well," he said curtly, "You'll be up in an hour?"

She nodded and stood while he went away, angry and in his blackest mood.

XXXII

TRUE to her word, at the appointed time she came knocking at his door. He was walking up and down — he had not ceased from this nervous pacing since she had left him and, at the first glance, she saw how taut every nerve was strung. She went to him directly, and taking his hand, pressed it to her heart. At her action, so full of gentleness and poignant feeling, he felt a longing to catch her up in his arms and surrender weakly each last shred of resentment.

" Inga — dear girl," he said with difficulty, " you don't know how you torture me and the worst is I can't understand — no; I can't understand at all! "

" Mr. Dan, why can't it go on just as it has? " she said suddenly, lifting her pleading eyes to his.

" It can't," he said roughly. " You know that as well as I do. It's gone too far. You've made yourself necessary to me. I must have you near me, by my side, every moment of the day. I don't believe in myself; I believe in you, and that's what I cling to. Good God, Inga, I don't understand you! Do you think you have the right to do this now, and for what reason? " He stopped, looked at her, and said angrily: " You are not so idiotic to think I care what may have been your past. It isn't any such thing as that, is it? "

She shook her head disdainfully.

" That has nothing to do with us," she said coldly.

" Well, then what? " he said frantically. " At first. I thought you believed it was only out of gratitude." He caught a look in her face and checked himself. " Inga, you *do* believe that. Good Heavens, don't you know, don't you understand how I have felt all these weeks, that if I have held myself in it was because I wouldn't bind you, until — until I knew there was something to offer you in exchange — something more than a derelict, a derelict that was going under? But, child, don't you know what I am, and don't you know what you are — how I long for you and need you? Don't you realize what you mean to me, to have you here close at my side, so young, so gentle, so strong! Haven't you seen my eyes following you, craving your young loveliness? Haven't you felt how my arms have longed to go out to you, to hold you to me? You mean everything to me — the end of a nightmare, the birth of a new day! And you could think that I've asked you to marry me out of gratitude! Inga, Inga; any man would be mad in love with you!"

He had ended turbulently, his hand on her shoulder. She looked at him long and penetratingly, as though plunging through the barriers that blocked the way to the truth that lay in his heart, the truth of the moment and the truth of to-morrow. This scrutiny lasted so long that he was on the point of breaking out again when she checked him with her hand.

"Yes; I believe that you love me," she said gently, almost as though she were reassuring herself. She added with the same low, soothing melody in her voice that his ear had learned to crave, "And I, too — I love you."

She pronounced this so solemnly that it sounded to him not like a surrender but as a farewell.

"And yet you won't marry me," he said, divining what lay behind.

"That is not necessary," she said deliberately, "that is, marriage — your form of marriage."

He turned like a flash and stood looking at her, his hands on his hips, open-mouthed.

"This is what I want you to understand," she said quite naturally. "What you must understand. Will you hear me and try to see my point? I have sworn that I would never marry. I can't — everything in me is against it. I can't, I won't acknowledge that any one or any system can force me to give myself to any man unless I love him, unless it is my wish to remain with him. How do I know whether you will always love me, always need me in your life? How do I know that I shall always want to be with you?"

"You!" he said, thunderstruck, for, at heart, like most artists, his nature was not a complex one and his religion was of the day and the moment. The idea that she could ever cease to love him struck him as more extraordinary than that he should ever change. "You can say that!"

"Yes; I can see that that might happen," she said resolutely. "Even now, and I do care for you, Mr. Dan — believe me, I do love you," she said, clasping her hands and half extending them toward him in a gesture of entreaty, "I only think of you; I only care what becomes of you, and I am so happy in that, and yet ——"

"And yet," he said sharply.

"And yet — now — even now," she said, nodding to herself, as though the veil of the future had been lifted before her eyes, "I know that, if the time came when I couldn't mean anything more, if I couldn't follow you where you'd want to go ——"

"But you are crazy!" he broke in roughly.

"No, no," she said sympathetically; "I'm not so crazy — I am right! For, Mr. Dan, I'm not of your kind — I know it. If you were strong — if you were yourself, I would never have been in your life; don't you see, don't you understand? I won't fasten myself to you! I won't marry you!"

"That's it, then," he exclaimed; "now we have the real reason!"

"No, no," she said hastily; "you mustn't think that. That's a reason, but not the real one. What I said to you is the truth. I can't believe there is any higher right than my own to say when and how long I shall surrender my liberty ——"

By this time, Dangerfield was in a towering rage. Despite her protestation, he was convinced that the real cause was one of pride.

"In other words, you prefer to be my mistress!" he cried with that intemperance which only comes when the longing for possession is so keen that love and hate tremble in the balance.

"No," she said, with such dignity that he could not meet her glance; "I am willing to go to you, to live with you, to do everything I can to help you, so long as we are as we are to-day. That, to me, is marriage. To stay as your wife when nothing is left but ashes — no; that is too horrible. If I say this, it's because I've thought about it and have the courage to believe it, because I want to keep my self-respect and my freedom."

"Oh, your freedom!"

"Yes, my freedom, because like that I always will be free, to come, to go, to give, to think honestly," she said gently. "Oh, I know you won't understand. I know you're thinking terrible thoughts about me. And yet — isn't my way more honest than — than women who marry and divorce two and three times? Is that respectability to you?"

"What have you been reading?" he said curtly.

"It's not what I've been reading; it's what I've seen," she said slowly. "It's other women — it's my mother's life." She covered her face suddenly, and her body shivered. "No, no; don't ask me to give up my belief!

Don't ask me to be different than I am! I am wild and free as you say; please don't change me."

"I only understand one thing," he said angrily, "and that is you don't love me. If you did, it would not be a question of discussion."

"No, no; you're wrong, Mr. Dan." She shook her head and held out her arms to him. "Mr. Dan, oh, why won't you see?"

He turned from her, though in her eyes was a yearning toward him, and her outstretched arms and swaying body drew him to her. He went away and stood apart, his back turned, shaken by the longing which beat in his veins and yet resolved not to yield an inch. He did not believe in her proclaimed theories — they were only excuses. The real reason lay in her distrust of the future. But, this seemed to him so monstrous, at the very moment when he was only conscious of the utter obsession which she had awakened in him, that he raged at the unreasonableness of the barrier which had been thrown across the promise of the future. Her very resistance seemed disloyalty to him, as though another shared her with him and strove against him. All at once a thought awoke him violently. After all, had she ever mentioned the real, the true reason?

He wheeled and went back swiftly.

"Inga, is there any one else — is that it?" he blurted out.

The suddenness of the question staggered her. She drew back, but recovered herself almost immediately.

"I have told you my true reason," she said, in a low voice.

"You have not answered. I have a right to know the truth. There is some one else," he insisted.

"You see, this is just it," she said solemnly, "you think you have the right to know everything about me.

That's what I don't admit — any such right, either over what has passed or what is coming."

"I didn't mean it that way," he said nervously. "I don't care what has been. Good Lord, I'm not asking more of you than I do of myself, but ——"

"But you must know," she said, looking at him with her sea-blue eyes, that in moments of tense emotion seemed to widen and darken.

"Yes; I must know," he said, exasperated. "I must know something about you!"

"You mean everything — everything I have done," she said, shaking her head, "every thought, all that surrounds me and makes me feel that something is hidden from the rest of the world. Oh, Mr. Dan, if I changed like that, if I were like every one else, you wouldn't care for me — I know it, I know it! Mr. Dan, isn't it enough what I'm willing to give you? Let me be as I am."

He did by instinct, at last, the thing he should have done at first. He turned with a smothered exclamation and caught her in his arms, crying hotly:

"I don't care for reasons and explanations — words, words! Whether it's right or wrong, as you see it or as I see it, whether you want to or not, I love you, and you're going to marry me!"

She closed her eyes; her body yielded in his arms and hung there inertly. Intoxicated, he believed, in this physical surrender, and with his lips close to her cheek, he poured out his heart to her, swayed by blinding tempestuous madness that found its answer in this unreason. Her eyes remained closed, her lips buried against his shoulder, where her head was pressed in a last instinctive defense. Suddenly she felt herself growing faint, threw back her head, avoided his lips, and flung herself loose, giddy and swaying, her hands to her temples, crying:

"No, no, Mr. Dan; don't carry me away! It's not fair!"

"What! You can be calm now?" he said, following her.

"I am not calm — I am not!" she cried. "Don't you know that I love you? Oh, it isn't fair to sweep me off my feet like this; it isn't fair!"

A shiver went through her body; she covered her face with her hands and went to the window and threw it open. A long moment later he came to her side and laid his hand lightly on her arm.

"I'm sorry, I lost my head, Inga; I couldn't help it."

She turned, quite calm again, and looked at him with a smile.

"I'm glad you did," she said frankly. "It's something, something to remember — and it makes me believe."

"I'm going to ask you once more," he said solemnly.

The evening was about them, and they stood in the obscurity, their faces but faintly visible to each other, and when their hands touched, they trembled.

"I cannot," she said, turning away. "Wait! You remember that night when we met the child leading the drunkard? You remember what I said — about memories? Well, that was my life; I was that child. My father was that and more — more than you can imagine, more than I can tell. And my mother lived with him, suffering every insult, every horror you can imagine. She lived with him, because she hadn't the courage to break away — because they had brought her up to believe that when she married she belonged to her husband, body and soul. I saw what marriage was then, and I saw my sister, too, bound and sold to a man she couldn't care for — a man who had a little money — a good bargain — and I know what marriage was, to her. She told me — when she hoped she was going to die. I hate marriage! I hate a thing that can enslave and degrade women as though they were brutes and convicts. Now, don't you see what it means to me to remain a free human being, just as free in the giving as before?

He was silent, seeking to evoke out of the past the figure of the child that her words had thrown before his imagination, amazed at this revelation of a thinking woman. She, too, was silent a moment. Then she turned.

"Give me your hand," she said proudly. "Listen, Mr. Dan: If I take you and you take me — just you and I, the only ones who count — can anything be more reverent, more sacred than as we are now?"

Still he did not answer, though he raised his eyes and looked at her profoundly. There was no confusion in her eyes, no hesitancy in the softness of her voice as she continued.

"I will go with you, I will never fail you, I will be happy to give whatever you ask of me. I will do this as long as you love me and need me. Won't this mean anything to you, Mr. Dan — won't this satisfy you?"

He shook his head. His face in the dusk was stern and gray, for he realized at last the gravity of the obstacle that lay between them. The very gentleness in his voice showed her how resolute he, too, was in his conviction.

"You may think one way, Inga dear," he said gently; "I think another. I couldn't love you if I did you this wrong. I couldn't, for wrong it would be to me. If I can't have you as my wife, I won't have you at all." He waited a moment, and then added slowly as though weighing each word: "Now I'm not going to be a coward and threaten to go to the dogs to play on your sympathies. You have given me more than I had a right to take, and

I'm going to try and hold what we've won together. Only — I've got to fight it out alone."

"What do you mean?" she said, putting out her hand as though to ward off a blow.

For a moment, he lost control of himself — they were close together, and the dark had obliterated the room.

"I mean I can't stand it! Flesh and blood can't stand it!" he broke out. "Inga, I can't have you near me — that I can't do! It's got to be one way or the other — all or nothing!"

"You mean I can't — can't come here any more?" she said, with a catch in her voice. "You mean I must go?"

"Yes; you must go," he said, with a long breath. His hands flashed up and caught her shoulders and then fell limply again. He turned with an inarticulate cry and went hurriedly over to the switch and flung on the lights. At a gesture he gave of mute entreaty she went to the door, slowly and heavily, with dragging step. With her hand on the knob she turned.

"I can't," she said hopelessly. "There's nothing in the world I wouldn't give you, Mr. Dan — except that. I can't — it's my belief; it's — it's me!"

XXXIII

Dangerfield kept his promise to Inga. Breeding and training in him were too finely aristocratic for him to surrender weakly under the girl's eyes. He went to his easel each morning with the early hours, sometimes in the company of Tootles, sometimes alone. Each day he passed Inga in the hall and exchanged cheery greetings with forced gaiety, but beyond this they did not meet. He laid before himself the task of finding himself if it could be done, now that his whole day had to be reorganized and the figure of the young girl banished from it. At the bottom he knew the task was beyond him. He knew himself and the child in the artist that cried out for comradeship and love.

If the change was noticed in the Arcade, no one spoke to him of it. Tootles had looked surprised when Inga had not appeared the first mornings, but kept his own counsel. Mr. Cornelius, too, after a first inquiry, made no further reference to Inga's absence, though he made a point of dropping in more frequently.

The crisis brought the two men together in a closer companionship, in a subtle instinct of class loyalty. To cap it all, Mr. Cornelius, in his most formal manner, invited Dangerfield to dine with him on the occasion of his monthly pilgrimage to Delmonico's.

At half-past seven, Dangerfield, who had been fidgeting in his studio, doing a dozen things by fits and starts, dressed and started down the hall. Two things had induced him to accept an invitation which threw him momentarily back into the world he shunned. He realized how strong must be the sense of comradeship in Mr. Cornelius to break through his habits of tenacious secrecy. Moreover, his curiosity was strongly excited by the mystery of "the baron's" monthly departure *en prince,* which had taxed the imagination of the Arcadians. Since the morning after his first arrival on the sixth floor, Dangerfield had never set foot in the old man's den, for with the exception of Pansy Hartmann, for whom he showed a noticeable affection, Mr. Cornelius had never exchanged an intimacy.

When Dangerfield reached the end of the hall, he found the door open and Pansy, who had been hastily summoned, busy with the final touches of Mr. Cornelius' tie, over which he was as particular as an old beau.

"All ready?" said Dangerfield, stopping at the threshold by discretion.

"*Entrez, entrez, mon vieux!* Come in — I am with you in one little moment!" cried Mr. Cornelius, who was in such a pitch of excitement that he was springing about like a débutante on the eve of her first ball. "Aha, we will make a night of it, a dinner like that at the Café Anglais and a bottle of wine to make you dream! *Faisons la noce!* two old *boulevardiers, deux vieux moustaches — hein?* Panzee, *ma mignonne,* what are you doing there with that tie?"

"Why, Mr. Cornelius," exclaimed Pansy, laughing, "how can I do anything when you're prancing around like that? Stand still and put your chin up!"

"That is so — that is so. There, I'm frozen to the ground. What a night!"

Pansy thrust an imperious finger toward the ceiling, and he obeyed by elevating his chin, not without grumbling, while the operation was completed with nicety.

"There, you're handsome as Chauncey Olcott!" said

Pansy, smiling at his excitement. "You'll have all the ladies twisting their heads after you."

"My hat and my cane!" exclaimed "the baron," as gayly as though he had cried, "My helmet and my sword!"

Pansy disappeared in the closet and emerged polishing a hat that might have come from a museum. Dangerfield, meanwhile, gave a last careful survey of the room. In one corner was a four-poster bed with the faded peacock-blue dressing-gown pendent below a tousled nightcap of gray silk. What furniture there was, and it consisted of a table, a chest of drawers, a bookcase, three chairs, and a massive Breton chest heavily reinforced with iron clasps, was mostly reminiscent of the First Empire which was "the baron's" hobby, for the walls were covered with engravings of the great Conqueror. Between the windows was the full-length portrait of an actress of the last generation — a striking figure in the costume of Adrienne Lecouvreur, slender and towering, a magnetic brow, ethereal eyes, and, below, the smile of a pagan.

Dangerfield stood before the portrait in long and profound study. Mr. Cornelius, turning from a search through the confusion of his wardrobe for the newest pair of gloves, looked up and saw the reverie into which his friend had fallen.

"*Elle était bien belle,*" said Dangerfield, catching his eye.

"*N'est ce pas?*" The aristocratic little figure drew up in a sort of military attention. He glanced at the woman in the frame and then at the room in which they stood. "It was worth it," he said smiling, with that loyalty unto sentiment that never dies in the soul of a Frenchman.

"What are you two talking about?" said Pansy, poutl the

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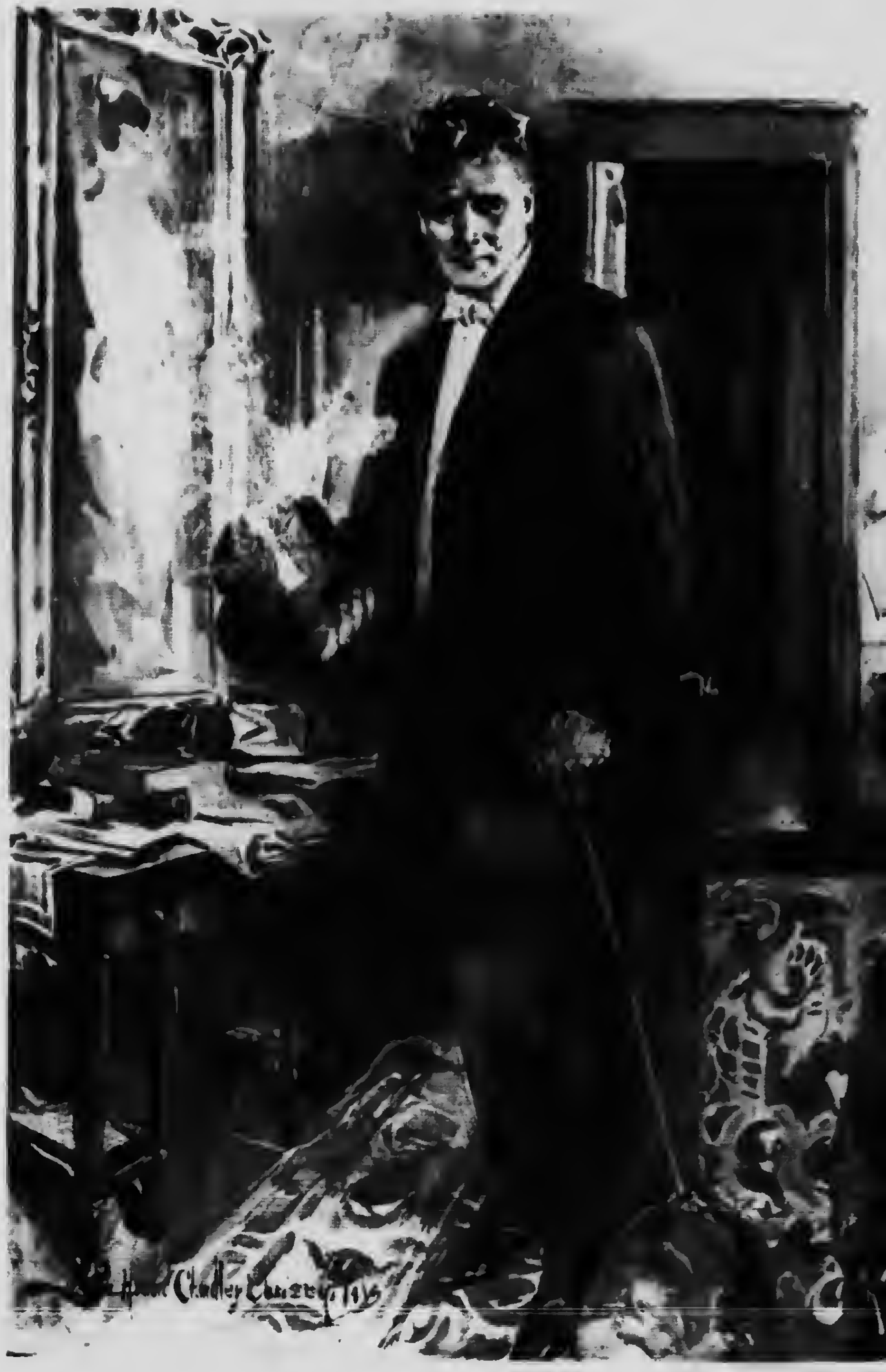
Howard Chandler Christy 1915

“My hat and my cane!” ex

ne!" exclaimed "the baron." *Page* 316.

ing. "I don't think it's at all decent of you to talk French before me."

"There, there, *ma petite amie!*" said Mr. Cornelius, patting the pink cheeks. "Don't scold! Monsieur Dangerfield was saying only what he could say of you — that the lady was very beautiful."

"Did you know her?" said Pansy, opening her eyes.

"I had the great privilege of seeing her act," said Dangerfield carefully, at which Mr. Cornelius sent him a pleased glance.

Pansy mollified, placed the odd hat upon "the baron's" head, tilting it a little to one side, so as to give him a rakish look, and snuggled him into his overcoat, which likewise had a decided reminiscent note. Dangerfield felt a sudden pang in watching this affectionate solicitude — a feeling of an emptiness in his own life — of something that had been and had been taken away. The thought of Inga, of the close companionship, of the strange, elusive girl, who had watched over him and fought his struggles, threw him into such a swift dejection that Mr. Cornelius, noticing it, cried out:

"No blue devils to-night! *En avant, mon vieux,* and to the charge! Panzee, an old fellow kisses your cheek with respect and gratitude — *merci!*"

But as he started out, he stopped, mumbled something to himself, and going back to the chest, unlocked it with a key that hung from his watch-chain, and, holding the lid cautiously open, began to seek among rustling papers.

"He must have diamonds there," said Pansy, laughing; "he makes such a time over that box!"

Mr. Cornelius took out several sheets of paper covered with figures, examined them carefully, thrust them in his pocket, and, after carefully locking the chest, led the way out, locking the door behind him.

Dangerfield forgot himself in a momentary absorption. He knew that his companion must receive an allowance on the first of the month, and that generally by the fifteenth it had melted away. What he knew of his past was indistinct. He had met the Comte de Retz (for Mr. Cornelius had more right to a title than the Arcadians suspected) in the first days of his own prodigal progress at Paris, where De Retz's intemperance of play at the gaming-table was public property. Dangerfield remembered vaguely the story that had run of his infatuation for the beautiful Suzanne Danesco, and the wreck of his fortune at the gaming-table, which had been the gossip of Paris for a month and then forgotten; but he recalled these things indistinctly with the feeling that there had been some arrangement by which the Comte had effaced himself to preserve the future of his son, and undertaken the gradual discharge of his debts of honor. He had never referred to these memories to Mr. Cornelius, just as he himself knew that, of all his neighbors, the keen eyes of the man of the world had seen below the surface and comprehended the crisis through which he was passing.

Outside, Dangerfield suggested the subway, only to be met with a scornful denial. For one night a month, at least, the illusion must be revived in its completeness. They hailed a taxi and arrived thus at Delmonico's. In the crowded room, their table was reserved and at each plate a gardenia was laid. Gustave, the head waiter, was at the chairs bowing recognition, visibly intrigued at the unprecedented spectacle of Mr. Cornelius arriving with a companion, nor was his surprise diminished by perceiving Dangerfield, whom he knew of old. Their entrance occasioned quite a stir among the diners, where the strangely distinctive figure of Dangerfield, with his one splash of gray amid the tangled black hair, was quickly recognized. Until this moment, he had felt no unease, too keenly interested in the unfolding mystery of his companion. But this entrance into the restaurant, this return into the old life affected him like a dash of cold water flung against his face. He felt the sudden turning of curious eyes, divined the excited flurry of whispered comments, and strode on, nervously recoiling, dimly aware that Gustave was addressing his companion as "*Monsieur le Comte,*" and that Mr. Cornelius, radiant as a collegian, was explaining that Gustave had served him in the old days when dining was an art and chefs like Joseph and Frédéric created masterpieces. He went to his seat, avoiding recognition of a dozen ready greetings, feeling all the old stubborn moroseness rising, angry at himself that he should have so thoughtlessly ventured back into the past which he had resolved to banish. All at once he was aware that Gustave was speaking to him with hasty caution,— Gustave on whose sphinxlike features was a look of dismay.

"*Pardon,* Monsieur Garford, one moment — excuse me — it will be better if I change your place."

"This is all right," he said, without much attention.

"I think you would prefer — that is — Mr. Garford — forgive me — there is some one quite near ——"

Dangerfield looked up. Two tables away, directly facing him, in a party of ten or a dozen, his former wife was sitting.

"No; this will do," he said coldly and sat down.

The test had brought back the *sang-froid* of the man of the world. He took his seat in a most natural manner, aware of what eyes must be watching his every expression, and, slipping his gardenia in his buttonhole, said, with a smile for the public, as he studied the menu which Mr. Cornelius had commanded:

"Really, de Retz, you are a connoisseur — the choice is perfection, just right — perfectly balanced. Excuse my moment's distraction. It happens that my divorced wife is sitting at the table opposite."

Mr. Cornelius hastily suggested changing seats.

"No; not for anything in the world," said Dangerfield, with a grim smile. "Go on talking — Oysters from Ostend, *petite marmité, filet de sole Café Riche* — Bravo!"

Mr. Cornelius, thus encouraged, broke into an enthusiastic discussion of each dish, explaining that he had chosen *filet de sole Café Riche,* rather than *Marguery,* as the latter was a *pièce de résistance* in itself, rather than the appropriate stepping-stone to the dish of the evening, which was a *caneton Joseph* cooked with gooseberries and *fine champagne,* with a bottle of Chambertin genuine *cuvée de 1872* from the Marquis de Severin's special reserve. While the old gourmet discoursed thus eloquently on the art of the immortal Vatel, Dangerfield looked at the woman who had been his wife, to whom he had yielded the period of his fullest youth. He did not shift his glance, he stared at her steadily, wondering, not taking pains to mask his curiosity, though he was aware that she flinched under the estimate. How was it possible that this woman, whom he saw now in the nakedness of her cold calculating, could have given him a moment's torture!

"Really," he thought to himself, "it must have been something in me, a need of an outward inspiration that blinded me and cloaked her with illusions,— I myself in love with what I profoundly longed for and created in my need!"

But if Louise had no longer power to wound him on his own account, she brought back to him, with overwhelming sadness, the memory of Inga, and the ceaseless, burning need that all the deeper sources of his nature had of her sustaining presence. Of those who were at the table, he knew almost all, men and women of a fashionable set, several defiant of social censure, others too firmly entrenched to be judged by their companions. Every one at the table must have known what Louise Bowden was, what she had done and would dare to do. This then was respectability — of an extreme cast, yet social respectability! Almost was he inclined toward Inga's scorn of convention and defiance of society, of complete denial of the world to judge them with the same standards with which it accepted those who bent towards its outward forms.

"A little glass of Amontillado with the oysters," said "the baron," "just to flavor them!"

He looked down, his fingers closed over the slender neck of his glass that held the first golden stream back to forgetfulness. He hesitated, shrugged his shoulders, and drank.

When he had groped his way down the hall and found with difficulty his door, one thing was clear to him even in the swirling, happy numbness of his brain. He knew now the secret of "the baron's" strange existence, of his brilliant monthly recrudescence and the long days of subsequent denial. He knew now what the sheets of paper covered with ordered figures meant, and the explanation or the curious, whirring noises which often at the dead of night came from behind the door of Mr. Cornelius. "The baron" was still, as he had always been, a blind, insensate gambler, passionately absorbed in the quest of that touchstone of gamblers, the pursuit of the infallible system which once attained held the alchemy of success. From Delmonico's they had gone to a select gambling-house in the Forties, where the Comte de Retz was as punctual as the calendar, and where he returned, night after night, until the quick and inevitable night when ill luck overwhelmed his meager capital — a meager moment of dramatic sensations, and then the inevitable return to the bleak existence in the lone studio lit by the flare of an arc-light.

Dangerfield came into his room, threw on the single gold-shaded table-lamp and sat down beyond the circle of light that cut the shadows of the studio. He felt painfully, treacherously awake, and he knew that, for the black balance of the night, sleep would not come until he fell over with physical fatigue at the mingling of the dawn. His surroundings, which lately had come into his intimacy, rousing the pleasant sense of the harmonious, now were empty and hostile. The living touch was absent, in the absence of Inga, just as, in the early days of his apprenticeship, he had felt in his muddy attempts at painting, the absence of the illuminating sense of atmosphere.

How a human touch colors the inanimate world with the communicated warmth of its enchantment! Yes; her absence had changed all. It was no longer the spot for dreams he had called it — each tapestry chair and table no longer wrapped around with the memory of her, of returning hope and struggling ambition — but a cold and deserted thing, which claimed him, too, cold and deserted. He loved her beyond what he had thought possible, beyond what he had believed lay in him to love, not simply as a part, though the vital element in his life, but as the whole world, the window through which all sensations must come to him. He had felt this realization in the tricked-out gaiety of the restaurant, in the sudden lightening of his heart as he had stood behind Mr. Cornelius, looking up at the ghost of the fatal romance which had sent him into exile, comprehending the man who, over the flight of years, could still pronounce that the past had been worth all that had been and was to come.

He had felt it in his revolt against all he had been born to, struggled against, and lived with in compromise. He felt it now in his isolation and exile, so overwhelmingly that he sprang up and flung on all the lights, terrified at the reality of his utter loneliness, staring at his reflection in the mirror as though at some uncomprehended stranger. The need in him now was as fierce as the horror of the isolation he had imposed on himself — which he could break with a word, which depended only on him.

After all, why not? What she had pronounced as her theory of life and love he had himself a hundred times acclaimed in conversation, heard dozens of others maintain. His brain was soaring on fiery wings with the divine frenzy of genius, which lifts itself up with pinions which consume themselves. He was drunk with the intoxication of the old world and with other days. There was something superb in it, something heroically mad — not the sordid drunkenness of small beer. He felt among the privileged of the earth. He had a cruel sense of power, the right to thrust aside petty plebeian scruples, to take what he needed. He was filled with the rage of living, desiring, conquering, to make an end of depression and weakness. Why should he stand on a scruple — that was hardly a scruple, a sentimental yielding to the conventions of right and wrong of a society of surface morality against which he had himself rebelled. He had but to cross the hall and knock, to swim back into the stream of youth and ambition. He pressed his hands to his hot temples, took a short fierce breath and said to himself:

"Will I do it? Now?"

At this moment, a knock sounded at the door. His heart stood still. Was it Inga — Inga who herself in her wretchedness had come to him, knowing his need? He went to it hastily, fearing, hoping. To his surprise, instead of the girl, it was Mr. Cornelius who stood at the door, beckoning and mysterious.

" Some one has entered my room, while we were away. Come; I show you."

XXXIV

Following Mr. Cornelius, Dangerfield went down the hall for an examination. At the bottom, he remained skeptical, despite "the baron's" assurance that the window had been locked and that the catch was now sprung. There were scratches on the surface of the iron lock of the chest and a spot of oil on the floor beside it. "The baron" was in a high state of excitement. The window-latch, he insisted, could have been sprung by an ordinary knife.

"But there are only two other rooms which give on the roof," said Dangerfield; "Miss Quirley's ——"

"No; not that."

"And Drinkwater's, which has been empty for weeks."

"Perhaps."

"That is certain."

"If so — why, then, don't they put it in rent again?" said Mr. Cornelius, shaking his head. Nothing could convince him that an attempted burglary had not taken place. In fact, he confided the fact that he had several times had a suspicion that attempts had taken place before.

To Dangerfield, the proof seemed slight — what was there in the denuded room to entice a thief? But, in order to humor the old fellow, he nodded wisely and promised to aid him with a careful search on the morrow.

He left him and went back to his room, but the tyranny of insomnia still holding him, he changed into slippers, opened the door and, in an effort at physical fatigue, began to walk the long murky corridor. Alone, in his mechanical journey, back and forth, along the creaky way, wheeling at the same points so mechanically that he fell to counting his steps, he saw all at once, under the door of Inga's room, a tiny ray of light come out. She was there, awake; she had heard him — was waiting, perhaps, wrung by the same torture which dominated him, feeling the same ache of separation. She was there — waiting!

His imagination began to whirl again. He had an impulse to break through things, to fling obstacles aside, to hurl down all that intervened; and yet he hesitated. A dozen times he approached the door in an angry revulsion against his self-imposed test, and a dozen times passed on. Once he stopped, leaning against the wall, staring at the knob, which seemed to turn under his eyes. She was there, she must be there, waiting miserably. The sensation was so acute that he felt her living, breathing presence on the other side of the door, her hand waiting on the knob that seemed to turn under his eyes! And yet he went away and continued up and down the hall, staring at the same points, counting the steps — up and down — until the sickly dawn flowed in like an inundation, and still the crack under her door shone like the blazing edge of a sword blade. . . .

The next afternoon, his model dismissed in despair, Dangerfield sat, head in his hands, staring at the meaningless canvas. He could not work. He had not worked since the day he had sent Inga out of his life.

The drag of sleepless hours lay on him, and the profound void of the victory he had won in the long marches of the night. Sitting there, in graven silence, he asked himself:

"Why didn't I go in?"

And when he had put the question to himself again and again, he understood. He had not yielded, because the need of the inspiration of a great love in his life was deeper than his need of love itself, because in the fulness of his maturity he comprehended that, in his artist's ideality, only a love that meant aspiration and veneration could restore life to him, and that this love he must protect and hold sacred even against itself.

It was not that he did not comprehend the essential innocence of the girl's offer, or the nobility of her courage, but that, deeper than his intellectual comprehension, he knew that in him a moral fire existed which he had not suspected until the love which had impelled him with longing to the charming figure of the girl had illuminated its depths. Despite all his reasons, despite a mental defiance of conventions, he knew that what called to him from a hidden consciousness was unselfishness, and by that token he knew, too, how much his whole being, his day, and his hope of the future loved and clung to her.

What had she felt these miserable days? He knew that she, too, had suffered. He had seen it in the stricken tensity of her silent, deep eyes, when they had passed in the hall, or when they had met in Tootles' studio, where she went often now, to be near him silently, no doubt. And between them what a ridiculous barrier intervened — a distorted conception of liberty, born in the intimate tragedy of the past, fed by the ill-considered doctrines of the day — Yet at times he wondered if that were all, if there were not, below her avowed reasons, causes he could not divine. What did he know about her? The longer he had known her, the deeper into the mists her figure had receded. A few hints she had dropped — of her home, of her father; a few scraps of gossip about the young sculptor who had been here before him; a few indications; Costello's recognition in the dance-hall; the haunting feeling, which had come to him in his days of distress, that there was something in all his exactions and struggles which was not new to her; the strange feeling that had possessed him at times that some one else was present at their side; her own calm insistence that what had passed before did not touch them now — all these confusing memories closed behind her, forbidding the return toward the past as though with impenetrable velvet folds of oblivion. Yet the strangeness of it all fascinated him — the audacity that had borne her where she was, the untamed pride which lingered in the slow-breaking, confident smile that suffused the room and his being with happiness; the echoes of hidden waters which sounded in her low, modulated voice, that had power to dispel hot fevers and bring him the cool of tranquillity, as though gentle fingers had passed across his forehead; the steady depths of the sea-blue eyes, which had looked gravely out upon the storm and the sunshine of life — all this had him in its cruel-sweet spell. His ears heard nothing but remembered echoes, and his eyes were clouded with the obsession of one figure, slender and supple, with the grace of an untamed animal, whose motions were like the rhythm of sweet sounds. He suffered so keenly the torture of these eluding charms that he sprang up with a groan, crying her name, and, all at once, he saw her there in the room, like a shadow, gazing down at him.

He did not dare to speak. He stood silently, his glance fastened on hers, across the little lapse of golden carpet which lay between them like stretches and stretches of space. He did not dare to speak; he was afraid of what her first words would bring, and this nameless terror was so overwhelming that at last he fell back in his chair and covered his face with his hands.

Then he was faintly aware that she was speaking, that her body was swaying toward him, like a perfume spreading through the room.

"Mr. Dan, I can't — I can't bear it!"

The next moment he had sprung up; she was in his arms, her head pressed against his shoulder, trembling like a child, crying:

"Oh, no, I can't bear it; I can't bear to see you suffer."

"Yes; that is true," he said solemnly — waiting.

"I was there last night behind the door," she said, in a whisper. "Oh, why didn't you call me?"

"Why didn't you come?" he said, with a quick breath.

Her lips moved as though she were about to speak, and then stopped.

"You were not serious, that was not the true reason — what you said about marriage," he said tumultuously.

She disengaged herself from his arms and raised her eyes to his face, furrowed with the sleepless pain which she had drawn across it. She looked at him thus, a long wait, her lip wavering. Then she said, without averting her eyes:

"Must it be so? You still insist?"

His answer was a cry, inarticulate, wrung from him despite his effort at control, at finding her still unreconciled.

"Wait," she said hastily. She looked away from him and then down and about her forehead and the slender lips the lines drew in hardness. "I can't; I cannot see you suffer. I know that — that is all I know!" she said desperately, and she flung back her head as though flinging sudden tears from her eyes.

"Inga!" he burst out, but she stopped him quietly, her fingers over his lips.

"I will do as you wish," she said firmly, "on one condition." She seemed to be thinking a moment, and all at once she continued rapidly. "You are an honorable man — I know that — I knew that last night — you will do what you say you will do. Look at me, Mr. Dan;

promise me on your honor, that whenever I come to you and ask you — you will give me back my liberty, that you will set me free."

"Whenever?" he said slowly, staring at her.

She hesitated, and her eyes seemed searching into his with faraway questioning.

"*If* I come to you, then," she said carefully.

"If you ever come to me with such a demand," he said slowly, "I shall do everything to give you back your freedom. That is a promise. I would have done so, anyhow."

She nodded as though satisfied. Then with a dignity that held him breathless, she placed her hand on his and said as though to her the words constituted a ceremony,

"Mr. Dan, your life will be my life. I will have no other thought but you in my heart — and no other desire but to give you what is in me to give."

"Then — you will marry me," he said slowly.

"Whenever you wish."

"This is final, Inga? You will not change?"

"You did not understand," she said quietly. "Nothing a stranger can say can make me more yours than I am now."

"And you love me?" he cried tempestuously. "Inga, that is what I want to hear you say. You love me so that you can't think of anything else, so that you can't keep from me, so that to be out of my sight is torture?"

She caught her breath at the frenzy in his voice.

"Would I be here if I didn't?" she said.

He stood away from her a moment, scanning her tense face greedily, satisfied at last. Yes; she loved him, beyond her pride, beyond her stubborn beliefs, beyond her fears even! She loved him so that nothing stood against his need that cried out for her!

He put out his arms, swept away by a confusing intoxication. She seemed to sink into his embrace, the moist, warm lips, half parted, which met his, were almost lifeless in their sudden frailty, but the hands against his throat were like ice. He hung on this first kiss as though in it lay his salvation; a strange, terrifying contact in which he seemed to be drawing her up to him, taking from her not only all her love but all her strength, all her youth, all the pulsing vigor of her body, its softness and its freshness to quicken his tired veins. He had taken everything, and yet it seemed to him that she had given nothing. He lifted her face to his, gazing into it with a hunger that had awakened never to be satisfied. Her lips were smiling, but in her eyes was the sadness of renunciation, the melancholy of the gray sea when the heavy winter weighs upon the land, and the bitter mists creep across the face of the day — the sadness of the sea that holds the secrets of time.

"Ah, Inga," he cried, with sudden divination, "don't look like that! Believe me, it'll be you, only you — all my life!"

She looked into his eyes and smiled, and while she smiled, the tears rose and fell.

XXXV

The whole Arcade seemed to change under the magic of Dangerfield's radiating happiness. Though neither he nor Inga ever referred to what had been settled between them, every one seemed to understand with the first glimpse of his glowing face. The singing in his heart seemed to spread its note of joy insensibly among his neighbors. Perhaps he had not comprehended before how they had watched breathlessly, waiting the outcome in fear and wonder.

As though a tension had relaxed, the hall seemed to sparkle with life; doors stood open in friendly invitation, and a constant running-in and -out filled the floor with excited whispers and young laughter. O'Leary, at the piano, pounded away for dear life, rolling out infectious marches, which had Tootles wheeling and counter-marching in imitation of his favorite Amazon parade. "The baron" trotted about, singing to himself snatches of Boulevard songs of other days, mumbling over certain portions which might be understood. Miss Quirley was so sentimentally aroused that she clung to Inga's hand at the first opportunity. Indeed, she would have liked to give away to the consoling pleasure of tears, but there was something about Inga's profound and grave attitude which forbade such demonstrations, and she was forced to spend her emotional reserves upon Myrtle, whose wedding-day was fixed for the middle of the week.

The marriage was to be at high noon, the wedding-party was to return to the Arcade, where Dangerfield was to give the breakfast. Mr. Pomello had contemplated an impressive banquet in a private salon of the neighboring hotel, with arbors of flowers, scattered flunkeys, and set pieces of horticultural dishes, which represented to his mind splendor in the shape of plateaus of lobster salad with Cupids and hearts entwined in crustacean decorations, frozen sculpture in colored ices, with fish and game entrées from culinary taxidermists. The proposal was met with indignation and peremptorily vetoed by the lady most involved.

The slightest suggestion of being displayed, of being put on parade, sent her into gusts of temper. Mr. Pomello, who could not understand the reasons of her impatience, acceded hastily. In fact, during the last week he had been on tenterhooks, so fearful that she would change her mind and throw him over at the last moment that his stress of mind was patent to all. In truth, there was reason for his apprehension. Myrtle Popper, as the day approached, grew more restless and unsettled. For a word, she would flare up into a sudden anger, nor try as he would, could he divine what action of his would displease her. With the others, particularly toward Millie Brewster, who appeared to avoid her, she was haughty, abrupt, and suspicious of a whisper or a low-pitched tone, as though she felt she were being made the subject of ridicule. King O'Leary, during this time, was noticeably absent, seldom appearing in the studio and then only in the company of others.

The afternoon before the ceremony arrived, and the hours were spent in excited preparation for the morrow. Dangerfield, camped on a step-ladder and bombarded with copious and futile suggestions from Tootles below, was endeavoring to hang a symbolic Cupid, with arrows of mistletoe, in the center of radiating garlands of smilax, which ran to every point of vantage in the room. Flick, stretched on the sofa, his hands under his head, was adding his yawning suggestions to the general confusion of the girls, who were passing and repassing, their arms heaped with trailing greens. Mr. Pomello, by the step-ladder, had been draped with vines until he disappeared under them like a stone satyr overgrown with ivy.

O'Leary, who had finished the moving of great pieces of furniture, had gone to the open window to cool off, when Myrtle Popper came abruptly over to his side. He looked up, measured the distance which separated them from the laughing group about the submerged Mr. Pomello, noticed the look in the girl's eyes, and realized that the interview he had persistently avoided had come.

" Hot work," he said, smiling to hide his confusion.

" Take me out to dinner to-night," she said directly.

" To-night? " he said, amazed.

" Yes; I've got to talk to you! "

He shook his head, and his face grew grave.

" No; can't do it, Myrtle — sorry."

" You mean, you won't? "

He nodded.

" Put it that way."

Her hand closed tensely over his arm.

" King, for heaven's sake let me see you; let me talk to you! You've avoided me all the week. I'm desperate! "

" Look out! " he said hastily, drawing his arm away.

" I don't care," she said defiantly. " Listen: Go down the hall, down to the third floor — there's no one there — and I'll come after you."

" No, I won't," he said angrily.

" You won't? King, you must, you must — if you don't — I — I shall scream — go mad. I can't keep up! "

" Look here," he said roughly; " you've got no right to act this way — you're about to be married, too — it ain't right, Myrtle. You've chosen — play square! "

"How do you know I'm going through with it?" she said, with a catch in her voice.

"Here, steady now — none of that!" he said, with an apprehensive glance backward.

"Lean out the window; they won't pay no attention to us," she said, under her breath. "King, you've got to listen to me! If you don't — I'll — I'll throw my arms about you — I'll do something dreadful!"

"You won't do anything of the kind."

"Yes, I will," she said obstinately. She spoke under her breath, her shoulders close to his, her lips drawn, and her gaze set in sternness over the dusty roofs and sooty chimneys. Suddenly she drew off the engagement ring Mr. Pomello had given her, a magnificent solitaire.

"Pretty fine — isn't it? — cost over a thousand, King — some diamond!"

"There'll be more of those, too," said O'Leary cunningly.

She held it gingerly in her fingers and extended her arm over the sheer dark descent into the thronged street.

"You say the word, and it's down it goes."

"And what'd Pomello say?"

"Pomello and all his rocks can go" — she laughed gaily at him, defiantly — "well, you know where — if you say the word."

"I've told you my advice," he said, looking away from her. "It's your life, not mine. What have I got to do with it?"

"Shall I marry him?" she said obstinately.

"You'd be a fool if you didn't!"

"Won't you ever understand?" she said, in a low voice.

"You ask my advice — I've told you it."

"You've told me nothing."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you understand — won't you understand that I'm throwing myself at you, King? Have I got to make myself plain?"

"Don't," he said hastily.

"What do I care? It's my last chance. Listen, King: Say the word, and I'm yours. It's you I want — it's *you*. You've made me say it — I don't care. Think of me what you want, but if you'll as much as wave your little finger at me, King, I'll follow — and that's flat!"

She stopped breathlessly and waited the answer which was forming in his mind.

"Well?" she said, at last, and her hand stole out and lay over his.

"You should not have said it," he mumbled, "you ain't in your right mind."

"That's not the answer I want," she said abruptly. "King, give it to me straight. Is it to be me and you — or ——"

"You're right, Myrtle," he said, frowning; "I've got to hand it out straight. Well, I'm sorry. It can't be."

"You're saying that because you're only thinking of the money, because you think it's too big an opportunity for me, that you oughtn't to stand in my way. Don't you think I'm flesh and blood? You don't think I can forget that — that time you took me in your arms ——"

"I shouldn't have done it!"

She laughed, a laugh that made Inga turn and glance in their direction.

"Look out!" he said hastily.

"I don't care; let them all hear! Well?"

"Well, kid, I'm sorry — sorry," he said, shaking his head. "I had no right to do what I did, because ——"

"Because you don't love me," she said quickly.

"Not in that way," he said lamely, looking away from her, across the chimneys, to the river with its floating steam clouds.

"Any one else?" she said finally.

He shook his head.

"And what you said's the truth?"

"The whole truth."

"Yes; I guess it is," she said quietly.

They stood a moment longer at the window, gazing aimlessly. Then she slipped the ring back on her finger and returned to the crowd.

The wedding-breakfast was a great success. The bride went through the day with complete equanimity, without a trace of the irritation of the past week, and came back to the Arcade a vision of youth and gaiety under the gossamer veil. She was in the liveliest spirits and danced so repeatedly with King O'Leary that all marveled, with the exception of Mr. Pomello, who moved about quite bewildered, as though he could not comprehend that this thing of beauty and joy was actually his. At the supper, every one made a speech of congratulation, with prophecies of future bliss to the bride and groom, in a wave of optimism which spread from Mr. Teagan's simple, romantic soul to Tootles, who forgave Pansy Hartmann and surreptitiously clung to her fingers under the table-cloth. Then King O'Leary rose to his toast. What made him reveal what he did no one could quite understand — perhaps it was the treacherous sentimental currents of such affairs; perhaps the explanation lay in the cunning of the punch; perhaps the real reason was understood by only Myrtle herself.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, beginning awkwardly enough, "you've all heard about what Mr. Teagan had to say about wedded bliss —"

"Thirty years, and we've yet to have our first growl!"

said Teagan joyfully, with his glass upraised to his better half.

"Thirty years and never a growl," said O'Leary solemnly, and those near him saw that he hesitated and shifted nervously. "Well, all I've got to say is, I hope —" He waved one hand awkwardly toward the bride and groom —"I hope you get off better than I did." At this, every one drew back with a scraping of chairs and looked at him in amazement. O'Leary breathed hard and went on obstinately: "Yes; I wish you never get what I got! I haven't said anything about it — a man's own affairs are his own affairs, I guess. But ten years ago, I sat down just as you're sitting down and just as proud and happy. And for a year and a half I was just that — the happiest and proudest man in North Ameriky or any other Ameriky. Then something went wrong — I never knew; I wasn't given the benefit of knowing even that. Perhaps the going was too hard — perhaps — well, anyhow, it was out in Seattle and luck was against us. We were stranded for sure — seventeenth of April — that was the day. I came back to the rooms and found them empty, everything gone, cleaned out, even to the tooth-brush on the wall and not a word of why or where for. That was eight years ago. I never knew what was wrong or why she did it. I've never heard of her since. I don't know as I ought to have chucked my tale of woe into this sort of an affair. Well, perhaps, it may be worth while to remember there are other sides — sides it's better to keep away from. I hope you'll get a better deal than I did, Mr. and Mrs. Pomello!"

He sat down abruptly and every one began talking in excited tones. Dangerfield, who was watching the blurred, staring gaze of Myrtle Pomello, formed his own opinions of why O'Leary had done what he had done, and possibly Mr. Cornelius also understood with his shrewd, kindly glance. As for the others, they were so frightened at the revelation that they flung themselves nervously into a revulsion of momentary gaiety — all except Millie Brewster. She sat quite still, looking down, and never said a word until they all rose from the table. Then she disappeared without any one's remembering just when she had left.

A week later, with only King O'Leary present, Dangerfield and Inga were married before a justice of the peace, and departed quietly for the lakes of New Hampshire, where Dangerfield had gone as a boy, and where, in the unfashionable month of May, he sought the seclusion and solitude of awakening nature, which his own reawakening soul had begun to crave. It had been her wish that there should be as little ceremony as possible, and from the court-room they drove directly to the station.

"I can't bear to think of other people watching us at such a time," she had said. "I want to feel alone."

He had nodded assent, grateful for the depth of delicacy which he divined in her. Now, in the carriage, O'Leary left behind on the curb with still uplifted hat, he had a feeling of being indeed alone, alone with strange thoughts which surprised him, alone with the sudden stranger who sat silently by his side, whose thoughts he could not divine, alone and yet violently and abruptly apart. She had passed through the ceremony as one steeled to an ordeal, gravely calm, without useless words, neither showing joy, nor elation, nor trace of shyness or excitement. When he had put the ring on her finger and the words had been pronounced which made them man and wife, she turned and looked at him — a long, searching glance that moved him so that he forgot his surroundings gazing into the profound eyes that seemed to open to him the road to tears. The judge joked him for a laggard; he caught himself, glanced down at her, and kissed her hurriedly.

"Best man's privilege!" said the judge, chuckling, while the attendants grinned.

She gravely offered her cheek to O'Leary, who hesitated and then raised her hand to his lips.

When they were at last alone, Dangerfield said abruptly:

"You can take it off now; you don't need to wear it — the ring."

She took off her glove and held up the little hand with the golden circle shining among the slender fingers. Then she drew the glove on again.

"No; I shall wear it."

He felt a strangeness in this intimacy, almost a diffidence. He wondered why he could not speak to her, but he remained silent — he could not mention trivial things, and what lay next to their hearts seemed forbidden. For the thoughts that had come to him now seemed to be the beginning of the barrier which would grow between them day by day, month by month, the prohibition that every one instinctively erects to solitudes of the soul from the encroachment of complete possession.

He had taken the final step, and he felt its finality: he had burned his bridges behind him — there was now no retreat back into the life from which he had come, into that kingdom of caste that, despite the devastation it had worked on him, still held him with remembered instinct.

"It's ended. This will be my life from now on — a life of work. The other, the old associations, the old friends are gone," he said to himself. "I have cut myself off from all that — whatever happens. I have done the right thing. I can never leave her now — no matter what happens. This is final; this is what I wanted."

It was done, and he had wished it done. Yet he was surprised at the stir in him which the realization had brought, and, though he was angry at himself, he was conscious of a certain unreasoning rebellion, not so much at the fact that his marriage meant to him the seeking of another world but that his freedom of choice had ended. The feeling seemed to him almost disloyalty. He hated himself for entertaining it, and then he glanced at Inga, sitting so straight and grave by his side, and wondered curiously if such secret thoughts could live behind the brooding of her eyes.

"What a rabble, what an insanity of noise and ugliness!" he said, at last, glancing out the window at the torpid, living masses in the street, and the ugly, vacant masses above, which shut out the sky. "Thank God, we're getting away to something clean and real!"

She nodded.

"I'm glad."

And this was all they said to each other — until they had gone through the flurry of the station and found their compartment. The porter stowed their bags, glanced at them with a smile, and went out, closing the door. Presently the train began to move, and something black and stifling closed about them. The same gravity still lay upon her, the same faraway brooding in her eyes. All at once, at the compelling touch of his hand, her glance met his, and then her lips smiled bravely.

"Doesn't it seem strange to you?" he said quietly.

"Very."

"I feel as if I have done the last thing I wanted to do — brought sorrow into your life," he said, in despair. "I don't know; I can't understand — you seem to have gone further from me than ever before."

She looked at him again, with the same intense, pro-

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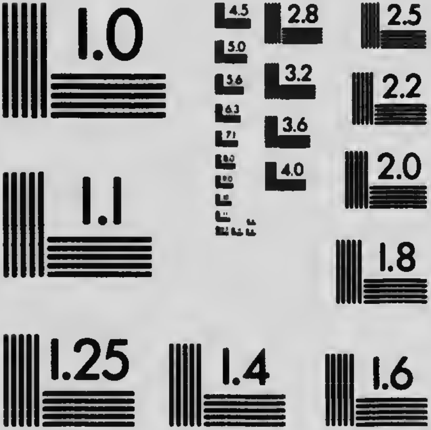
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phetic scrutiny she had given him after the ceremony. Then she put out her hand and drew his into the warm shelter of hers.

"Don't try to say anything — we can't — not now," she said. They continued to sit thus side by side silently, while the train ran on into the fading day.

XXXVI

THE porch of the bungalow was filled with trunks and packing-boxes. Across the settee, piles of clothes, outing-shirts, corduroy skirts, and sweaters were balanced in perilous pyramids. Dangerfield, pipe in mouth, bareheaded, sleeves rolled up over his tanned, muscular forearms, came out of the camp and stood a moment in frowning disapproval of an intruding motor-boat, venturing near the rocky line of the shore, evidently on curiosity bent. The bungalow stood on a projecting point, impending over the lapping waters that ran in whitening distances into broken vistas of wooded islands, while beyond, like crouching leopards, the deep blue of a mountain range bound the horizon. It was mid-July by the dryness in the air, by every leaf at rest, by the smoky haze which hung over the heated lake.

The long razor-bow of the white racer furrowed through the dull waters that rolled up angrily and snapped together in a hissing serpentine defiance.

"The third this morning!" said Dangerfield irritably. "Why can't they stay at their own end of the lake?"

The speeding boat, with its flash of white waists and colored parasols, swung around in a wide, foaming loop while the racing throb of the engine suddenly ceased. Across the water came women's voices:

"Oh, there he is now!"

"What a romantic spot!"

"She's quite pretty."

"Do you suppose they're married?"

"Hush — he may hear you!"

Then the engine took up its rhythmic hammering and
the boat shot away. Dangerfield breathed a curse at all
humanity in general and those obnoxious members in
particular who roamed in motor-boats. He went back
into the living-room, drew out a map, and spread it on
the table. For the last two weeks, with the influx of summer
visitors, even the distant seclusion of their camp
had been invaded by these human pests. Each day the
feeling of restlessness had been growing over him an
the longing for flight. The pervading green monoton
of the American summer had come, and with it the en
of the long day's sketching in the open air. Yet he ha
lingered, loath to end the dream. The two months ha
drifted away like the lazy mists of the dawn rolling o
the mountainsides. They had been rich in the living, i
the tranquillity, and in the achievement. The great liv
ing-room, with its wide windows and deep fireplace, wa
covered with sketches, rapid water-colors of transien
moods of the day, the hazy purples of the dawn, the rudd
glow of early sunset on the distant mountain-tops, whi
patches of late snow against the young, green meadow
sketches without other thought than the joy of the in
pulse — penetrating, daring, and keenly lived.

He searched the map, studied it without result, ar
finally pushed it away in indecision, glanced at his watc
and lounged out onto the steps, scanning the lake imp
tiently. Resolved to break up camp and plunge into
remoter solitude, he felt the unease of change. He h
been happy, completely happy. It had been to him hon
He took out his watch and consulted it nervously aga
restless and dissatisfied the moment he was forced to f
back upon his own company. Presently, across the la
there came a patient chug-chug of a motor which he h
learned to distinguish from every other engine, a
around the long point which shut out the village a d

appeared. Insensibly, the fretting lines about his forehead cleared and a feeling of content seemed to permeate his body. He rose, and went swinging down to the dock.

Inga stood erect in the lumbering flat-bottomed dory, her slender figure outlined against the shining lake, clad in white, her head hidden under a wide-brimmed straw hat, her hair (which she had thrown loose the minute she had left the village), floating lazily out in the breeze of the passage. He watched her eagerly, hungrily, as she came sweeping over the glassy waters like some Rhine maiden out of fairy fastnesses.

The boat slipped swiftly on, made a quick, sweeping curve, and rushed at the dock. Inga bent forward just in time, reversed the engines, and brought up snugly to the side, crying:

"Don't touch. See how well I can do it!"

He laughed, standing away, well content with the spectacle of her confident youth as she shut off the engine, leaped out, and made fast. Then she sprang lightly back, and, picking up a package, flung it to him.

"Catch. Steak for dinner. Another coming. Look out! Bread!"

He caught the deftly tossed bundles and came forward, but, disdaining assistance, she leaped lightly to the dock, holding out a pair of smudgy hands.

"Don't touch me; I'm covered with grease. Had an awful time making her go. Take my hat."

He removed the wide Panama, bending down to the lips which were offered to him. She ran to the end of the dock and kneeling splashed her hands in the water; daintiness itself in the bending slenderness of her lines, the thin skirt clinging to the willowy hips, the curved line of the leg unconsciously revealed, the spilling masses of her hair which, though caught at the back, came tumbling about her cheeks, now pouting in disdain at the soiling smudges.

All at once she straightened up, shaking the brilliant drops from her fingers, and glanced up into his face, her intuition feeling immediately the change.

"What is the matter?"

"They've been around again — three of them!"

Her face clouded; she nodded gloomily.

"The beasts! Don't mind them."

"You were away a dreadfully long time," he said restlessly.

She came to his side, passing her arm through his, smiling with the pleasure of knowing how much she had been desired.

"All the fault of the poky engine." Then she perceived the porch and the trunks which he had dragged out in his fitful impatience, and stopped with an involuntary exclamation of dismay.

"Time to break up camp," he said fretfully. "It's impossible here!"

"Yes; I suppose so," she said slowly.

"I can't stand being spied on — being watched. I can't paint."

"But it's midsummer ——"

"I know that, and yet it annoys me. I can't bear to be idle. There's so much to be done! It isn't that — it's — it's I want to get away — to be alone. You understand?"

"Of course."

She nodded, trying to conceal her disappointment, though, for a moment, the horror of change, of the venture into an unknown land was so keen, that she burst out suddenly:

"I hate to go!"

"I also — I hate to go," he said gloomily.

"It's not what it is now," she said wistfully, with a little gesture toward the wooded shelter which had been the first note of home to her; "it's all it has been."

"But we'll find another spot just as this was — away from the world." She turned away, but he caught her arm. "Inga, dear — why, you are crying!"

"No, no — I am not," she said, her lips quivering and her deep gray-blue eyes swimming with the film of tears she could not control. Then, all at once, she broke from him and ran away, disappearing in the woods with an imploring wave of her hand. In five minutes she was back, as though nothing had happened, smiling bravely.

"Mr. Dan, I'm ashamed of myself!"

Whenever she wished to tease him out of a contrary mood by arousing his ire, she addressed him as she had done in the old days of the Arcade. This time, he understood that she was struggling with her own moods, and smiled indulgently.

"If you behave that way, we'll bundle right back to New York!"

"Oh, no; you won't do that — not yet!" she cried, frightened by the suggestion. She approached, looked at him curiously and said, "Where shall we go?"

"You've forgotten what I promised you," he said smiling.

"The sea!" she cried rapturously.

He nodded.

"But where? Won't everything be crowded with people?"

"Not the place I'm thinking of," he said. "A little island up off the Maine coast, fifty miles from a railroad, where no human being thinks of going — by 'human being,' you know what I mean — inhuman beings. There are lots of fishermen and farmers and rocks and curious old inlets, filled with pirates and sea-serpents."

" Really — and the sea — the sea itself!"

" The sea that comes sweeping in with great, long, sleek combers. Only, I have written to an old skipper of mine and don't know why I haven't got an answer," he added, frowning.

" Oh, in Maine — I forgot!"

She dove into her waist and brought out a letter in contrite embarrassment. " Came to-day. I'd quite forgotten!"

He glanced at the postmark eagerly, nodded, and read the letter rapidly.

" It's all right," he said, glancing up brightly. " Inga, there's a little shack waiting for us, in the wildest, rockiest cove you ever imagined, and the sea goes thundering around the point!"

She was so excited that she could not believe it until he had shown her the letter and she had devoured it herself with her own eyes. Then she sprang into his arms, closing her hands about his neck, glowing and tremulous, frantic with joy and happiness, in one of those rare moments, seldom in the day, when she showed him the tumultuous depths of her emotions. After a while they grew quieter, and she said:

" All the same — I hate to go — it's been so simple — so natural here, hasn't it?"

He nodded gravely.

" It's better to remember it so — a memory without a regret."

He was profoundly in love, even to the point of being amazed at the completeness of his emotion. Everything about her surprised him. In the first moments he had said to himself that his days would be glorified by the great love of his life, but that he would not be able to work. He found, on the contrary, that, by some sure instinct, she did not obsess his thoughts, or, rather, that she blended into a new eagerness of his imagination which brought feverish awakening of all his mental faculties. Instead of intruding, she seemed to evade him. He loved her with an increasing desire, for the very reason that, after weeks of marriage, she remained a greater mystery than ever. In the disillusionizing intimacy of daily life, ordinarily so fatal to the fragile garments of romance, she still kept herself aloof and veiled from him. From what instinct, he did not know — perhaps from a certain unconquerable maiden revolt against the possessing instinct of marriage, a rebellion of the imagination, a lawlessness of the soul. Whatever the reason — instinct, premeditation, or rebellion — he was grateful, and did not seek other answer.

She had strange moods of delicacy that amazed him. In the daytime, or, rather, in the high beat of the sun, she seemed always on guard, watching him with alert eyes that remained closed in mystery to his gaze, seldom showing emotion, instantly checking it if a rare moment carried her away. Yet, at the turn of the day, in the transforming touc [illegible] light, she came closer to him; he felt her deep ey [illegible] in glowing intensity, and her hand, without hesi [illegible] came stealing into his, while through her whole body, something soft and clinging seemed to compel her to the contact of his strength. By night, in the secret hours of rustling leaves and murmur of stirring waters washing the broken shore, with note of far-off hoot-owl and slanted silver shower of moonbeam across the boarded walls, she was a creature all fire and tenderness; of startled passion and languorous nestling — and each morning, when he awoke, the place at his side was vacant. At his call, she came flitting in from the porch, radiant and ready for the day. Gradually, he comprehended that she never wished him to see her off her guard.

disheveled, heavy-lidded, or otherwise than pleasing to his eye.

Once he questioned her, accusing himself from motives of curiosity.

"It's not quite fair. If you're going to steal away like that, I should forbid your returning to gaze on me." He shuddered with mock emotion. "Heavens, what a sight a man asleep must be, gaping, unshaven and tousled!"

She shook her head.

"That's a different thing."

"How so?"

"It makes no difference how you look; you would be the same to me in rags and mud. I love you for your strength."

"And I?"

"You love me for what you see," she said, after a moment's hesitation.

"That's not true," he said, catching her shoulders.

"Not entirely," she admitted, smiling. She studied him a moment, with a far-away anxiety and then added: "I want you to love me as an artist. I suppose I have queer ideas. Am I right?"

He caught her roughly to him with a laugh, well content.

"You are a profound philosopher, young lady," he said; "you have analyzed the psychology of marriage admirably — though, at the bottom, I don't believe you realize at all what makes you do what you do."

"I want you to see me always at my best," she said, smiling.

"The queer thing is I can never paint you," he said, releasing her and frowning. "I have a feeling I never shall succeed. Heaven knows I've tried enough ——"

In fact, he had tried not once but a score of times, always starting eagerly, always turning away, impatient at an expression which eluded him.

"That will come."

"No; I don't believe it will."

At the bottom, undoubtedly, it was because she herself still eluded him. He sought in vain to discover what lay in her hidden thoughts. Sometimes, he believed her a woman who had read deeply, listened, and considered much; again, he returned eagerly to the idea that she was only a child of nature, primitive and finely intuitive. Yet there were moments when she seemed to comprehend in ways that astonished him. When he discussed with her, she seemed to absorb his ideas, through the channels of her sentiments, and often, by a phrase, illuminated a thought which was struggling for clarity. But if he came up against an opinion of her own and sought to change it by argument, she became confused at once, incapable of logically perceiving the truth or falsity of a contention. Often, too, it seemed to him that he caught an echo of a far-away personality in a thought which he could not associate with her. Then he would turn away with an uncontrollable jealousy of the past, of the thing of which he could never make her speak.

His curiosity as to Champeno increased as he felt the unfailing charm which she drew about him night and day. Who had given her the comprehension of the insatiable curiosity of a man's soul which must be met with constant evasion, of the perilous disillusionment of intimacy which must never be permitted to seize the last veil? What kind of a man had been this other man in her life, and to what extent had he captured her imagination?

The questions on his lips were forbidden by their compact and yet his curiosity never died out — and for that, in the happiest moments, he suffered much.

In the first weeks, with the rimming ice on the sparkling blue waters and the snow patches against the smoky blue of the mountains, brilliant with reflected pinks and violets of the dawn and the sunset, he had plunged into open-air sketching with the avidity of a glutton. He wanted impressions, instantaneous, striking, and unified. He steeped himself in the melting, drifting moods of the sky and the mirrored waters, longing for color as a musician craves feasts of harmonious sounds. He worked rapidly, seizing an impression in an hour, in thirty minutes, ignoring the triviality of details, consumed only by the desire to imprison a secret of nature's improvisation, a flaming orange subduing and modulating a world of grays and barbaric blues as a race spreads its culture over history, the yielding of a tone, the tragedy of a fairy maze of shimmering gold, fading into the melancholy of the dusk — all these and a hundred other vibrant, vital impulses he set down with rapid brush, without consciousness or criticism, buoyed up by the joy of working and the confidence of a flowing stroke.

At first, he had insisted on Inga's working at his side, but she quickly perceived that the suggestions he turned to give her were distracting him and resolutely refused to continue. Rainy days, when he was forced to stay indoors, he was like a trapped panther, and then, with the coming of the night, the old thirst which lurked still unconquered in his flesh awoke fiercely and gripped him in its wide-eyed fatigue. Sometimes the craving in him was so imperious that he would call her in a frenzy of restlessness, and together, clad in boots and slickers, lit by a swinging lantern that sent long, scouting rays through the crowded woods where slender birches flashed in ghostly silhouettes, they would go tramping through the night, scaring up woodland marauders that flung off with a scurry of leaves at their approach.

Or other nights, when the sky was friendly, he would place Inga in the bottom of the canoe, well cushioned and balanced at the stern, and would send the black waters foaming behind them for long, vigorous hours, while he tired the physical rebellion that lay in his aching appetite. They spoke rarely, each of a taciturn temperament, well content to be absorbed into the expanding night with its solitary sounds. Sometimes they would return for a few hours' sleep snatched before the coming of the day, and sometimes they would linger for a glorious moment of sketching in the fugitive maiden hour of the dawn. Then he would come back to camp, worn with weariness and the inner struggle, to fall into a heavy slumber, drifting into insensibility with Inga's hand clasped in his. When he awoke beyond high noon, she would be sitting on the steps, her chin in her hand, gazing out at Catamount, where the storms came rolling down to whip the lake. By some strange instinct, the moment his eyes opened she seemed to feel his gaze on her and sprang up immediately, coming lightly to his side, her skirts and silken blouse all aflutter with the freshness of the morning breeze. In those long reaches of the night, when he threw all his weight on her slender strength, she seemed the happiest and the closest to him. What weariness she herself felt she hid from him, ready for a foray into the night at any moment, tender, gentle, and healing in her touch, which at times knew, in a sudden gust of emotion, how to still the beating restlessness that held him. He loved her profoundly and yet he seldom showed it in a spoken word — the reticence of her own nature laying its spell of silence over his.

XXXVII

ONCE possessed with the thought of change, Dangerfield wished to be off at once. He had lived so keenly in the region of sensations these last months, that only sensations new and unmastered could answer the craving of the artist, which had found a rebirth in the new life of the senses. The green unanimity of the July woods and the brazen expanse of the heated sky tormented his eye. He felt a longing for the region of the sea, whose moods have alone infinite variety, ever stirring, changing and changeless.

The next night, prepared for departure with the morning, they sat on the steps of their camp, hand in hand.

" When I've made up my mind to go, I can't bear to wait," he said, all at once. "Are you like that?"

She shook her head.

" I love to stick to the things I know," she said softly.

The day had gone down in stillness and lassitude; the night hung over them from the hollow bowl of the sky. Above the sharpened silhouette of Catamount, crouching against the horizon, the sinking bulb of the moon, like some molten mass, seemed burning sullenly. By some odd effect of rising mists, the red reflection fell on the glassed lake in a single glowing tongue of flame. But, even as they watched, a stirring in the air brought a rippling, spreading dance of moonbeams across the waters to their feet. A few leaves whispered above their heads.

" Hot to-morrow," he said.

" Yes."

Neither heard the inconsequential words with which they veiled their thoughts. He was profoundly penetrated by the weirdness of the spectacle before him, feeling in himself, too, a consuming heat to burn up places and experiences, a need of emotion and progress. She looked in awe, sensing something ominous in the witchcraft of the sky, something personal to her and the coming months.

"It makes you sad to leave here," he said presently.

"Yes; I'm that way," she said apologetically. "Every tree here is a friend."

"We have been happy — rarely happy." She took his hand and laid it against her cheek. "Whatever I do, you will have done it, Inga," he said, with a note of emotion. "And there were moments — yes, even at the time we were pledging ourselves to each other, even in the train afterward when we could not talk to each other, you remember — when I wondered how it would turn out — if, at first, it would not be a struggle between us. Curious what thoughts come to you at the queerest times! I suppose you were thinking something like that too."

"I was wondering," she said evasively.

"You have never seen the sea?" he said irrelevantly.

"Never, never, except as a small child, and I can't remember well."

"You will be swept away by it," he said, his imagination on what was coming.

"I have loved it here," she said, in a low voice; "I could stay here forever."

"Really?"

"Absolutely."

"And I — I have been happy — happier than in all my life — and yet I'm impatient to be away, as though I had taken everything out of it that was to be taken."

"Yes; you are like that," she said slowly, and she nodded to herself. "It is right you should be."

"I feel that's what's going to send me ahead."

"Yes; it will do that."

"Look, there's the moon going down behind Catamount!" he said. She drew closer to him, her head on his shoulder. He laughed a teasing laugh. "Soon it'll be black, and then a little dryad of the night will no longer be afraid to show what she feels."

"Yes, yes," she cried, closing her arms about him suddenly, and as his lips met hers, he found her all trembling, and warm and agitated.

XXXVIII

THEY arrived at their new home after a sail of three hours down the winding shores of the Maine inlets. The day was hot and clear, the breeze hardly sufficient to belly the sails, and at times long calms surrounded them as they drifted on the tide. This new home was a fishing-outpost, in the lee of a rocky point, against which the vast waters lay in troubled slumber. During the hot voyage, while Dangerfield swapped stories with Captain Slocum, Inga had crept forward to the bow and stood leaning against the mast, her gaze eagerly set down the shifting shores to the approaching solemnity of the great sea, which every ledge seemed ready to reveal. In her excitement, she was impatient as a child, turning toward Dangerfield from time to time with eyes that danced with expectancy. As soon as they had made their dock, she sprang out and went bounding up the ledges until he could see her figure outlined against the sky, transfixed in gazing wonder.

When the baggage and provisions had been finally transferred and the house inspected, Dangerfield climbed to the crest. Inga had hardly moved from her first struck attitude of wonder. He came quietly to her side, interested in her surprise, feeling again old sensations through the discovery in her eyes, as though watching a child in a playhouse. From where they stood, shoulder to shoulder, the rocky, tumbling coast twisted to the horizon, undefiled by sight of human habitation. At its stone feet, the sea, like a cloth of peacock blue, lay in flat complacency with faint rim of winding lace. At times, across the placid expanse a foray of rippling zephyrs went wandering aimlessly and spent itself until once more the smooth spaces stretched out in quiet somnambulance. On the horizon, a fishing-boat or two lay becalmed; a steamer moved sluggishly, with heavy trail of impending smoke.

"It's asleep now," she said.

"It will wake."

"It's so smooth, so silky ——"

"Are you disappointed?"

"No; no; it's so vast. It's asleep, but you don't trust it, do you?"

"What do you feel?" he asked, watching her curiously.

"I feel cities, nations, over there, crowding down the horizon."

"Not loneliness?"

"No, no; I feel so many human things in it — things that are gone and things that are coming."

"As though you were watching history pass by," he said gravely.

She looked up quickly and nodded.

"Funny, that's not how it affects me," he said. "It makes me feel little — insignificant. It crushes me at times, and at others, even in crushing me, it compensates by the feeling of the futility of what we strive for."

She drew her brows together in a contemplative frown.

"I don't believe I could feel that," she said, in wonder. "I feel freer and lighter, as though there were more air to breathe, as though I could run for hours, as though there were no fences and no gates to stop you from doing anything you wanted to do."

He laughed, feeling a communicative thrill.

"Sure you won't feel too lonely?"

"The idea! With this?" Suddenly, to his surprise, she flung her arms about him and her lips sought his rapturously.

"Why, I believe you are some old sea-pirate's daughter, after all!" he said, astounded by the unaccustomed display of emotion. "You're like another being, Inga — even your eyes seem to have cleared away the mists."

"Yes, yes; I feel it!" she cried joyfully. "Oh, Mr. Dan, promise to stay here forever and never never go away!"

"Promised," he said, in mock solemnity. "We stay here forever and give up all thought of cities and professions — and even of luncheons and suppers."

"Oh, dear, I forgot!" she cried in contrition, and, laughing, she sprang away from him and went flying down the path to their new house.

With each succeeding day which went slipping by, he felt a pervading sense of heart's ease. Inga was indeed a transformed being, a soul abruptly awakened. In the city, and even in their first camp by the lakeside, he had always felt in her a deference and a timidity toward him, as though, despite her love, she worshiped at a distance, a reticence which brought her confusion when his eyes were too strongly on her in the white of the day, which clung even to her lighter moods when she persisted with teasing eyes in calling him "Mr. Dan." Now, all at once, all barriers vanished between them. Whether it was the mysterious current of the sea, or the completeness of their isolation, she came to him with a new independence, the pride of a wild animal, monarch of its wilderness.

Instead of waiting on his moods, there were times when, to his surprise, she sprang into the lead, carrying him after her for a wild beat along the shore against a growing gale, or a journey into the night, and when, during the day, he painted the curling water and the advancing cliffs, she would often leave him for long hour of exploration, returning with the news of some felicitou discovery. In such matters, her instinct was seldom a fault. She seemed to absorb his own intuitions, to sens what he sought in arrangements of masses and colors, s much so that, at times, he seemed to hear his own thoughts speaking through her voice.

Nothing pleased her more than to work for him, and the only quarrels they had were when he sought to divide her labors.

"Look out, Inga," he would say, in mock sternness, "you will spoil me, you little heathen squaw!"

"Just make up your mind," she said defiantly, "that you exist here only to paint — all the rest is mine. Stretch out in that hammock instantly, and if you dare to move, I'll upset everything, and then there'll be no dinner!"

His resistance never lasted long. He would sprawl back gratefully, pipe in mouth, and watch in Oriental luxury, while she flitted from the fireplace to the table, in the mellowness of the summer evenings, busying herself with the roasting of the potatoes and the broiling of the ham. The long day's work done, and well done, satisfied in his ambitions, he followed the grace of her light movements, his eyes filled with never failing delight in her youth and supple strength. Once he said, half in earnest, half in fun:

"I suppose you think you're fooling me with all this domestic pretence."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, her head on one side, the broiler in the air.

"I suppose you think you are going to make me believe that you are really married to me, whereas I know that you are not at all."

"Oh, you do know that, do you?" she said, laughing.

"I do," he said solemnly. "The old justice of the peace who married us thinks he's bound you to me hard and fast; but I know better."

She set the broiler back over the coals and came over to his side, vastly amused and yet with a telltale look in her eyes, as one suddenly surprised.

"You are a terribly wise Mr. Dan, aren't you?"

"I am," he said nodding. "You've made up your mind to fool me, that's all. I don't feel married to you in the least, and that's the truth. Shouldn't be surprised to wake up any day, young lady, and find you've disappeared — swum out to sea or taken to the woods."

"I believe you're half serious?" she said with a smile.

"I am — Pagan!"

"Well, don't you like my way the best?" she said, looking down at him, thoroughly delighted.

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On the end," he said abruptly.

This answer brought a swift change in mood to her. The archness fled from her smile, and her eyes grew pensive and far-seeing.

"Isn't it enough to be as happy as we are to-day?" she said, with a touch of sadness.

"I suppose so," he said, with an uncontrollable burst of jealousy; "particularly when you can't know what's in the future or in the past." He rose up quickly and caught her in her arms with a wild revolt against the measure of herself she allotted him, crying roughly: "Inga, you love one way, I another, and sometimes it drives me mad to think of what's passed. I love you as a man loves; I want you all, completely, to know everything you have done, everything that's behind your eyes now, everything you're thinking."

In his outburst of feeling, he brought her violently to him until his arms must have hurt her, and yet she made no protest except for a sudden struggle for the breath which he had crushed out of her body; but her face was radiant with the fury she had roused in him. Her eyes faced his steadily, baffling and amused.

"Yes; I want you all, completely — you, all your thoughts — everything that is you," he repeated hungrily.

"No, you don't," she said, smiling, and then, as he wavered under the searching frankness of her look, she added, "now honest — do you?"

He laughed, drew her quickly to his lips, and released her.

"You're right."

She nodded her head victoriously and went back to the fireplace. Then she turned solemnly.

"I shall take care you never know," she said looking back, "for, you see, I know *you!*"

"She is right — extraordinarily right," he confessed to himself. Then he wondered how she could divine such things, and next if it were all intuition or if it were not the product of another experience, another man. And this thought tortured him.

XXXIX

What she had the power to do was to awake in him sensations, sensations of mystery and of charm, sensations of the rare moods of nature and of the night, sensations that brought the youth of the artist thronging back to him. Of this he spoke to her frankly, trying to make her understand. It was one evening, when a sudden squall was whistling under the doors, and the rain pellets, wind-driven, were rattling against the windows. They were before the fire-place, the dishes cleaned for the night, watching the glow of charring logs, Inga stretched full-length on the rug, her elbows on the floor, chin in her hands, Dangerfield rocking back, drawing long clouds of fragrant smoke from his pipe. He watched her (he never tired of studying her instinctive poses) with a sense of eye-delight. There was something feline and pliant in her contemplation of the fire, the wonder one sees in a graceful animal fascinated by a burning flame which lies beyond the world of its comprehension. Inga, to him, was a constant source of pleasant sensations and unfathomed surprises. He rose and laid a stick on the red ruins, cities and palaces in miniature, and returned to his seat, as the stick caught fire and sent its fluttering shadows into the room.

"Feels good to be here, wind and rain outside, fire and shelter, inside — that's home," he said. She nodded without turning, divining that he felt like talking to himself. Presently he said, as though appreciative of her intuition:

"Good work to-day. I'll make something big out of that sketch, that inlet seen through the mist — bully sky-line, and taken just from the right spot. There's something going on in me, the power to feel effects, not simply to transcribe them — thanks to you. You've done a bigger thing than just getting hold of me, Inga; you've given me back the power of sensations — that's youth, that's the artist. Well, to be an artist is to retain youth, I suppose, the ability to receive sensations. You've got that instinct yourself, primitive, savage, but it's there in everything you do. And I get it from you, from watching you, from feeling through your eyes. That's the big thing — to feed me with sensations. You see that's what civilization has taken from us, the power of sensations, passion, love, hate, fear — all great sensations of the artist. Civilization steps in and fences us about; passion exists only when it is a destructive force; love even — blind, romantic love — civilization has turned into an economical partnership; hatred, the fierce, cleansing passion to destroy, is taken from us, even fear, the greatest of all, the fear of great unknown nature and hidden voices in the sky, the sea and the woods, the terror of the night when the other world may return — civilization has deprived us of that, too, by explaining it. Civilization is constantly at war with our elemental nature. But to the artist, the elemental, the world of the instincts and sensations is the world of creation. That's why we break through conventions, why we seem constantly in revolt against society — the need of sensation. To convey, one must be keen to receive — Too abstruse? Well, that's what I am living in, reveling in now — yes, for the first time in my life."

She listened, her large eyes intent on him, her brows a little drawn, nodding when he came to an end. Yet he wondered. He had a queer, half-humorous feeling that she had understood nothing, and yet that she was industriously storing away his words, as a squirrel buries food against the winter, for some further use — for some other queer turn of her existence.

At the bottom, he was content that she should acquiesce and not discuss, that she lay before him in a languid, graceful picture looking out at him from eyes that were like the uttermost sea. With her, he felt absolutely, pleasantly alone with himself, in a stimulating self-communion, his imagination rekindled, his mind taking flame with new ideas. And this mental fertilization was due, as he himself acknowledged, to the charm of his existence with her, to the curiosity she had awakened in him with the abrupt releasing of riotous, youthful nature, even as a wild grace and glory had come into her eyes with the liberty of her released hair, which came tumbling and turning about her slender, dark face. Sometimes, when she stood on the edge of a cliff, she flung her hair completely free, her head thrown back, her throat bared, lying back on the arms of the wind.

"What a trick civilization has played on her!" he thought, at such times. "She should be a bride of a Viking rover, not of me."

One night, in mid-August, when every leaf lay flat upon the torpid air, he awoke with a restless sense of loss. The room rose luminous in the flood of moonlight. He turned to the couch at his side. It was empty.

"Inga?" he said softly.

Then he repeated his call, and there was no answering sound. He did not feel alarm, knowing well her moods, but, being wakeful, he felt a curiosity to know where her impulse had taken her. He rose and stood a moment at the threshold in the warm night. From where he stood, the cove lay revealed, the mellow sands and the back of the cliff, inky there in the frown of the full moon which flooded the shore, the water, and the dominion of the air above him. Then he went quietly up the path and stole over the bank. Below, in the phosphorescent waters that rose luminously over her white body, Inga was floating over the long, slow, in-drifting swell. He moved down cautiously in the deep shadows, careful to make no sound, taking his seat on a projecting ledge. Below, the sanded strip lay glistening like an Arabian Nights' field of jewels.

It was hot and so still that every movement in the air was arrested; even the twisted bulk of the moon and the few pallid stars which showed seemed drowsy with sleep, in an unnatural sleep, a slumber laid upon the night by witchcraft. She lay upon the back of the scarcely stirring sea, her body a confused and softened mass against the green-black depth and the ripple of the phosphorus which ran over her, glistening in swarming fiery multitudes at a movement of her feet or hands, was like a gossamer of beaded gold outlining the slender limbs. She floated, her arms outstretched, her head turned upward in the full glitter of the moon, her black hair, like sea-grasses floating about the dim oval of her face, and so immobile was her pose, so devoid of anything physical, that he felt as he sat there and watched her, that he had surprised a pagan nymph, stealing back in the silences of a hostile world, to worship in ecstasy pale Diana, goddess of the night.

He remained silent, scarcely drawing a breath for fear of being heard, in a sort of devotional ecstasy also. Before him was the mystery of timeless nature, of forbidden spaces, of the great innocent body of the world which each night returns to its maidenly solitude and waits serene the moment when the transient horde of men shall pass, and the day again shall wrap her in silence and in solitude, even as the unconquered night. Under his eyes lay the mystery of the living flesh, of the spark of life which meant Woman to him — Woman, the glowing atom which had drifted hither and thither and settled a moment into his arms, to wake all his faculties, all his emotions and all his aspirations, and at the end of all this tireless giving to remain — undivined. What did he know of her even now — of this woman whom the world called his, whence she had come or where she would end.

"If I should die this year or the next, what would be her life?" he thought, and, for a moment, he strove profoundly to tear aside the heavy fold of the future. He saw her attaching herself again to some man, of that he was certain, obeying some divine impulse to accomplish her purpose, and the thought of that other man of the future filled him with a restless melancholy.

"The truth is," he said to himself, "love as much as we can, we remain always alone, alone in the things we do not dare to tell each other, alone by the barrier the future lays between us. After me — what?"

All at once over the surface of the water, there came a sudden dripping shower of sparks. Inga turned to the shore, her body growing out of the waters as the goddess herself once rose to beauty and to life. Before the incomparable beauty of the scene he could not restrain an exclamation. She sprang to the shore and turned, frightened.

"Inga!" he cried hastily.

Instantly she turned and fled over the jeweled beach, bounding away like a young deer, while back over her shoulder came her laugh, gay and tantalizing. He sprang up in turn, with a sudden, impetuous rage to pursue and overtake her, and then quickly checked himself and resumed his seat. Presently, after long minutes, he heard a light crunching in the sand behind him and the next moment her moist hands closed over his eyes.

"Do you think I'm an awful person?" she cried, laughing.

He turned and caught her yielding body, soft and pliant in the folds of a great bathrobe, and drew her down into his arms.

"So that's what you do when you get Bluebeard fast asleep," he said, with a laugh in his throat which she knew.

She nodded, and her arms stole up and around him.

"What were you thinking of?" he said, after a moment, wondering what thoughts had been in her as she lay in the contemplation of the luminous night.

"I? I was thinking how delicious it was." She stopped, laughed a little, and added, "Must I tell — well, then — how delicious it was to bathe all alone away from every one, with no clothes on!"

"Was that all?" he said, with a sudden disillusionment. But instantly he added: "No; that wasn't it — that's a fib. What was behind those eyes, Inga, witch from the sea?"

She shook her head with feigned ignorance. Yet about her lips there floated a strange, wistful smile, and her eyes, as they watched him, seemed to have depths as forbidding as the night about them.

XL

For weeks they had no news from the Arcade, except a postal from King O'Leary. It was far into September before a batch of letters, which had journeyed back and forth and had been reenclosed, arrived with news of the outer world. There were several of no importance — notices of firms soliciting patronage, and advertisements — but among them were two letters which Dangerfield pounced upon eagerly — the first from Flick, with a Southern postmark which excited their curiosity, the second from Tootles, which was deferred for a later reading.

The New Imperial Lodging House,
Jiggs Rest,
Georgia.

Temperature, 105 in the cellar.

Dear kind folks swept by ocean breezes:

I'm in trouble again — awful trouble, but this time it's desperate. I've lost the best pal in the world; I have forfeited the respect of the whitest white man in Manhattan; I have ruined, blighted, dynamited, sold out, and Judas-Iscarioted my best friend. I shall never face him again, never look into his reproachful eyes. I couldn't — I couldn't. It would break me all up; I should crumble and weep like a maiden. He has forgiven me much, but he will never, *never* forgive this. I shall never return unless a scheme I am looking into here turns out big money and I can come back proudly, with my wallet cracking, ready to make amends. It's all about the pride of Tootles' heart, the masterpiece which was to create a new art, to dignify the advertising profession and put a dress suit into the home of every flat-climber. But first — The address may surprise you. You're not as surprised as me; I've been here about five days — I think. Just how I came is also hazy, but the evidence is I came in a smoker, under a smoker, or on top of a smoker. Likewise, somewhere up or down the road is a collection of trunks, boxes, and barrels belonging to me and containing heaven knows what. I likewise annexed a coon-dog. He is with me. I admire him because he manages to get several square meals a day. I don't know how he does it, but he does. I have named him Remorse — it's the way he looks at me. The last city I remember is Wilmington. I likewise have some faint recollections of a milkman — a charming fellow, in West Philadelphia.

At any rate, I'm here — until I make enough to get out. I could take all the money away from these rubes, only there isn't any money to take. My best chance is selling a Wimpheimer & Goldfinch, silklined, pointed cuff, velvet collar, two-button-and-braid-down-the-trousers dress suit for one week's board and ten dollars flat to Jiggstown's chief of police, who's hankering at the chance of a lifetime to wear one but's afraid of being REMARKED! Which brings me to the point.

How did I acquire thirty-two dress suits, sizes 38 to 42, 18 white-piqué vests, three winter overcoats, and one golf suit? At least I did have them, because I've got a little paper that tells me so in my pocket. How it got in my pocket I don't know. Where these are at present, I don't know, with the exception of three dress suits and a winter ulster that seem to have stuck by me. If it would only snow I might sell the overcoats and go after the dress suits. I've got two checks for Chattanooga, three for Miami and one for Oscaloosa. Where I acquired all those trunks, I don't know. I suppose the dress suits are in them. I can't imagine where else they can be.

It all began so peacefully too. I'd played Wimpheimer & Goldfinch backward and forward and three times around the corner until I had them feeding out of my hand. When everything was set, I hired an open-face dray and tucked the Well-dressed Man in it — *uncovered* — with a bunch of palms at the head and the foot and started down Broadway. Say, we gathered a mob about us that had to be beaten apart! I'd tipped off the reporters — a few particular friends of mine — that this was something new in publicity about to be pulled off, and when they saw us floating down the mob, they began to pull the coat off me to get the inside story. All I would give them was a bouquet of dark and mysterious hints. Picture by famous artist, identity profound secret, fabulous price, every figure supposed to be a close portrait of some of the swells higher up (which was true — six flights up). That started them on a fine guessing-bee. Well, when Wimpy and Goldy looked out the windows and saw what was coming, it was all off. They wanted to pin a medal on me and take me into the firm. We set the canvas up in the main showrooms, and business was over for the day. At this point, there came upon the scene a little gink by the name of Steinwilly or something close to that name.

"Our purchasing agent," says Mr. Goldfinch, with his eyes still bulging at the Well-dressed Man.

"Shall we talk business over a little gentle lunch," says Steinwilly pleasantly.

'Course that's a way they have down there; they think if they buy you a five-dollar meal you're going to come down a thousand or two. So I nodded and we sauntered out.

"Ever try a royal smile cocktail?" says Steinwilly.

I knew that game, too, but I looked him over and sized up his capacity, and I said to myself, "Two can play at that." There's where I was wrong — besides it was a hot day. Well, we sat down and I plumped out my terms. Twelve hundred outright and three hundred extra if it took on and they ran it another year. I was figuring on falling back to a flat thousand, you see. Steinwilly looked terribly distressed at this, but I knew that game, too, so I proposed another flock of royal smiles. He brightened up at once — reckon he must have been living on them for the past year. So we matched, and I won. Then we decided to take in a show, and we matched for the taxi, and then for the tickets.

"Would you match twelve hundred or nothing for the picture," he said smoothly.

"Nothin' doin'," I said.

He sort of sized me over and decided to wait a little longer. Now, I don't know just exactly what happened after this. I know we stayed together for a good part of the night, for all I remember is seeing royal smiles (they're pink, you know) blooming on every bar. Whether I left him or he left me, I don't know. Fact there's a good deal I don't know, or why, or when, or where, but the awful outstanding fact is Steinwilly and I must have matched and I must have sold Tootles' masterpiece for a bunch of dress suits. The worst of it is: Where are the dress suits? The memorandum I've got is signed "Steinwilly," and there's an awful scrawl "per special agreement" but if I got the dress suits, did I keep them? I don't like the appearance of Remorse on the scene. Did I swap a dress suit for this bandy-legged pup, I wonder? I'll have to work down to Chattanooga before I'll know.

Honest, I'm all broke up — what will Tootles say? I don't dare write him.

Chattanooga (later).

There's no doubt about it — The dress suits are here, most of them. I met a conductor on the way who greeted me like a long-lost brother. Seems I paid my fare by contributing one to his beautiful appearance. I wonder how many more are roaming the sunny South? Couldn't work the sheriff in Jiggstown, but as I was eating on tick, he concluded he'd save money by buying me a railroad ticket out. Remorse is here with me.

Miami.

Located more dress suits, likewise ran into a traveling man whom I swapped two dress suits with, for about half a ton of patent bottle-openers. I found half the dress suits gone and all kinds of junk in their place, folding tooth-brushes, histories of the South, etc. Guess I must have gotten into a traveling man's convention. Am at work selling out the stock, slow business — weather against me.

Wonder what I'll find at Oscaloosa.

Break the news to Tootles, won't you? The way I'm headed now it looks as though I'd reach the Arcade via Panama and Japan. Let me know what really did happen with that body-snatcher Steinwilly. Honest, I'm sick over it. I shall never, *never* forgive myself.

FLICK.

P. S. I expect to do considerable sightseeing down here, but I'll get a letter if you send it

care Hank
At the Bar. The Jackson House.

"Do you suppose that's all he got for the picture?" said Inga, when they had ended laughing over Flick's adventures. "Tootles will be broken-hearted."

"Looks pretty bad," said Dangerfield, shaking his head. "Well, let's get to the worst." He took up Tootles' letter and immediately broke into a roar of laughter.

Dear folk:

Lots of things have happened since you left, good, bad, and indifferent. Flick has disappeared. Where the deuce he's landed is beyond me. He's been gone two weeks and never sent a word. He started on a spree after selling the masterpiece to Wimpheimer & Goldfinch, for fifteen hundred dollars down and a royalty of five hundred a year. This must have been too much for him, for he started in to celebrate. Don't blame him, do you? It almost made me take up drinking. As far as I can make out from what they tell me, the firm put one of their best little drinkers up against Flick, a fellow called Steinweld — quite a decent old sport, too. According to him, he started Flick at lunch, kept with him through the afternoon and evening, and ran him into a couple of their traveling men to take up the job. Flick not only cleaned up the contract, but matched the crowd for all their spare change and then kept on matching until he'd won about six trunks of spring styles which were waiting over in the depot to go out the next day. More than that, he ran them into some benefit ball up in Terrace Garden. You know Flick. The dance, they're not sure it was at the garden, either, broke up with a free fight, and when they woke up the next day, they were enjoying the hospitality of the city. The last they remember of Flick he was leading the grand march with the winner of some popularity contest. They weren't sure just where this was — they said they'd been so many places! However, Goldfinch was a sport, stuck by the bargain, said they'd been caught at their own game. But what do you think happened to Flick! The only clue I have had, was the arrival of a strange-looking pup, which Sassafras says is a coon-dog, which came here in a box, half starved and howling like mischief. Box was addressed to Flick from some point on a southern railroad line. Sounds as though he were still alive, doesn't it?

When are you coming back? It's awfully glum up here, you can imagine, with everyone away. I've been working hard, all summer, drawing like mad — think you'll say I'm getting somewhere. As far as news goes, there are some queer turns. Old Pomello died some three months after the marriage, over in Italy — pneumonia, I believe. Belle Shaler had a note from Myrtle. Queer, isn't [illegible] Wonder what'll become of her now. She inherits what [illegible] old fellow had, I suppose. The news excited everyone, of course. You see Madame Probasco, the time she had that séance, made some prophecy that fitted in with what happened. Millie Brewster is back after a visit home. Have an idea O'Leary cleared out on her account. "The baron" hasn't been any too well, looks shaky, and then something happened that cut him up terribly. Hit me, too, for a while but now I've gotten hold again. Pansy went off with that old scoundrel Drinkwater. Seems they'd been seeing each other all along, and he must have got some hold over her, hypnotized her. Belle was as surprised as any of us and mad clean through and through. We don't know just what happened — hope they're married. That's about all, but, Lord, it's lonely without the crowd! Have you done great things? I'm crazy to see what you're bringing back. My best to the missis.

TOOTLES.

The hilarity which Tootles' elucidation of the mystery of the dress suits occasioned, died out at the news of Pansy's elopement. Underneath the quiet of his announcement, they divined the hurt that lay near his heart. A few more letters remained among the chaff, which Dangerfield opened rapidly — announcements of fall exhibitions, which woke in him curious currents of impatience; a note from Steingall urging him to exhibit, another from Quinny with the news of the club. Then, all of a sudden his fingers struck one addressed to

MISS INGA SONDERSON.

"The idea!" he exclaimed, in pretended wrath. "Never heard of such a person! What impudence!"

He tossed the letter over to her without curiosity, and took up Quinny's letter for a more careful perusal. The echoes of the old world brought a strange fluttering to his heart. He wondered what they, the old friends, believed had happened to him all this time, and he wondered, looking out the doorway with a curious quivering smile, what they would say when they knew that he had not gone under, that he had won his fight and was coming back to his own.

He took a long breath, and there was a new light in his eyes as he turned. Inga was at the fireplace, her head resting on her hand, staring into the flames which were licking up the letter she had tossed there.

"What was your letter?" he said, noticing the immobility of her attitude.

"Nothing — a notice from a publisher, that's all."

He came closer with a sudden, leaping jealousy which he would have been at a loss to justify.

"Is that true?" he said slowly.

She nodded, looking at the burning, twisted mass.

"Inga, tell me the truth!" he said, in a voice he had never used before with her. She raised her head, met his burning eyes, and answered steadily:

"Why, that was all."

In the embers, the flame died down. He knew that she had lied to save him pain. In a sudden disgust at this outer world which still had power to throw its disturbing shadow across their Eden, he went to the table and took up the whole correspondence and flung it into the coals.

"Curse them! I wish they'd leave me alone!"

Then he sat down and held his head in his hands for fear of jumping up, of seizing her and turning her to his eyes, and forcing her to admit that what lay now in ashes had been a letter from out the ashes of the past, from that other man, whom he could never see or comprehend, but who haunted his days and stood always between him and the sun of unconscious happiness.

"I hate letters!" she burst out as suddenly, and went precipitately out of the door and flying over the cliffs.

He made no move to follow, but sat there grimly, staring into the fire, and what he thought of darkly was not alone the past but of what lay ahead.

XLI

INGA had lied to him, and he had understood the reasons of her denial. Yet the fact remained that the first lie lay between them, the blade that cut ruthlessly through the veils of the summer's illusion. Until then, he had lived in an unreal paradise. The world had been exiled, or, rather, from morning to night, in every mood of nature he had dominated where he had walked. There was a primitive directness, a savage charm about Inga that had carried him back to the healing savagery of the solitary world. Absorbed in the fulness of his artistic regeneration, falling into pleasant mental languor, an ease of the body and all the senses, he had forgotten in the quiet reveries of fire-lit evenings, that beyond the threshold there waited those irreconcilable enemies of the present — the haunted past and the inscrutable future. So completely did she blend into the roaming moods of his mind, so keenly intuitive of the moment to listen and the moment to dream that, at times, stretched indolently and gracefully before the roaring logs, she seemed to wait his pleasure with the mute loyalty of some friendly animal. Now, all at once, the spell had vanished.

He was a man alive to fierce, disturbing emotions, aware that, side by side with the blinding figure of passionate love, was that relentless, inevitable companion — primeval jealousy — exacting its ruthless toll for every narcotic moment of oblivion. She, too, was different, no longer the companion whose every word and every thought he possessed, but something that drew back from him before the clutching hunger of his soul, and veiled herself in the obscurity of the past — the eternal stranger — Woman.

He did not blame her — the crueler thing would have been to have told the truth. He felt this, and yet his whole nature rebelled against the intruder, which had crept in like weeds among the flowers. He could not speak to her; he could not meet her eyes. His own self seemed to have run away from him. He was incapable of rest or activity, and when she returned, he marveled at the calm in which she moved. The next day and the day after, something hot and red stood between his eyes and his canvas. He tried desperately to paint and remained bewildered by the void within him. He began a dozen sketches, swore, and scraped them out, and, after long, racking hours, remained with his head in his hands, staring at the terrifying white depth of his canvas that seemed to him to be something without end or beginning, a vast emptiness into which he had sunk all his hope.

The first day when she returned over the dripping rocks to join him for the long tramp home, she asked as usual:

"Good day?"

"No — nothing," he said shortly.

The following morning when she appeared, she looked into his face once and asked no questions. They were silent during the walk, each curious of the other, keeping a little apart as though a thousand miles intervened between them. The evening had gone down in angry squalls and, across the white-lipped sea, the wind went scurrying in frantic flights. At their sides, the wakened sand-grasses writhed in fitful temper, hissing like disturbed serpents. Occasionally a whirlwind, turning along the beach, flung stinging pellets against their eyes. A great restlessness, a rebellion against indistinct things filled their breasts and made them ache, and persistently their eyes avoided the other's.

When they had gained the shack and barred the groaning door against the assaults of the storm, she took the easel from his back, stood a moment looking solemnly into his clouded face, and turned without a smile. A moment later, as he sat sunk in a chair before the fire to which he had given fiery wings, she came with his slippers and knelt at his feet. Before he realized what she was doing, she had started to unlace his boots. He drew back angrily, crying:

"Why do you do that!"

But, without changing her pose, she remained kneeling, and suddenly, clutching his knees, she cried passionately:

"Oh, please — please let me!"

Then, with a rise of tears, he understood the longing and the misery she expressed in this instinctive submission, and, leaning suddenly, drew her up into his arms, where she lay with a catch of her breath.

"Mr. Dan, Mr. Dan, you are so unhappy!" she said at the last.

He did not answer, though his arms tightened about her as though he would have crushed the thing he loved.

"You are unhappy — and I have made you so!"

"It can't be helped," he said bitterly.

She did not say anything more and, after a moment, drew herself up and out of his arms. Not for a long while did they speak to each other, until the supper was over and the fire had been built for the night. Instead of stretching out on the rug in feline languor, she began to move restlessly about the room, with an indecision that was strange to her. He watched her through the sheltering clouds of tobacco smoke as she went from window to window, listening to something that cried in the soughing chorus of the tempestuous night without, and, as he watched her, he wondered if the day would close thus in this aching unease, this numbed suffering that wrapped them around and yet held them remorselessly from each other. She came to the fireplace and abruptly faced him, her hands behind her back, pain and wistfulness in the anxious searching glance she laid upon him.

"I told you a lie," she said, all at once. He raised his eyes and looked at her. "About that letter," she said hastily.

"Yes; I know."

"You knew, of course," she said thoughtfully.

"Of course."

"Are you sure you would rather I told you?" she said earnestly. Then as he frowned and gripped his hands nervously, "It has nothing — it can have nothing to do with us now," she said desperately, and, as he still hesitated, she added: "It will only hurt you. That is why I did what I did — not to hurt you."

"I know that, too," he said. "You were right. Don't tell me."

"But I will if you wish," she said, her eyes growing rounder and larger in the intensity of her gaze, while her lips trembled a little.

"No, no; I don't want you to!"

He drew a great sigh, rose, and stretched out his arms. But immediately he had refused to hear her explanation, a revulsion came to him. It seemed to him that anything were better than not to know. The mystery that enveloped them had a hundred monstrous figures of doubt and jealousy in it. The one thing he could not combat was the unknown.

"It was a man — a man who loved you?" he cried, before he had realized it.

She caught her breath, startled, collected herself angrily, and at last, looking him directly in the eyes, nodded slowly.

He came closer and stood staring in her averted face.

"And whom you once loved?"

She drew back, turned, looked into his eyes, and turned away again.

"Yes; since you would know."

He hesitated. Should he go on or should he draw back now while it was yet time, before the self-infliction of pain, before the visualizing of a shadow which meant nothing to them now, which was of the past, as other things had been in his own memory? All at once he stopped, aghast. Tears were in her eyes, and her hands were at her throat.

"Why do you do that?" he said abruptly.

"Because it will hurt you," she said, shaking her head.

"Yes, yes — horribly!"

"What good does it do?" she said, shaking her head.

"None, none at all — I shan't ask to know any more," he said firmly, and he took up his pipe from the table where he had flung it and began to fill it, humming to himself.

She came and stood beside him until he was ready for a light. Then she struck a match and held it to him.

"Very becoming," he said, with an effort, smiling at the sudden glow that suffused her soft face and gave points of fire to the depths of her eyes.

"I wish you understood me," she said, with a wistful arching of her brows and a sudden downward slant of her eyes away from his.

"Wish I did!"

"I am different — different from you, I suppose. I don't let shadows make me sad."

"No; you are never jealous," he said bitterly. "In fact, I wonder if you are capable of such an emotion."

She appeared to consider this question.

"I suppose not," she said, at length.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Not even — not even if you saw another woman coming into my life — really?"

"If that happened, I should go away — quietly," she said thoughtfully.

"And you would not suffer?"

"Oh, yes — of course — I should suffer, but I should disappear just the same, for the world would be empty to me." She looked at him a moment, hesitated, and said: "That would be something real, not something that is ended or something that might happen. You see, it's this. You have something in you that I haven't got."

"What?"

"Sentiment."

"I believe that is so," he said suddenly, yet he continued to look at her, mystified.

"I mean it this way," she said pensively. "You don't see me at all as I am. You see me as you wish to see me. It is very beautiful, but it is not always me, and so sometimes I feel that it's not me you love and, and I wonder ——"

"You'd rather I didn't idealize you?" he said, greatly astonished.

She smiled with a smile that changed the sadness prophetic in her eyes to a glow of happiness.

"No; I want you to feel as you do just now," she said shyly, "even ——"

"Well, even what?"

"Even if you wake up after," she said solemnly.

"Inga!" he cried, in a furious protest. But she avoided the arms which sought to sweep her down to him.

"That's what I mean by sentiment," she said hastily. "Do you understand?"

He paused, his curiosity returning.

"And you?"

"I? Oh, I see you and love you for what you are."

"Even for my weaknesses?"

She looked at him, her eyes deep in his eyes.

"Above all for that," she said, and, though her lips turned slowly into a smile, her eyes remained sad. "I wish ——"

"What?" he asked as she stopped.

She shook her head.

"That I should always remain what I was — a derelict worth saving?"

She looked at him suddenly and so fiercely that he laughed, and caught her in a passionate embrace.

"Look out! If I get to behaving too well, you'll lose interest in me, Inga," he said, laughing.

To this she made no reply.

He was astonished at the things she had shown him she had divined. He recognized their truth. He even felt t [illegible] in her eyes was some strange intuition that made ther [illegible] beyond his view, down the long lanes of the future. But, above all, he understood that in their love the first phase had ended and another begun — a phase where the bitter and the sweet, sorrow and sadness, possession and denial would forevermore go hand in hand. She knew it, too, for that night they lay wakefully in each other's arms and though they lay clasped in the oblivion of the night they spoke no word, for what lay in their minds they could not say to each other.

Yet this knowledge that life in all its aspects could not be avoided, that the thoughts which he cried out against could not be stilled, and that, even as he loved her, the woman of the present, he must suffer fiercely and weakly for what she had been, entered into that inner consciousness of the artist and illuminated it with a new, miraculous sense of power.

When he returned to his work, the test of sorrow brought him a deep comprehension. In the completeness of his dream he had forgotten what no artist should forget — that life is tragedy. He put before him a canvas which a week before had thrilled him with its mastery. He looked now and saw that it was only half truth, that he had done it in an ecstasy of sentimentalism. He threw it aside and began swiftly to paint in another. And as he looked upon the immemorial rocks with their head-dresses of sand-grasses turning with the first colorful touches of the autumn, he perceived beneath the surface pleasure to the eyes something grim and tragic in this spectacle of summer stifling in the arms of autumn, in these scarred and rocky sentinels, waiting the momentary flurry of the bitter time; the soul of those things which cannot die, inscrutable, contemplative and majestic, amid the poignant sadness of the green world which must die and die again, endlessly returning to its pain.

He painted breathlessly, seized by something poignant and illuminating that drove him on, and when he had ended, he covered the canvas hastily, afraid to look at it. For a week he worked in this frenzy, without pause for self-analysis, warned only by the fever of work which possessed him that what he had done was true, feeling in himself immense, clarifying changes, a detachment of vision he had never had — a new, stern independence of the intellect which he had purchased at the price of the intoxication of the senses.

At the end of this period, a certain heaviness of the spirit succeeded. He felt that he had worked beyond his capacity, aware of profound weariness and dejection. The next morning he postponed the morning's sketching.

"No work to-day," he said, "I feel like looking over what I've done. Let's get out the canvases and sit in judgment."

"First fall exhibition?" she said, laughing.

"Exactly."

Together they brought out the voluminous records o the summer and ranged them about the walls. As h studied them, group by group, in their historical progress he nodded, surprised himself at the richness of the record its sincerity and grasp. At the end, he brought out th dozen sketches of the past fortnight, which he had pu away each evening without an appraising glance, reserving them even from Inga. He placed them in a row and stood back to watch the girl. She stood before them, making no comment, but so accustomed was he to her moods, that he comprehended at once the depth of her tribute. In truth, she was overwhelmed by the revelation of a new note, something which she would not have been able to define, but which held her transfixed by a penetrating sense of mastery, as sometimes, in the moment of lightest teasing, she had felt herself breathlessly impotent in the sudden closing-about her of his compelling arms.

"So this is what you have been doing," she said, in a reverie. Then she turned and looked at him, seeing a new self in the man. "What made you do this?"

"You."

"I? How so?"

"Things you've done — things you've said, about sentiment, you know," he said rather incoherently.

His glance returned to his work, and he felt a sudden thrill, even an astonishment, transcending all earthly happiness at the recognition of what had come to him.

"You said I've done this?" she said, frowning.

"By making me suffer," he said quietly. "Oh, I needed it! It was right. It came, I suppose, with that letter. If it hadn't," he added, smiling, "I suppose I should have gone on dreaming — for the dreaming was sweet — with you, Inga."

"Yes, I see," she said, nodding.

"What do you see, I wonder?" he said curiously.

"You don't need me any more," she said, looking not at him but at the work.

"I have gotten above myself," he said pensively. "I am not afraid of life — in its completeness now. The bitter as well as the sweet — they are both good, both vital."

"You see in a way that makes one feel strange things — even to a sense of time."

"It's impersonal, isn't it?"

"Very."

"For the first time?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if I will keep it," he said moodily.

She turned, laying her hand on his arm, nodding her head, with conviction.

"You won't lose it now."

"And yet," he said, laying his hand on her head, "there are times when I wonder if it had not been better — not to wake up."

"You feel differently — about me, don't you?" she said slowly.

"No."

"Yes, yes — oh, it's not that you love me less, I think, but — but if I went away, you would stand by yourself now! I mean it would not crush you."

"Inga — you *will* go away some day," he said, looking at her profoundly, speaking as one sometimes does in inspired moments — a thought which flashes across the lips before the will can check it.

For a moment they stood staring at each other, equally amazed.

"Why did you say that?" she said, at last, of the two the most visibly astounded.

"I don't know — I hardly knew I'd said it. And yet I believe what I said is true. More, I believe you believe so, too. Isn't that the truth?"

"Some day — yes; I'm sure," she said, looking at him solemnly.

"When, I wonder?"

He felt as though something uncanny was in this conversation, a moment of rare and absolute truth had brought a flash of the future. Indeed, the words he had spoken astonished him as much as they had Inga. Yet he felt a sense of conviction, as though, before the verity of his work which faced them, they, too, had faced the truth.

"Are you — sorry?" she said, at length, timidly.

"That the dreaming is over?" He shook his head. "I don't think so," he said slowly. "I feel as though now we can talk to each other."

"That is true," she said, moving nearer, and she added, "Mr. Dan."

"Trying to tease me?" he asked, smiling.

She shook her head. He was looking into his canvases hungrily; he did not see her eyes or comprehend the significance of her return to the old deference, but, for a moment, while they stood gazing at the victory on the canvas, she swayed against him slightly, and her hand slipped under his arm as though clinging to its protection.

An hour later, when he remembered the suddenness with which he had prophesied that the day would come when she would go her own way out of his life, he was amazed and puzzled to comprehend the impulse he had obeyed. At the bottom, he believed in no such possibility. What he had said must have been said in some sudden cruelty of love to test her, to know that, if she could quiver before such a possibility, the intensity of her devotion was constant. A little conscience-stricken, he referred to it that evening.

"That was a crazy thing I said about your leaving," he began lightly. "Queer mood I was in."

"We can't help having queer thoughts. That's natural," she said quietly, looking down at the floor.

He laughed a full-throated, confident laugh.

"Well, you know, Inga — I did feel that about you — at first."

"And now?"

"Just try, little viking!"

"And yet you are very"— she stopped and slowly accentuated the word —"very different."

"How so?" he asked, a little uneasily.

She hesitated and perhaps changed the intention of her answer. "It's the way you look at me. I think you see me as I am now."

"That happens always when you love," he said pensively. "And it means something deeper, surer — something quieter. Don't you think so?"

"Yes."

He could not divine from her manner any special regret or that any serious consideration remained from his thoughtless remark. In fact, he felt in her a new sense of closeness, an almost Oriental solicitude of his slightest desire or comfort. When he went out now in the sharp chill of the autumn mornings, she no longer went roaming away over the rocks, or played over the sand reaches, tantalizing the waves with sudden rushes. Instead, she camped down at his side on a great rug, her hands propping up the tanned oval face, her eyes dreaming into the distance. At times, he felt their gaze turned on him for long, unvarying moments. He remembered a favorite pointer of his college days, who had adored him as no one else had worshiped him, and the strange sense of the summer's end which had possessed the animal to lie in mute staring wonder at his side, by some canine intuition of change. The dog had died years ago. He had never replaced him.

A certain calm content came into his soul in these soaring days. A change had operated in him; a gust of divine madness had passed, and with it all the rebellion against the progress of life. He had loved as youth loves, blindly, fiercely, flinging all his self in impulsive sacrifice, longing to be convinced that with love he had found the ardent, fiery youth which he had renounced. Now, in the awakened sense of power, he faced middle age with a confident triumph. He saw ahead clear regions of light that opened immeasurable horizons of life. He had found himself, and, as he looked at her from time to time, with eyes satisfied with the charm of life and color, he said to himself that he would never again be capable of the fierce, gripping ache of jealousy which had possessed him. Yet it was good to have her close to his side, to listen to the low music of her voice, and yield to the enveloping charm of her ministering devotion. The first obsessing spell had given place to this — it was good to be so loved. She was the companion above all others he needed for what lay ahead. It was even providential. He felt a deep and tender sense of gratitude that softened the almost cruel confidence which had come to him in his new self-sufficiency.

By the middle of November, the weather had become so stormy and chill that work was only a question of haphazard moments. He began to feel a new longing — an impulse back to that world of conflict and multitudes, of strife and jealousy and competition, which he had left behind him in loathing and renunciation. When the fog and the rain hung outside, he would spend long days in contemplating his sketches, making notes of future compositions to be arranged. He had gone far and he knew it. Yet one thing was lacking. He wanted the tribute of others, of the old associates who had given him up in despair, written him off the ledger of life. At times, thinking of how they would stare and stand amazed before this triumphant renaissance, he felt restless impulses to go rushing back, a need of the sensations of happiness and triumph in every form, a boyish craving for applause. Inga read these signs only too clearly, and as the thought of return was to her a dread one, womanlike she went ahead to meet the inevitable.

"Well, Mr. Dan, when are you going back?" she said, one night, when she had watched him in long reverie.

"How do you know we're going back?" he said, surprised.

"It is time," she said seriously.

"Really?" He looked at her curiously, comprehended what lay in her mind, and said, with an accusing smile: "I'm afraid I'm still mostly a boy, I want to be patted on the back for what I've done."

"That's only right," she said quietly. "It is what you need, too. When shall we go?"

"Say next week."

She shook her head.

"Sooner."

"Day after to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," she said, with a firm little bob of her head. "When things must be done, it's better to have them over."

He felt a leap within him at the thought of the great city which was his again. Then he looked at her and laid his hands on her shoulders.

"We will come back — next summer," he said, smiling.

She smiled back at him, meeting his eyes steadily.

XLII

They did not return immediately to New York. Halfway, an unaccountable timidity seized him — the shrinking of a schoolboy before entering a public assemblage — and with a sudden impulse they turned back for a week of Indian summer in the bungalow by the lake where they had gone first. He himself did not in the least comprehend the motives which had made him suddenly delay the test of the return to the old life. Sometimes he thought it was a lack of confidence, a fear of having lived in illusions, that would dissipate before the rude shock of reality. At other times it seemed to him a clinging to the world of solitude in which he had found his happiness, in distrust of what compensation lay ahead. So deep was this indecision of the soul that their days were spent in aimless pleasure. His easel remained unpacked. No desire for work came to him. Now and then, he felt an irresistible longing to plunge back into the world of men, and again, a revolt against himself — a restless shrinking-back, a longing to return deeper into the unquestioning loyalty of the great world of forests and still ranges. At such times, he would gaze for long spaces at Inga, filling his eyes with the healing vision of her youth and charm — wondering.

"Why do you stay?" she asked him, one evening, when they had sat silently, looking across at Catamount, blue and luminous under the scattering sunset clouds which swam like radiant goldfish above its sharp outline.

"I wonder." After a moment he said, a certain gentleness in his voice which seemed attuned to the gentleness in the skies, "I think it's because it's the ending of a phase. I want the other — the big things — and yet I want to hold on to this, to what this has been to us, a little longer and still a little longer. Do you understand?"

She nodded, and her fingers turned gently in his fingers.

"This is personal," he said slowly, "the other will be different. It will be a sort of renunciation of many things. This is the romance, the great romance of my life, and, well, I want it to go on a little longer."

Her head went slowly down to his shoulder; he drew his arm about her.

"It is unbelievable, providential — and it is all you," he said reverentially. "You are as strange to me, Inga, as the first day. I do not know you — no, not at all. Yet, in what you have made me feel and in what you have made me suffer too, you have done everything."

A certain charm of the twilight, of the quiet spot, and of the youthful ecstasy he had known momentarily swept aside the man that had been built up victoriously and logically. For the instant he was in love with love without reason or reserve with the memory of other moments felt in the passionate moods of the fading day and the poignant floods of moonlight.

"Shall we never go back, Inga?" he said breathlessly. "Shall we stay here all winter, just you and I?"

In his arms he felt her tremble and then fill with a great sigh.

"Oh, I'm so glad you said that!" she cried abruptly, and for a moment something shook in her voice.

"Shall we stay?" he said eagerly, confused by thronging sensations, even as the earth and the sky grew confused in the fall of the night.

She laughed, lightly and happily from the heart, and though she was not deceived by the intoxication of the moment, she yielded with every sense.

The next morning she was an inconscient child, without a brooding thought, romping about the bungalow, doing a dozen crazy things, singing and laughing until her mood caught him in its playfulness. For the day they were as foolishly happy as a pair of growing puppies, playing a dozen tricks on each other, laughing for the pure joy of being together, pursuing or pursued.

"Upon my soul, Inga, I believe you are actually flirting with me!" he cried, from across the table.

She eluded his sudden grasp and went scurrying out of doors and up into the sheltering branches of a broken pine. He stood at the foot laughing, one hand on her ankle which he had caught just as she was hurrying out of reach. Thus arrested, she turned and settled herself on the swaying branch.

"Actually flirting with me," he said sternly.

She shook her head indignantly, her eyes sparkling.

"What is the meaning of this, I'd like to know?" he continued, scowling.

"Would you, Mr. Dan?" she said, with her head on one side, her lips tantalizingly set.

"I certainly do! Why are you so happy, all at once?"

"Because," she cried, "because I want to crowd a whole lifetime into a day! Look out!"

Before he could reply, she had sprung down into his arms, almost upsetting him with the shock of her descent. She lay her face close to his, panting and flushed.

"Because I want to be happy for a whole lifetime!" she said and flung her arms about him. The next moment, she had slipped from him and taken refuge along the shore, leaping lightly from rock to rock.

A little later, as he waited her return, she came back quite sober and demure.

"When you make up your mind to go," she said, looking at him intently, "do it quite suddenly, and don't — don't tell me until just before — just a few hours before."

His mood, too, had turned to seriousness. He drew her to a seat beside him.

"It's queer how your mind changes," he said earnestly. "I thought, once, I wanted to shake the dust of the city forever — run off, be a hermit up in the top of a mountain, on an island. I hated men and their ways, their jealousies, and their estimates — and, now, I feel as though I'd like to go back, astound them just for once, and then come back here forever." He stopped, looked at her, and saw the smile on her lips. "What's that mean — you don't believe me?"

"I believe all but the last."

"Well, that's the way I feel now," he admitted. "I suppose I should stay away. It's only vanity."

"No; you want to feel your strength," she said slowly. "What you get from others will give you confidence."

"Yes; I suppose I'm like the rest," he said frankly. "There is something cruel about it. I want to go back and feel how I've gone ahead of the others — even my friends, my best friends. It's something savage, almost as though you flung them down bodily and climbed over them. And they'll feel that, too, no matter how much they praise what I've done — at the bottom in their secret hearts it'll hurt. Wonder why it must be so!"

"I don't know," she said thoughtfully; "if you feel that way, it's because you need just that feeling, I suppose."

He hesitated, rather surprised at her understanding before he went on.

"I know it's trivial, guess the big ones are beyond that — if they are; and yet —" He brought his hands together in an eager clasp over his knee, and his face lit up.

"And yet it would be something to go back and feel how you've astonished them all, to make good, to have everyone talking about you again — the feeling of the footlights. If you've once known that, it's hard to get away from it." He smiled at himself. "What an ass I am! Do you think I'm hopelessly ridiculous?" She was standing, her back to a tree. As he looked up guiltily, she was smiling down at him, with a proprietary, maternal pride. "Inga," he said grinning, "sometimes you remind me of a mother cat, purring away contentedly and watching her favorite kitten tumbling about the rug."

She burst out laughing.

"Perhaps!"

He took her hand and said abruptly:

"And you — do you want to go back?"

"I want what you need, Mr. Dan," she said, looking at him steadily.

"Will you be proud of me, Inga, when we have an exhibition all our own?"

"I'm proud now ——"

"But won't you be prouder when the crowds come and you feel what you've done?"

She shook her head.

"No; not more than I am now."

"I don't see why you say that," he said, perplexed and frowning.

"I shan't like to share you with crowds," she said abruptly, and then, as though she were afraid to have shown too much feeling, she said hastily, "Mr. Dan, don't think of exhibiting too soon."

"Why, Inga?"

She studied him carefully, as though calculating in him all his capacity of suffering and all his need of praise.

"You're too sensitive — you'll be changed too easily by what people tell you."

"You mean, criticism will hurt me?"

"No, no; their praise."

"Flattery."

"Yes."

"So you think I'll give in to flattery, do you?" he said, with the exaggerated gruffness he used when he pretended to be angry.

She nodded without yielding an inch.

"Yes; it means so much to you — oh, I'm serious. There are so many things, new ideas in you. Work them out yourself; don't let any one else know what you're thinking — not even me — until you get where you want."

"What a wise head!" he said, smiling.

"I'm right; I know I'm right."

"Yes, you are," he said solemnly. "I don't know how you guess my failings, but you guess them remarkably well. All right; I'll appoint you my guardian, and I'll promise to obey."

"Then don't show your sketches to any one — oh, Tootles and King, if you want, but not to the others — the ones you want to — to throw down and climb over."

"Why, I believe you're just as savage as I am!" he said, laughing at her conclusion.

"I am; I am!" she cried, in high excitement, and the point lay settled. She was back in her mood of riotous gaiety.

For the rest of the day he watched her, puzzled and fascinated, drawn to her by all his senses, finding her a hundred times more tantalizing, perplexing, and desirable than ever before, astounded at the whirl of spirits into which she drove without a pause. The next day, while he was still waiting what mood would dominate her, she announced abruptly that the time had come to depart. Then he understood.

It was far into November when they returned to the Arcade, and the city was the city of the approaching winter, vibrant, stirring, and electric. He felt a new eagerness of the imagination, a confidence buoyed up on waves of energy that seemed to urge him joyfully back into the arena of conflict.

When they had taken a taxi and were caught in the full crush of thronged avenues, he drew forward on his seat, leaning eagerly toward the window. The city was there, waiting for him, with its variegated flashes of life, its movements of skyscrapers and clouds, its streaming multitudes and, in the shifting current, faces, fragments of human light and shade. These scattered details, which once had been meaningless and confusion on confusion, had a new significance, brought together and made comprehensible by deep, underlying impulses, moving and massed according to the same immutable laws, that flung giant rocks, inscrutable and calm amid the shifting seasons that overran them only to die away. In this opposition of fashioned cliffs and drifting tides of men he felt a kinship with the sea-swept reaches he had known, a unity in significance which surprised him, where he had expected disillusionment, and, drinking in greedily thus the richness of the thronged world which called to him, he realized, with a sudden joy, that his true work lay ahead of him.

Inga, by his side, sat like a statue of contemplation. In her, a profound transformation was taking place. From the moment when, far-off, she had divined the approach of the metropolis, by its far-flung, hideous stragglers, until the moment when they had burst into the sudden upleap of serried life, crowded windows, flight on flight in mute straining toward the freedom of the upper air, something had closed about her, a rigidity of the soul, and from her eyes something childlike and inconscient had fled away. She continued to stare ahead calmly and without flinching, but the look on her clear forehead was brooding and prophetic.

They had hardly drawn up at the Arcade amid a gathering of small urchins, when a great limousine came superbly up and a familiar voice cried in great excitement:

"Inga! Inga!"

The next moment, the Myrtle Popper, which had been, came flying rapturously toward them, in the figure of a stylishly dressed woman in half mourning. From the limousine, more slowly, King O'Leary descended, somewhat embarrassed at being thus surprised.

"Mr. Dangerfield, how well you look! Inga, how pretty you've grown!" cried Myrtle, embracing her. "My, what a surprise; we thought you never was coming! The boys'll be tickled to death. You must all dine with me to-night — sure you must! It'd just break my heart if you didn't. We'll have some party!"

O'Leary shook hands, a little red under the sharp, amused look Inga gave them and, after a promise to allow themselves to be fêted by Myrtle, they went in to Sassafras, whose white eyes rolled so rapidly in astonishment that they threatened to fly loose. The elevator was as dusky as ever, jolting and balking on its resentful way up. The corridors were vast — ill lighted and creaking under their tread, but at the door where the studio of the Three Arts had been, they stopped aghast before a strange sign which announced,

McTweeder and Flaherty
Canadian-American Buster Pie Co.
Business Office.

Myrtle, laughing, explained that the ruse was for defensive purposes only around the first of the month, and at the noise they made, Tootles and Flick came bounding out. In another five minutes they were the center of an excited gathering — Miss Quirley all aquiver; Belle Shaler; Millie Brewster, a little drawn and nervous; "the baron," who seemed strangely feeble and old, even to Schneibel, who came plunging in, crying volubly to see the masterpieces of the summer — at once — while a patient waited below in the torture-chair. One look at Dangerfield told them the story of the summer. O'Leary shook hands with Inga, blurting out:

"Well, you've done it — say, my hat's off to you!"

And a little later, "the baron," profiting by a moment's isolation, leaned over and patted her arm, saying with his courtly smile:

"You wonderful child — when you are in heaven will you ask the *bon Dieu* to squeeze me through — a little?"

XLIII

Months of even tenor succeeded, of unremitting industry, when nothing else seemed comprehensible to Dangerfield but the rage of work. So absorbed was he by the richness of the vision which opened before him in the exploration of the city, that even at nights in the hundred and one restaurants through which they flitted — beer garden, water-front quick lunch, oyster-parlor or café in upper Italy — his eyes were always eager and his pencil busy. Of that narrow carpet from Twenty-third Street to the Park which is called New York, they saw nothing. They had plunged back into the healing flood of humanity that swirls and eddies along its upward striving voyage beyond the social boundaries of the elevated, feeling the sincerity of its joy and sorrows, noting its sane and colorful vulgarity, relishing its vitality, its capacity for progress, and its God-given will to enjoy and to enthuse.

For these months of intimacy with the simple and direct life of the massed nations of the cosmopolis, Dangerfield lived and worked in unconscious fervor. No weakening pause at self-analysis, no intimidating calculation of what foreign criticism might declare ever entered his day. He experienced the greatest delight of which an artist is capable, a joy which is like first love and must be surrendered with the consciousness of success — the pure and unreasoning love of the work itself. He had followed Inga's intuition and resisted the impulse in him to try the effect of what he had done on those whose admiration would have been precious to him. He renounced this temptation of the vanity the more easily in that he perceived, to his own surprise, that the summer had been but preparatory to the big things before him.

Meanwhile, many things had happened in the Arcade. About six weeks after Dangerfield's return, to the amazement of every one, Drinkwater and Pansy reappeared. That he had married her, contrary to the fears of Belle Shaler, was fortunately true, though, beyond that mere announcement, the girl had nothing to say, maintaining an obstinate silence to all questions. They took an apartment in the building next door which was reached by a bridge from the lower floor, though Drinkwater still maintained his old room in the form of an office. That he held a strong fascination over his wife was apparent, for though she was much changed and quite tamed, no word of complaint or criticism passed her lips. The only evidence of unhappiness, if any did exist, might perhaps have been noticed in the assiduity of her attendance on Mr. Cornelius and the thousand and one attentions with which she surrounded him. "The baron," who had been broken in health for some time, seemed to cling to this affection, though he would never reconcile himself to receiving the husband.

Tootles, who was of a dramatic temperament, had braced himself heroically to withstand the tragedy of his life. For several days his appetite noticeably diminished, but the recovery was rapid and visibly abetted by the providential meeting with a blonde student at the art school, who engaged his affections instantly and tyrannized over him as successfully as the brunette of the past. The windfall which had come to him from "The Apotheosis of the Well-dressed Man" had departed in the fashion of all winds, in an attempt to rival the careers of sudden millionaires, who are believed to soar from such humble foundations. One-third had gone in gilt-edged mining stocks from a sleek and confidential promoter whom Flick had annexed down South; another slice had been sacrificed to acquire fifty-one per cent. of the stock of a combination corkscrew and coat-hanger to be called the Corkaroo, which had been sacrificed to them by an inventor in distress, while the last hundred dollars had been placed in desperation on a ten-to-one shot, about which a friend of a friend of Flick's had private information.

Meanwhile, the Arcade was watching with undiminishing interest the comedy which was transpiring daily and which had as its principal actors Mrs. Pomello, King O'Leary, and Millie Brewster. That Myrtle had come back determined to carry off King O'Leary was evident to all. In fact, in the frankness of her nature, she made no disguise of her intention. By one of the caprices of fortune, which the fickle goddess delights in showering over the metropolis, the dashing girl, whisked from a manicure-parlor to sudden opulence as though on some miraculous wishing-carpet of the "Arabian nights," found herself a widow within a short three months and sole heiress to a property which developed beyond her expectations.

Mr. Pomello had died suddenly at Nice, where in an indulgent cosmopolitan society, appraising by the eyes, they had found easy acquaintance. Myrtle as a young widow, heiress to fifteen thousand a year, undeniably stunning if inclined to liberties with the King's English, found a number of sufficiently titled adventurers ready to assist her upward progress into society. Before she left, she had the exquisite sensation of actually refusing to be a countess — an internal satisfaction which Providence accorded her as a reward for constancy.

But, in the directness of her nature, she cared little for these infirm personalities. She remembered the man who had stirred her from the first impudent kiss, and, after a certain period of retirement in memory of the strange, gentle old man who had transformed her horizon, she came back to America and established herself in a resplendent suite at a neighboring hotel. Prosperity had as yet worked no arrogance in the naturalness of her nature, and though her former friends instinctively drew back in defensive attitudes at the spectacle of the limousine, the liveried chauffeur, the exquisite costumes of half mourning and the large and brilliant jewelry, they soon relaxed their suspicions before the unaffected generosity and gay moods of the ex-manicure-girl. The one exception was, of course, Millie Brewster, whose weakness for King O'Leary had long been evident. The gorgeous arrival of Mrs. Pomello reduced Millie to a state of melancholic desperation, which even drove her to the extent of half confidence in Tootles, who, having had his heart exploded a number of times, felt qualified for the rôle of a sympathetic consoler.

As a matter of fact, neither Flick nor Tootles were in the least doubt that Myrtle had made up her mind to carry off O'Leary with a high hand and marry him, after the easy matter of a divorce had been settled, nor for that matter had Millie Brewster, who daily grew more silent and more pathetic, flitting into the studio at all hours for a glimpse of her idol or at least the opportunity to converse about him. What O'Leary himself was thinking remained the mystery, nor could his comrades in the arts, either by sly traps or direct accusations, procure a clue. In truth, O'Leary himself was as thoroughly perplexed as the next man. He was human, and he deeply relished the public rôle he had suddenly found himself thrown into, by the battle for his possession between the two charmers, either of whom enchanted when the other was away.

Now, it happened that Tootles, though the sentimental adviser of Millie, was convinced of the hopelessness of the odds against which she struggled, while Flick insisted that Myrtle was riding to a disaster, and for this he had shrewd reasons of his own.

"She's making mistakes," he said wisely, on one of the many occasions when he discussed the absorbing subject with Tootles. "Some girl, some action, fine eyes and all that, but she's on the wrong track! I could put her wise, but I won't."

"What mistakes?" said Tootles.

"Introducing society and King to each other. You can't tame King — he'll kick over the traces some day — then good-by."

"Oh, I don't know. He doesn't show any signs yet. He's driving out, lunching out, theaters and all that sort of stuff. I do believe she's even gotten him worked up to taking tea. Do you mean to say that's not serious?"

"Serious for her — she's rushing the game," said Flick obstinately. "Mark my words, she'll go too far! She'll start dressing him up."

"He had on a new tie yesterday," said Tootles suddenly.

"Sure he did. She'll try to make a dude out of him — see if she don't; and one thing O'Leary isn't, and that's a Charlie boy. I tell you he won't stand for it. He'll go cold all of a sudden."

"My word," said Tootles doubtfully, "it is a chance though! Remember the solid-cash basis. That does count for something, Literature."

"With you or me, Art," said Flick crushingly. "I am quite ready to console the lady and so would you be. I'm wild, but I'm not a wild Indian like O'Leary. If Myrtle was wise, instead of blowing in on a circus-wagon with diamond attachments, she'd hang around here in a sweater and a sunbonnet, and do the joy-riding on a surface-car. O'Leary will never stand for the fancy stuff, never in the world!"

Even as they were thus debating, King O'Leary came into the studio. Under one arm he carried a couple of packages, while in the other hand hung what was unmistakably a hat-box.

"Hello!" said O'Leary, with brazen effrontery, and, whistling, he moved over to the corner which had been specially allotted to him as his private dressing-room.

"Hello!" said Flick, who stared first at the hat-box and then at Tootles.

O'Leary continued to whistle loudly, removing his coat and vest while he undid the first of the packages. Tootles, in his amazement, reached out his hand and clung to Flick's. From the package, O'Leary drew forth a pink-and-white shirt with cuffs attached, and slowly and deliberately, without abating his nonchalant whistling, struggled into it.

"If he puts on a collar, you lose," said Tootles to Flick, who was too completely flabbergasted to retort. Even as the words were spoken, King O'Leary produced a standing collar and attached it to the shirt with the clumsiness of a first effort. Flick and Tootles went over backward still holding hands and, thus supinely on their back, their feet in the air, continued to stare at the apparition.

King O'Leary, having surveyed the effect of the white badge of servitude in the mirror, flung into his vest and coat and ripping off the cover of the box produced a derby which he adjusted with nicety on his head, giving it a rakish tilt. Then he produced a pair of gloves, shook them carefully in the air, raised his arms, yawned, and departed whistling. Tootles looked at Flick; Flick looked at Tootles.

"Poor Millie!" said Tootles, still on his back. "Are you convinced now?"

"I am," said Flick. "I give up. I know nothing about human nature."

For three days, King O'Leary vouchsafed no explanation. He rose, clamped into stiff shirt and stiff collar, crushed down over his free brow the unspeakable derby hat, and departed into society. Flick and Tootles arranged the old flannel shirt, flowing tie, and venerable sombrero upon a roughly constructed wooden cross in the corner and placed upon it the following inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
KING O'LEARY
Requiscat in Pace

But on the evening of the third day, while they were sitting glumly in the easiest chairs, reflecting upon the frailties of human nature, shortly after ten o'clock the door opened and King O'Leary came in. While they gazed upon him in amazement, with the utmost solemnity he placed the derby hat in the center of the floor, added the stiff collar, and, going to the corner, took from the commemorative cross the loose shirt, his old friend, the sombrero, and the limp tie. In another moment, he stood before them the King O'Leary of old.

"What about the plug hat?" said Flick faintly.

O'Leary's answer was to advance with deliberation and to plant one foot firmly upon the degrading object of social servitude. The next moment there was a slight report and beneath his foot nothing but a crumpled mass. So ended the romance.

The next week, Mrs. Pomello sailed for Europe. Of what had taken place between them, O'Leary never dropped a hint. Perhaps it wasn't necessary. The badges of servitude which had failed to imprison O'Leary's rebellious spirit were appropriately preserved as mementoes of the past. Millie Brewster used to dust them off with a certain quiet satisfaction on the days in which she continued to clean up the room.

During these long and fruitful months, perhaps due to their loyalty to the unaccustomed haunts of the city, Inga and Dangerfield had failed so far to meet a single acquaintance of his old life.

All at once, this unconscious isolation was rudely interrupted. They were returning from a visit to a Yiddish theater, in the heart of the East Side, when the whim seized Dangerfield, who was an inveterate night-owl, to turn aside for a last pleasant hour in one of the least popular restaurants of lower Second Avenue, the show-place of the exploited East Side.

They had hardly installed themselves at a quiet table before Dangerfield, looking across the room, was aware of a group of three men absorbed in his contemplation. He recognized Lupkin, the great Russian basso, and Fallon, the author, both old acquaintances, and De Gollyer, the critic, of all the friends of the past perhaps the closest to his confidence. He bowed abruptly with a certain confused shyness which was beyond his control and, seeing their hesitation before Inga's presence, gave a little sign of invitation. The next moment De Gollyer crossed over and had him by the hand. He was a little man, of the world to the finger-tips, *flaneur* and connoisseur of all that life yields of the curious, dramatic, and hidden. Their friendship had been of boyhood origin, of the strength that never weakens.

" My dear boy," he exclaimed, still gripping the hand that Dangerfield had extended him, " is it you or your ghost? I thought — we thought ——"

"You thought," said Dangerfield interrupting, "that I had gone off into some corner to pass away like a sick dog. Well, here I am."

De Gollyer was looking into his eyes, at the strength and the health in his face, estimating the confident ring in the tones of his voice, the new energy that seemed to fall from him as from invisible electric batteries. Then, from his friend, he looked swiftly at the woman at his side, seeking the explanation.

"My wife," said Dangerfield, who knew him too well not to comprehend instinctively the progress of his thoughts. "And — you are quite right."

"My dear lady," said De Gollyer, staring at her a little too insistently, "I have only been completely astounded twice before in my life. This is the third time. Will you allow me to sit down and recover myself?"

"You look astounded," said Dangerfield, laughing.

"My dear boy, I never saw anything so amazing in my life. But you look younger and more beautiful than I do. Where have you been? What have you been doing? Why didn't you let me know? By Jove, Dan, I am glad to see you like this!"

The exclamation burst forth so impulsively that Inga, who had retired into her shell the instant she had fallen under the shrewd, delving glance of the man of the world, felt a sudden warming of her heart toward him. Dangerfield put out his hand with a nervous laugh and laid it on De Gollyer's arm.

"I know you are, Bob," he said. "Well, I'm coming back."

"And the work?"

Dangerfield looked at Inga, a sudden longing in his eyes. She comprehended and smiled back her acquiescence.

"Come and see — you'll be the first."

De Gollyer had not missed the question and the answer which had flashed between them. Plainly Inga intrigued his imagination the more. She was the key to the mystery and, at times, while he sat listening to Dangerfield, his eyes fixed themselves on hers with an intensity that left her hotly conscious and at times she felt this glance wandering down to the fingers of her left hand.

Dangerfield was not in the mood for general conversation, and, beyond amicable greetings, avoided joining De Gollyer's party. She herself suggested that they should leave, uncomfortable at the encounter, keenly aware of the covert looks the three acquaintances were sending in her direction, divining the manner of their astonishment, of which she was the object. When they were on the sidewalk, in the cool of the luminous night, she drew closer to Dangerfield and slipped her hand under his arm, a little possessive gesture she seldom used. He looked down at her wondering, a little perplexed, and patted her hand affectionately.

"Lord, that was a surprise!" he said, thinking of De Gollyer. "It's like the wind, banging open the front door. I just had to ask him up. Did you mind?"

She shook her head.

"It had to come."

XLIV

THEY had taken rendezvous with De Gollyer for noon of the next day. By eleven Inga had the studio in order, arranging it with solicitous eye, hastening out to add the pleasant touch of a few clusters of gold and red poppies with the instinct of the woman who felt that she too, and her work, were on trial. When she returned she found Dangerfield in a fever of restlessness tramping the room. She came in quietly, arranging the brilliant notes of fragile petals so as to lighten up the somberness of the great renaissance table, watching meanwhile the furrowed moods which fell rapidly over the face of the artist. For the moment he was the Dangerfield of the first days, creature of wavering temperament and undisciplined impulses. The meeting with De Gollyer had come to him as a cry in the wilderness. The old life, the old traditions, the old habits, deep as the deepest instincts, came thronging back to him, reclaiming him in this dark continent of the sixth floor back of Teagan's Arcade. Passions little and great pass away but the comradeship of man to man abides through failure and disaster. One word from De Gollyer had loosened a thousand voices calling him back.

Beyond all this social atavism was an impending test. De Gollyer was not simply a facile-lipped critic but one who knew. A profound discouragement seized him, a weakening sense of despair. He turned suddenly and his hand trembled a little.

"Wish I'd never met him; wish I'd never told him to come," he blurted out.

Inga, watching him, understood him better.

"You have nothing to fear," she said with a touch of pride.

Dangerfield did not seem to have heard her for he whipped about the room a score of times, before stopping suddenly.

"Inga," he said nervously, "what would you show him? Just the things I did lately, that bit of Grand Street and the Italian wedding? They're the best, I think. Or would you show the sketches at the seashore also? Or what would you do?"

Womanlike, she resented this sudden timidity before the judgment of another, resenting that the masculine authority which she had herself built up should yield, if only momentarily, before the personality of another man.

"Begin with the beginning. Show him all just as you did it. It's that that's wonderful; to follow each step, to realize how you have grown to what you are doing now."

"You think so?" he said doubtfully.

"Why do you care so much what one man thinks?" she said with a flash of anger. "It's you who have done the big thing. I am not afraid."

"It's not entirely what he will say," he answered slowly. "It's the criticism I shall pass on myself when I look at them through his eyes. So you would begin with the beginning. Yes, I think you're right."

He gave a sigh of relief, as though this were a difficult point settled, and began to rummage among the records of the year, sorting the canvases as he wished to have them presented.

She moved over to the open window and waited, her arm on the sill, looking out, listening for a footstep in the hall with a little frightened tremulous leap of the heart, feeling the imminence of a new phase in the life of this man whose every hour she had shared, a phase that held something ominous for her, the rushing in of the outer world, the return of old friends, the thronging in of admiring acquaintances, the multitude pouring in to separate them and claim its right in the life which had been wholly hers.

De Gollyer arrived even before the hour set, an eagerness in his eyes, an expectancy in the rapid prying glances which scoured the studio, delving into the darkest corner, divining what lay behind each concealing screen. He was surprised — plainly surprised — at the exquisite harmony of the studio. Man of the world, connoisseur of the human drama strongly blended with the militant honesty of the genuine critic, he had a sure instinct of the right word and the right action. He felt in Inga a strong antagonism and a certain unease before his intruding attitude.

"My dear Mrs. Dangerfield," he said, going to her instantly. "I congratulate the wife. Everything is perfect, absolutely,— just so, even to that little touch of red poppies against the carved wood — beautiful, beautiful — just in its place, adds just the note, just the right value. Mr. John Sargent couldn't have done better. Dan, if you've painted anything half as good as this room I shall be satisfied."

Despite herself, Inga began to laugh. There was something about the little man in his twinkling eyes and shooting eyebrows, his easy adaptability and winning friendliness which could not be resisted.

"The place is in good tone," said Dangerfield, pleased.

"Yes, my boy," said De Gollyer, moving from right to left, nodding his head in appreciative contemplation, "and I've known you long enough to know that you don't deserve the slightest credit for it. Charming, absolutely charming. Mrs. Dangerfield, may I count on you to decorate the new apartment which I am taking this winter?"

"Indeed, Mr. De Gollyer," said Inga, laughing, "you're quite wrong. I had very little to do with it."

"And that note of red poppies?" said De Gollyer triumphantly. "Ah, what about that? No, no, I refuse to believe anything but what I want to believe." And as Dangerfield had turned from the easel and was searching among the stacked canvases making his choice, De Gollyer, holding out his hand to Inga, locked her steadily in the eyes and added: "Mrs. Dangerfield, you are a wonderful woman. Allow me to thank you in the name of American art."

She understood him beneath his jest and smiled back her serious smile — yet a little uneasy, feeling a new and strange world which had come in with his entrance.

"I'm so glad you have come to see what he has done." she said shyly. She looked covertly at her husband and added with a glance of subtle warning, almost imploring: "You're the first he has shown anything to. Your opinion will mean everything to him."

"Madame, I am a friend before I am a critic."

He gave her a reassuring nod and this moment of friendly treachery seemed to bring them into an intimate alliance.

He had indeed made up his mind to adjust his criticism to the evident exigencies of his friend's situation, but this benevolent attitude disappeared with his first inspection. De Gollyer, as Dangerfield had said, had more than erudition and the compilation of technique at his finger tips. His instinct was keen and his judgment seldom erred. He had expected to witness a measure of growth along the lines of the polite and rather dramatic talent which his friend had shown in the past. He was quite unprepared for the revolution which had been wrought.

"Going to show you what I have been at from month to month," said Dangerfield nervously. "I think it will interest you. At any rate that is Inga's advice and I am going to follow it."

De Gollyer immediately bowed to Inga and said in a sharp staccato which marked the passage of the man of the world and the arrival of the critic: "Quite so, quite so, and now, my boy, let's go to it. I want to see everything, good, bad and indifferent. We'll go through everything once — without any phrases, sans phrases, sans phrases! The eagle's point of view first — *le coup d'œil!*"

"That suits me," said Dangerfield, by the easel. "Well, here are some of the first things, a few sketches I made last Spring when this young lady was getting hold of me."

He brought out a half dozen of the rapid, powerful, incisive sketches which had marked even to his own surprise the complete and unpremeditated revolution in his art.

"Eh, what?" said De Gollyer with an exclamation of astonishment, "one moment, one moment." He took a few quick steps forward, pursed his lips, drew his eyebrows together and stared at the canvases. Then he looked up suddenly at Dangerfield with an astonishment so complete that a great wave of happiness came into the soul of the artist. "Um-um, is it so? Well, well, indeed? — Suppose we go a little slow. Last Spring, hey? You did that last Spring? My boy, my boy, you should have warned me. Well, well, is it possible?"

A sudden excitement caught him. On that instant, he divined what was ahead and with it came a certain possessive joy of discovery, that he, De Gollyer, would have it within his power to announce a new phenomenon to an interested world. He became transformed into a veritable dynamo of human curiosity, excited as a connoisseur who in a casual rummaging suddenly stumbles upon a treasure of the past. He wished to see everything, even the hurried fragments, details of arms and shoulders, suggestions of profiles and figures blocked in with a few rapid fertile lines. In his excitement he seemed to forget their presence, or rather to have suddenly assumed command of the situation by right of a superior authority, giving his orders in quick, nervous staccato, insisting on recalling canvases which had pleased him, discarding a few with peremptory directness.

"Not bad, not bad for last year but no place here, my boy. You've gone beyond that. Burn them up or, better still, send them to that ass Carvallo; that's just what he would understand. He could sell a dozen of those to his moving-picture aristocracy. Put it aside, Dan, it doesn't belong. No American sentimentalism, no Hudson River school! We've gone beyond Queen Victoria!"

The rejections which the little Czar of criticism ordered into the scrap heap with intolerant finger were few and, to tell the truth, quite merited. Dangerfield himself admitted their justice with a curt nod of his head while the canvas went shying across the floor, like a discarded rag.

They came to the first impressionistic water colors of the summer, rapid notes of vagrant flitting moods of nature seized in unconscious rapture of the moment. De Gollyer was plainly puzzled.

"It's the same and yet not the same," he said, staring at them. "It's more personal. Beautiful, brilliant,—you waste nothing; right to the mark; you're after the essential thing and you've got it, but it's personal. It's your mood. Mind you, I don't say they're not astonishing; they are. Don't know any one else who could have done it just the same way. We must exhibit them all together — a riot of sensations. By Jove, yes, sensations, that's just the word," he said, delighted to have found the exact term. "But we're looking for bigger things, Dan — *le coup d'œil,* the big vision. Um-um, very fine, very fine, bewildering but sensations. My boy, they're *your* moods. If I must pass a criticism, pass a very captious criticism, you were too much in love, that's it, too much in love. Mrs. Dangerfield, as a man of the world I am altogether charming; as a critic I am merciless. Dan was too much in love with you when he did these. A captious criticism, a very captious criticism — but go on, go on — I feel something coming."

De Gollyer's remarks spread a certain embarrassment which he was too keen not to notice and too clever to seem to observe. Inga sat down, clasping her hands over her knee, staring at the speaker with a sudden alarmed perception that beneath the apparent lightness of his phrases, there was a man who saw with a clarity which left her with a sudden sense of impending danger. Dangerfield, to cover his confusion, for he himself recognized instantly the subtlety of his friend's criticism, hastened across the studio to return with a new batch, the record of their sojourn along the broken coasts of the sea. Then he stepped back, moved over to the chair where Inga sat staring ahead and laid his hand on her shoulder with a premonition of what must lie in her mind before this inspection of De Gollyer's which divined those things beneath the surface of the paint — which they themselves had never faced in complete honesty to themselves.

When De Gollyer had reached that period which had been the crisis of Dangerfield's internal conflict, those weeks in which he had won a final dispassionate independence, the little man sprang forward eagerly as a falcon sighting its prey.

"At last! I knew it, my boy, I knew it," he cried in a fever of excitement. "I've hunches — prophetic hunches and I knew this was coming. I knew it from the moment you showed me that first sketch. My boy, this *is* it! By Jove, this is fine! You've gone far, you've gone beyond yourself. By Jove, this *is* a smasher!" He turned and held out his hand, aglow with enthusiasm. "Dan, your hand; criticism ends here, you amaze me. I didn't think you could do it. By Jove, no, I didn't!"

Inga forgot all her alarmed resentment at one sight of Dangerfield's face.

"It is good," said Dangerfield reverently, staring beyond the canvas.

"Let's go on, let's go on," said De Gollyer, impatiently.

As canvas succeeded canvas his amazement and delight increased. When they came to the record of the winter; to those clear, powerful revelations of the hidden treasures of the great metropolis which later furnished New York with the artistic sensation of years, De Gollyer suddenly sat down as though weakened under the powerful stress of discovery, absorbed in a mood of complete silence which might have deceived any one but the friend who knew the value of this rare tribute of profound amazement. At the end, instead of a new outburst of enthusiasm which Inga had expected, he got up, walked over to the table, picked up a cigarette absentmindedly and went to the window, looking out without bothering himself to phrase a compliment. She felt a sudden sinking of the heart, a brief transitory emotion which took flight on the instant that Dangerfield turned towards her with a glow in his eyes such as she had never seen. She went to him, raised his hand to her lips, turned aside to hide a sudden rush of tears to her eyes, and feeling the need of the two friends to be alone in their emotion, nodded and went out.

When De Gollyer turned at last and came back down the room, Dangerfield, catching his eye, said quietly:

"Yes, I know what I've done but I wondered if you — others would see it."

"My boy, it will be a riot," said De Gollyer solemnly. "You've given me a thrill, you have, and that's a fact. How the devil did it happen?"

Dangerfield silently extended his hand toward the door through which Inga had passed.

"It was sink or swim. Kismet, that's the answer."

"We gave you six months down at the club," said De Gollyer. "Remember the last night you were there?"

"I remember."

"We expected anything then — any moment."

"And you were right."

"We lost track of you. We heard you'd dropped out. How in thunder did she ever do it?"

"There are some women, very few, in this world," said Dangerfield slowly, "who were put here to do just such things, who are only happy when they are giving everything, pulling some poor devil out of the gutter and putting him on his feet again,— some one of course worth the saving."

"My boy," said De Gollyer, "I know you'll understand my curiosity. You and I have gone shoulder and shoulder through too many things to beat about the bush. Tell me about your wife. I confess to you that I cannot make her out. As you know, I rather pride myself on reading human nature."

Dangerfield was silent a moment, then he installed himself in the chair opposite his friend, drew out his pipe and began to smoke.

Between the two had been one of those rare intimacies only privileged to men of the world who have early reached that stage in their intellectual development when they have rejected shams and take a mutual delight in the recognition of life as it is in its profound varieties and inexplicable turns of fate. When they spoke to each other it was always in absolute confidence and without attempt at masking their thoughts.

"Bob," said Dangerfield, "I will be quite frank with you. My wife is as great a mystery to me to-day as the first time she came into my life. I know nothing of her past or what she may do in the future. And I don't want to know. She came into my life by chance, if you wish to call it so. She saw me as you remember me, down and out! That was enough for her. She had to attach herself to me, to cling to me, to fight for the spark that was still left flickering. She is of a different race, different instincts, than we are. There is something of the strange forbidding reticence of the north countries about her. I've tried in the moments when I loved her most to force myself beyond this barrier. I have never succeeded. Now I don't want to. Sometimes I try to understand her and I think, in a way, that the time when I was wildest, the most helpless, I brought her the keenest happiness. It's a curious thing to say, and you are perhaps the only man who will understand it, but sometimes I think she misses that. Now that the battle has been won, you may not believe it, but I think the rest will count for very little,— the success and the public and all that. When that comes she will be very lonely, poor child."

He drew a long puff, gazed dreamily into the recesses of the studio and said:

"Did you ever, when you were a boy, catch a bird, imprison it in a cage, feed it and make a friend of it till it would sing whenever you came near and then feel an irresistible impulse to throw open the bars and give it liberty?" He stopped, looked down at the floor and added: "Understand?"

"Yes, by Jove, I do understand," said De Gollyer. "The Slav women are like that. I've seen them. There is something imprisoned about her, something unfinished. I think that is what struck me, what puzzled me. Dan, she won't like what's ahead, the going back, the following you into your world. For of course you will go back now, you can't help it."

"I am very proud of her," said Dangerfield loyally. "Will I go back? I don't know. It depends on many things — on her happiness principally. I have loved her passionately and I have suffered, as I never thought I could suffer, out of the blindest jealousy, at the very thought that another man could have meant anything to her in her past. I suffered and that is perhaps what I needed the most."

De Gollyer smiled and with a quick movement of his hand indicated the canvases arranged against the wall.

"I saw all that, I saw what you had been through. I shouldn't have said what I did about your being too much in love, my boy, but I didn't say what I saw afterward."

"Understand me," said Dangerfield loyally; "I love her."

"I understand the distinction."

"What I mean is that the great madness has passed. If it had not I should have been consumed by it. The feeling that has succeeded, the feeling that has given me the power to look out of myself — the thing you feel there in my work, is the feeling of absolute tranquillity with all the world. I have made the harbor. As for Inga, she has a right to everything in my life, nothing could ever make me give her up. I am bound to her by gratitude which nothing can ever shake and at the bottom, Bob, I know that the best thing for me would be to live her life, to stay out of all the old life, keep out of the society rigmarole and the parade."

"My boy, you are quite right," said De Gollyer with a smile. "But will you do it? You've been a man of the world and when you once get that point of view it's in the blood. It calls you whether you're in Timbuctoo or buried in a shanty in Harlem. Things like that are in the blood, Dan, and then it's something to come back, to feel the joy of the fight and, damn it, it's your right to feel that."

The door opened and Inga came in, hesitating a moment on the threshold with an inquiring glance at the two men who were relaxed in their moment of intimacy.

"We've been talking over plans for the exhibition," said De Gollyer glibly. "It must be a smasher, the biggest thing of the season. I'm going to bring up a couple of men to-morrow, Mrs. Dangerfield. We are going to make Dan the sensation of the town."

"I am very glad," she said, with a nod of her head. She looked at them a moment and then took a seat quietly. She knew that they had not been discussing what he had said.

Dangerfield arose and coming over to her put his hand lightly over her head. She looked up quickly and smiled, but into her heart again there crept a sense of something undecipherable and threatening, the end of something, the beginning of a new confusing phase, a new world which came crowding against her.

XLV

De Gollyer's coming changed everything. Each day other men returned out of the past, fragments of the life which had gone before; brother artists arriving prepared to praise and staying to contemplate in amazement the rise of a master talent. Under De Gollyer's expert guidance other types arrived, dealers with keen business instincts, vying for the honor of the first exhibition; men about town, celebrities of the hour, of that lighter complex cosmopolitan world of amusement which New York recruits from the four quarters of the globe, on curiosity bent, fulsome in their eulogies, studying Inga with undisguised curiosity, with that look which she now understood so well, that calculating glance which De Gollyer had sent her on the night of their first encounter, the look of trying to appraise her, to decide just what the situation called for. They came, welcome or unwelcome, as formerly the summer hordes had invaded the privacy of their life by the lake and driven them into flight — only this time there was no retreat possible.

Day and night were crowded with the business of art. Rarely now were they able to slip away for a quiet meal by themselves. The door was always open to the arrival of some new enthusiast and until midnight and after, the studio was alive with eager voluble groups rallying around the restored leader. In this new pervading excitement of the return there was no time for work. Occasionally Dangerfield made an attempt to paint but the mood was not on him. Something else obsessed his imagination, the exhilaration that came to him in this flocking back of brilliant acquaintances; in this eager preparation for the exhibition which would bring him the one great moment apart from all other hours of triumph, which would remain supreme in the memory of the artist. This exhibition, carefully prepared for by a brilliant article of De Gollyer's, caught the fancy of the New York public with the shock of a dramatic surprise in which the personal history of Dangerfield himself, his strange ups and downs, counted for much. The newspapers, grateful for this surprising climax in the drama of a life which they had so faithfully recorded, devoted columns to the purely personal side of this astonishing renaissance, retelling old anecdotes, detailing intimacies of his stormy and picturesque career. Fortunately the danger of a too theatric success was averted by an immediate conflict among the super-critics. Dangerfield had the inestimable fortune of being viciously and scathingly attacked by the intrenched conservatives and as violently defended by the young and the radicals. Overnight he found himself at the head of a party, claimed as a pioneer who had revealed the significance and vitality of the neglected fields of American art.

He exhibited in the Spring exhibitions and everywhere was honored with gold medals and special prizes. A month after his first appearance before the public his prices had trebled and even at these figures his canvases were eagerly snatched up.

In all this flurry of success Inga remained a little bewildered. She had gone to the private view and to the opening day but from then on she had returned into her shell and slowly eliminated herself. Before these brilliant crowds of an alien world she found herself ill at ease, keenly sensitive of the storm of whispered comments of which she felt herself the center, embarrassed by the curious glances which played over her as she moved silently, a little frightened, by the shoulder of her husband. Invitations poured in upon him from those eager to exploit a new personality. He refused them all, ready to meet those who came with their enthusiasms to his studio, declining to venture forth. She thought she understood the reasons of these refusals in his loyalty to her. She watched him covertly, with the perplexity of a mother bird who sees its nestling take wing and soar away. In the discussions which raged over the supper table and in the quiet of the studio nights she remained always in the distance. They spoke of things which she did not understand but she did understand how eagerly the mind of Dangerfield craved this exhilaration of the imagination and as she had learned to read his innermost thoughts, the passing expression in his eyes she comprehended that despite his determined exile there were cravings in him, even necessities, for the stimulus of the more public triumphs which he refused. She felt the happiness which would come to him in a complete return to the world of celebrities, among those favored few whose presence is greeted by a stir in the crowd.

De Gollyer, Quinny, and Steingall had urged him to return to the club as a sort of first step back into the world which eagerly awaited him. Despite his persistent refusal, in which lay perhaps a temperamental shrinking before the publicity of the test, Inga comprehended how deeply inlaid was this new longing. To her there was a sort of finality about the decision, a final surrender of the last hold which she had over his life. Yet as always this very realization drove her to urge the thing she feared. When her mind was made up she met the situation without equivocation, with characteristic frankness.

"There is one thing you really ought to do," she said to him one night when the last late guests had departed and they remained alone in the studio.

"What's that?" he asked without particular attention to her remark. He was still keyed up by the excitement of the discussion which had ended, a discussion in which he had dominated by a boldness and justness of opinion.

"Go back."

"Go back?" he said, startled, and looking at her with a puzzled frown.

She nodded. "Yes, it is time."

"Why do you say that? It's very strange that you should say that," he said evasively and turning from her he flung down in an easy chair outside the circle of light, so that his face was concealed in the shadow.

"Because it is time," she said quietly, "and — because you want to go."

"The idea!" he said laughing nervously. "Haven't I refused again and again?"

"Yes, that's so." She hesitated a moment, then added: "Mr. Dan, won't you tell me, honestly, just why you have refused?"

He began instantly, a little too hurriedly.

"Why, Inga, it's very simple. I should think you'd understand. It's just the very thing I shouldn't do. I should think you of all people would realize — you've heard me say it often enough, that the one thing an artist should do is to keep to himself. Why should I go out to amuse them? They've only a curiosity to see a new animal. Heavens, you don't mean to say that *you* want to take up society! Inga, that would be amazing!"

"No, that's not what I want but it's no reason why you shouldn't go."

"Here, I say," he said angrily "none of that! Let's understand each other once for all. I'm not that kind. Wherever I go you go."

"I wish you would go back to your club," she said after a moment without answering his last remark. "That is different, that would mean a lot to you. Oh yes, it would mean a lot, I know it."

"Just why do you say that?"

"Because such things mean a lot to you."

"What things?"

"Why, the feeling of being admired and petted after you've done something big," she said, smiling a little. "You're very much of a boy. Then you need to be with men who wake you up. It's good for you. I can see that — you need a little play."

"Well, I'm not going," he said abruptly and with a sudden gesture of irritation he cut her short and refused to discuss the matter further.

But despite his protestations he longed to do the very thing he had refused. Yet he hesitated. It seemed disloyalty to her. Just why he should feel so he could not quite explain to himself, yet he felt despite all that she had said it would send her further from him than she was now, with the feeling of encompassing loneliness.

It was not until a week after, late in the afternoon, after a renewed urging by De Gollyer that he yielded far enough to glance undecidedly at Inga.

"Come now, Mrs. Dangerfield," said De Gollyer, "Dan always was an unsociable brute. He ought to drop in, you know, he really ought to. Every one at the club is waiting to see him — can't understand why he doesn't come around."

Inga sprang up lightly and taking up Dangerfield's coat brought it over to him with a determined air.

"Of course he must go — besides, he's just dying to," she said laughing.

Dangerfield hesitated, resisting a little, still looking down at her.

"Are you sure you want me to go?"

"Very sure."

He looked into her eyes, a little guilty weakening in his heart. Yet he was unable to detect any modifying seriousness beneath the lightness of her expression. He allowed her to slip his arms into the coat.

"There," she cried; "you know you're just crazy to do it."

He couldn't repress a telltale smile.

"Well, yes," he said, feeling a sudden excitement in his voice. "It will mean a lot to go back to see the boys once more." De Gollyer had gone ahead down the hall. He turned again, still uneasy, still a little conscience smitten. "I'll just run in for a look around. Back by seven." Then he caught her in his arms and held her close to him in one of the old impulsive moods. "How do you know so well what I want to do, young lady?"

"I do," she said defiantly.

She began to laugh as though the triumph were all hers and she continued laughing until he had gone out and closed the door.

XLVI

When he saw around the green and tranquil park the familiar outlines of his club, he had a feeling as though he were seeing the first welcome lights of civilization after long wandering in a wilderness. His entrance made quite a stir. Old Joseph at the door came up beaming to take his hat and coat. A group of men lounging on the stairs turned with exclamations of surprise. In a twinkling the rumor of his return spread from floor to floor. Men came crowding about him, old friends who greeted him uproariously, concealing under the boisterousness of their greeting the deep emotion which each felt. He had been a leader here and the sudden thronging of those whose names he could scarcely recall showed him the extent to which he had been missed. Every one had a word of congratulation, every one was talking of his exhibition. He found himself quite a hero, the center of loyal adherents. Nothing seemed to have changed. There were the same groups about the billiard tables, the same evening gatherings at the bar; he felt even a tolerant affection for the bores and the dead-beats who never change either. He was back among his own, gloriously, triumphantly returned. These were of the old guard, who loved him, who understood what he had accomplished, who would never judge him, would ask no questions, would be his until the end, no matter whether that end be victory or emptiness, in the loyal fraternity of men. The long months which had been so poignantly, vitally alive were now like the delirious passage of a fever.

It was almost seven o'clock before he realized the hour.

He would have liked to stay for dinner in the old dining room, packed with relics and to have enjoyed gluttonously this richness of affection, to have felt again and again the strange tingling delight as each new figure recognized him with a start of surprise and came joyfully up to claim him.

On his way to the Arcade he began to plan many things. There was no reason now why he should continue the meagerness of their present life. He had always had in him luxurious desires, the need of beautiful surroundings and a disdain of petty economies. Now that he had emerged from the wilderness, that success was his, he would take an apartment with a great double studio which he could fit out with all the luxury of detail which his pagan temperament craved. Then, they could readily afford a Japanese servant — a good cook who would preside over the little dinners for which he had once been famous. The thought of a butler made him smile a little bit at himself and at his own vanity. He admitted to himself that he was, as De Gollyer had said, of the world and that the little niceties of life meant much to him. But he smiled at himself tolerantly, for he was aglow with triumph and happiness. If he wanted a thing he wanted it immediately and it rather annoyed him that it would be impossible for him to start to work on his quest until another day should have arrived.

When he came up eagerly to his studio he found Inga waiting. He hesitated and then deferred the question of their moving until another day. He had a sudden feeling that she would oppose the suggestion or if she did not oppose it, behind the baffling calm of her eyes there would be a deep revolt. Yet when a few days later he made up his mind after much hesitation to approach the subject, he found to his surprise that she made no objection. She asked only if he meant to abandon the studio in the Arcade. This had, in fact, been his idea but something in the directness and suddenness of this, her only comment, made him change his mind.

"No, no," he said hastily, "we'll keep this for the work, for the serious business — a place to run away from people. The other will be just the showcase."

"I am glad you are not going to give this up," she said quietly.

"You'll have to get used to a servant, young lady," he said laughing, "and a Jap butler at that."

"I'll try. Have you found a place?"

He nodded, a little embarrassed thus to admit that he had kept the information from her so long.

"You'll like it and perhaps you will even get used to the butler."

She seemed to accept the change as a matter of course, as though it was something she had foreseen for a long while. Her attitude rather surprised him. He had not expected such easy compliance. Inga as the head of the house was a new idea to him, something that amused and perplexed him.

Once the installation completed she seemed to enter into the new atmosphere quite naturally. It is true that she became more reticent than ever, seldom joining in the general conversation except when addressed, but in the company of others — and their rooms were seldom quiet now — she held herself with grace and dignity. If she offered no advances she showed no antagonism. The men who came to his dinners admired her tremendously though their wives were plainly puzzled by her, never quite at ease in her presence. Of all the new acquaintances perhaps only one, De Gollyer, suspected the truth, that she was absolutely out of her element, quite at loss how to reconstruct her days.

. . . .

In the middle of the second month she said to Dangerfield quite suddenly one day:

"Would you mind if I did something?"

"What?" he asked wondering.

"I've decided to take up my work again."

Since their marriage she had abandoned the modest little field of magazine covers and posters which had formerly been her means of existence.

"Is this a request or an ultimatum?" he said grimly.

She frowned and for a moment, he saw a look of rebellion in her eyes, but almost immediately she looked down at the floor.

"I should like to very much," she said. "I am rather — rather restless."

"Then do it by all means," he said after a moment's reflection. He would have liked to seek further the reasons of this sudden resolve, yet he hesitated, feeling a certain unease before the answer which might be critical. "Besides, Inga, it isn't for me to say what you should or shouldn't do."

"Yes, I know," she said, "but I wanted to tell you."

He caught her hand as she turned to depart.

"Are you unhappy, Inga?" he said abruptly.

She shook her head.

"There's nothing I have done, at any time, to hurt you, is there?"

"No, no, Mr. Dan, nothing."

"You'd tell me?"

"Why, of course."

The change did not affect the ordinary routine of their lives much except that as he spent more of his time in the apartment, the working fit being still absent, while Inga was busy at the Arcade, their days became more divided. After a little while he ceased to notice this.

One afternoon she came home later than usual, and at the first glance at her face he perceived that something out of the ordinary had transpired. He helped her out of her coat with a vague feeling of uneasiness. In her hand was a letter, which she had been clutching so tightly that it had become twisted and wrinkled.

"Well, what has happened?" he said when they had gone into the studio and were standing by the great window that gave on to the low spread of park beneath. She looked into his eyes and saw them go down to the crumpled envelope still in her hand.

"You remember that letter?" she said slowly, "that letter last summer?"

He nodded.

"And this is another one?"

"Yes."

"From him?"

"Yes, from him."

He looked at her, seeing the agitation which had her in its grip, surprised at the curious calm in himself, a calm which had in it a sudden sense of pity.

"Inga," he said gently, "we haven't said one thing to each other we really thought for months. Don't you think it is better to talk it out?"

She looked at him; then without quite realizing the sense of what she was doing laid the letter on the shelf of the window and absent-mindedly began to smooth it out, but her eyes were far away.

"I wonder if we can," she said doubtfully; "some things are so hard to understand."

He took her by the wrist and led her before the great Florentine fireplace, installed her in one of the big armchairs as though she were a little girl. Then he sat down himself.

"Inga," he said presently, "whatever we do let's feel we can say to each other just what we think. It's the concealing and evasion that does harm. Now understand me. I claim no rights over your life and your actions. Yes, I did once, but that was a time of tempests and jealousies — a wild moment,— very wonderful perhaps to have known but which could only have brought unhappiness to both of us. I look at things differently now. I don't want you for my slave. I want you as a free companion. You must be that, as free as the day I met you."

She drew her hands up before her lips and her little teeth closed over her fingers as she stared into the shadows of the fireplace.

" You are unhappy? " he said slowly.

" No."

" Is that the truth, I wonder? "

" I am restless," she said after a moment.

He knew to insist on the avenue she thus opened to him meant the approach to a perilous understanding. Like all who have loved and have reached that point where they perceive life must be readjusted, he began by recoiling. Something seemed to close cruelly about his heart strings. He had a sudden horror of what might come, the dread of the very change he knew was inevitable. He rose, moving aimlessly, sought out his pipe, but without filling it. Then he returned to his seat, looked at Inga still staring ahead and said:

" What do you want to say to me? You can talk out freely. I shall understand now."

" He has written me again," she said slowly.

" And the first time,— did you answer? "

She shook her head.

" No."

" I don't know why I said that, Inga," he corrected himself hastily, " forgive me. I know you better."

She raised her eyes, looked at him and smiled faintly.

"He has written me again," she repeated as though she had forgotten that she had announced it before. "It is very pitiful. He is in a bad way, he has no one and it is all my fault."

"Yours, Inga?" he said, astonished.

"Yes, it is my fault," she said, her glance in the distance. "I failed. He was weak — very weak — but I failed to do what I should."

She looked down and drew the letter from its envelope and extended it towards him.

"Mr. Dan — I would like to answer it — very much."

He looked hungrily at the crumpled paper she thus offered him. He knew it was the key to many things which had mystified him in the past, the chart to that shadowy personality which had been in the background of her life, whom often he had detected in her eyes intruding when most they were alone, whose words and thoughts had come to him on her lips. Then a wave of pity came to him for the woman whom he had absorbed so covetously in his need and in a moment of generosity he refused to part the veil.

"No, I do not want to see it, that is not necessary," he said gently. "Do what you wish. If you can help him, do so."

"He wants to see me. He is very down. He needs —" she stopped, "he needs help so."

She again extended the letter to him.

"I think if you read it — it would be better. You'd understand."

"I understand," he said quietly. "I am at a point in life when one can understand such things. I understand that a person one has cared for cannot possibly pass completely out of your life. If you can help him now, do so. I think that will make you happier, won't it?"

She raised her eyes suddenly in startled inquiry.

"You mean that?" she said after a full moment of intense absorption.

"I mean there must be perfect faith between us," he said with kindness.

"Thank you," she said, but so low that it was almost a whisper. She rose very straight and slender, looking down at him. "I shall never break that faith, Mr. Dan."

The ending of the interview left them with a feeling of emptiness. They had tried to face the issue and each had instinctively avoided it by the memory of the old tenderness which lay in their eyes and lingered still in the echo of their voices.

"Live your life, Inga," he said impulsively, "in whatever way it must be lived to bring you happiness. That is the least I can do for you, but remember one thing — what you've done for me no one can ever undo. No one can take this place from you — it's yours."

And as they were both conscious of how much had been left unsaid, how much still waited to be faced, they swayed towards each other, tears in their eyes, and clung to each other passionately, as though with a sudden unquenchable loneliness.

XLVII

With the first exodus of the summer travelers from the city a new spirit of work possessed Dangerfield. With the clearing of the horizon of all that was glittering and superficial, the city with its great sanity and moving vital currents returned to him. He put off his departure for the country from month to month, fascinated by the summer moods of the metropolis, the brilliance on the Avenues, the extravagance in the lighted air, the teeming boisterous sweltering hordes on the beaches. He felt himself possessed with new enthusiasms. It was a new city he discovered, the city of the outer air, swept together in a friendlier fraternity by the mutual necessity for crowded pleasure after the long day.

In these ardent excursions he gathered around him other men, younger men, ardent disciples who wished to see what he saw, men interested in his new exposition of the treasures of beauty near at hand.

He found that success had brought him this — that isolation was no longer possible. The world paid him its full tribute but claimed him for its own, absorbing him into the rank and file of its groping masses, delegating to him his servitude of leadership. Yet he felt a certain content in fitting into the procession. The believers who surrounded him, communicated to him a certain strength which surprised him. Perhaps at bottom they convinced him of his power, the last and most fleeting sensation of the true artist. Then, too, he found that in expounding his views and seeking to open their eyes and inspire them, he taught himself, translating what at one time had been

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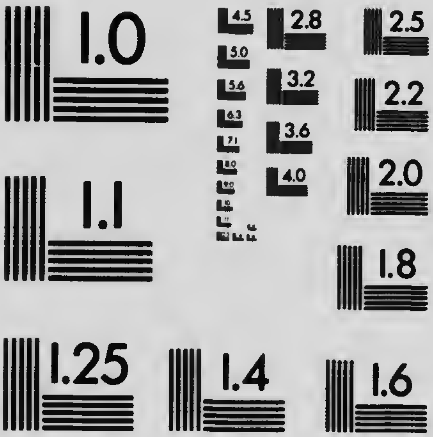
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pure instinct into the intellectual possession of conscious knowledge.

Tootles was usually of these pilgrimages. The young fellow had steadied amazingly with the opportunity of entering the privileged gatherings. He had begun to perceive that beyond all the fine fervor of inspiration and enthusiasm, is the long hard routine which alone can bring self-satisfaction in the knowledge that the building is rising on a firm foundation. He had a quick eye and a gift of absorbing with almost the imitativeness of a monkey, conceptions which were still logically beyond him. Yet there was no doubt of his earnestness. As a sort of announcement to the world that he had put behind youthful follies he even allowed his face to be disfigured by a scrubby mustache,— the sort of sacrifice a young doctor feels called upon to make on assuming the dignity of a practice.

In the beginning Inga had been of the party — Dangerfield was always eager to have her with him — but gradually, almost imperceptibly, she had dropped out, giving as an excuse the need of her own work. On his return to the Arcade he found her installed in her old studio. The first afternoon on which he made this discovery he had gone angrily to her door, so profoundly hurt by her action that for the first time he was in a mood for reproaches. He found her busy at her easel, model on the stand. He stopped, hesitated, and said with enforced restraint:

"I don't want to interrupt you. When you are through come in, there's something I want to see you about."

"Shall I come now?" she said instantly, observing and perhaps divining the reason of his agitation.

"No, no," he said hastily, respecting the mood. "After working hours, not before."

He crossed to his own studio, rebelling bitterly at the persistence of her self-sacrifice. But providentially, the model he had engaged was already waiting for him, an old toper, scavenger of small beers and wine drippings from the fragrant hogsheads of West Franklin Street, who had caught his fancy the day before. He was placidly asleep in a sort of musty drowsiness and he did not stir at Dangerfield's entrance. Something grotesquely humorous in the gourd-like head, sunk in childish slumber, caught his imagination immediately. He tiptoed over to his easel, brought out a canvas and stealthily prepared for a rapid sketch. At the noise of a falling tube the blissful Falstaff slowly opened one eye and prepared to awake.

"Don't move!" said Dangerfield hastily.

"Eh? What you mean?"

"Go to sleep immediately," said Dangerfield sternly, too interested to perceive the humor of the situation.

"Sleep? That all you want?" said the amateur without astonishment.

"Go to sleep at once,— just as you are," said Dangerfield, with the voice of a drill master.

His sitter, nothing loth, nodded drowsily, the heavy lids slowly settled against the bloated cheek, and in a moment a kettle-like breathing announced that he had obeyed to the letter.

When, an hour later, Inga came in, Dangerfield sent her a warning sign. She tiptoed over and took her seat by his side, waiting quietly until another half hour had brought the end of the afternoon's painting.

The model gone, Dangerfield, all else forgotten, stood eagerly contemplating the little masterpiece which a fortunate hazard had thrown in his way.

"What luck!" he said joyfully, his knuckles pressed against his teeth in that intimate gesture of excitement which she had come to know so well. "The beggar was fast asleep dreaming of running spigots and seas of beer when I came in. What luck! I never would have gotten this in the world."

"It is you at your best," she said, nodding with a pleased smile. "By the way, what was it you wanted to see me about?"

He looked at her, suddenly remembering, surprised at how quickly his irritation had passed.

"Oh, yes, and it's very serious, too," he said hastily, and then in order to reassemble all the resentment he had felt he took a turn or two about the room, drew off his blouse and flung it viciously across the room. "You know, Inga, I'm very angry with you."

"Why?" she said with just the trace of a smile.

"What the deuce do you mean by going back to your studio? I don't like it. This is as much yours as it is mine. If you are going to work, work here with me. You always used to."

"Yes, I used to, but that was different."

"Why?"

"I can tell you now," she said. "When I worked here, it was to help you, quiet you, because you needed to have me near you, always near you,— all the time."

"And now you've made up your mind you'd be in my way," he said irritably; "that's it, that's what you mean, isn't it?"

"No," she said, shaking her head, "I wasn't thinking of you; I was thinking of myself."

He believed this an evasion, and the way his eyebrows came together in the old bear-like stare plainly showed it.

"Inga, is that the truth?"

"Yes, it is," she said in her low musical voice. "What we do is so different. If I should work here with you I should be overpowered by you. I must get by myself, do the little things I can do. Don't you understand?"

"Is that the effect I have on you now?" he said slowly.

"If I tried to work here with you I should only sit and watch what you are doing, and I want to work — I must work, for myself!"

"I misunderstood you then," he said, his voice returning to gentleness. "Thought you were thinking of me and I can't bear to feel that you are always making the sacrifice."

"No, no, Mr. Dan," she said hastily, fingers clutching the covering of the table against which she stood, "I must think of myself, too, don't you see?"

"Yes, yes, of course, dear," he said hastily. He looked at her, hesitated and once more they retreated before the issue which lay implacably ahead.

. . . .

Afterward he wondered if she had told him all the truth, if his own needs had not been in question as well as her own, for he needed the privacy of his own room as every artist beyond the intimacy of friendship and love must retain a certain sanctuary of isolation where he can close out the distracting, intruding world and reign as absolute lord over a dominion where his every mood is a law.

His sense of loyalty to her never wavered. The world in which he moved was a world of workers. The rest he persistently shut away, resolutely declining all invitations to wander back along pleasant paths that opened to him at every point. Where she could not go, or rather, where she would not wish to follow him he refused to enter. In fact he did not even refer to the multiplicity of invitations which he continuously declined. He would have been very much surprised indeed had he suspected how intuitively she had divined his sacrifice. A great gentleness encompassed them, a deference toward each other that had about it the tenderness of their happiest days, but it was the deference of strangers towards each other. He never put a question to her, he never asked her for an account of her days, he made no reference to the man who had written to her in his need nor sought to learn what her decision had been. Once when she started to open the subject he stopped her, saying gently:

"You don't need to give me any explanations, Inga. You must feel this. I don't want you to change your life in the slightest on account of me. For the rest, I have absolute faith in you."

But from day to day he watched her — wondering.

. . . .

Meanwhile in the ordinary routine of the Arcade an event had happened which threw the inhabitants of the sixth floor into a flurry of astonishment.

Without the slightest warning, out of a clear sky, King O'Leary's wife turned up. She was a frail, rather tired, rather bored little woman who vouchsafed not the slightest explanation but came back weak and discouraged to be taken care of. Which was exactly the thing King O'Leary did, with a shrug of his shoulders, despite the protestations of all his friends.

"I'm down and out, King," she said, by way of excuse. "You're the only real man I know. I haven't no right, but — if you don't take care of me, it's all over."

He looked at her and the illusion which had lived in his heart through all the years suddenly snapped. She meant nothing to him now, could mean nothing, but she had been a part of his youth.

"Well, I guess you're still Mrs. O'Leary," he said slowly, "and if there's no one else to see you've got a roof over your head, I guess it's up to me. That's law and that's religion."

She broke down and wept at this, which annoyed him more than her return. But in a day she recovered her spirits and seemed to be thoroughly content to be lounging about the studios, smoking endless cigarettes, slumbering through the day time and waking to laughter and boisterousness at night. He installed her in the room that had been Myrtle Popper's, and probably gave her generously of his savings for she appeared in several new dresses of a rather Oriental suggestion.

During these weeks a cloud hung over the face of King O'Leary and all his usual good humor fled. He was irritable, resented the slightest expression of friendliness of his old associates to such an extent that they hardly dared note his coming and going. For this the cause was evident. The attitude of his wife had become that of a petty tyrant. Knowing the extent of his pride and the depth of his chivalry, she seemed to take a malicious pleasure in tormenting him before others, snapping him up at the slightest opportunity, lecturing him, seizing every chance to turn him into ridicule with such persistent vindictiveness that his friends wondered how he managed to hold himself in.

Then one day, as suddenly as she had come, she disappeared, taking with her all of her belongings and in addition one or two other small objects which had pleased her fancy, leaving behind her the following note scrawled on a stray leaf of paper, pinned to O'Leary's pillow:

KING:

I'm a thorough little beast and you are as fine as they make them. I won't bother you any more, I promise you that. You've been so decent I'm going to tell you the truth. I'm no more your wife than Belle Shaler. I got a divorce three years ago down in California. When I get hold of my papers I'll send you the decree. I thought at first you knew and then I made up my mind to work you for a good thing but you're too damned decent for that. I'm not making apologies — it's not my way. You're one of the best, King, and the only good thing I ever did for you was to leave you. Good luck and good-by.

LULU.

XLVIII

The first boisterous winds of Autumn had come to end the stagnation of summer when one day in the full midst of the afternoon's work Inga came into the studio where Dangerfield was singing gorgeously to himself in the boyish zest of his work.

"Hello," he said, looking up, surprised at this early entrance. "Nothing doing this afternoon?"

"I finished sooner than I expected," she said evasively, "and it was very bad. I want to watch you."

"All righty, I'll try to perform."

But something in the gravity of her look made him turn abruptly and study her with a sudden presentiment. She seemed unconscious of his scrutiny even when from time to time he turned in her direction with rising wonder. She sat just behind him so as to command both the model and the canvas, her chin on the back of her hands, her body sunk in the depths of an armchair, her glance set in revery before her.

A vague sense of uneasiness crept over him, something which sent to flight all the playfulness and the joy which had been in his heart. He could not quite account for this sudden shadow which seemed to obsess the room. He had seen her often in such profound moods and yet there was something indefinable in the solemnity of her pose, in the set purpose of her eyes which warned him.

He started to whistle and stopped. He tried to return into the flowing impulse of the moment before, and felt a sudden unutterable distaste, a resentment against himself and the thing he was creating. The brushes in his hand were heavy, his arm itself weighted down by some unseen load. Something began to race in his heart and to quicken every nerve.

"That will do for to-day," he said, dropping his brushes suddenly. "I'll let you know when I want you. Take your things and go."

The moments until they were alone seemed interminably long and cruel. He jerked the canvas from its easel and set it in the corner without a second look, stripped off his blouse and went hurriedly to the washstand to plunge into soap and water. When he came back, drying his arms, the little model, a waif from the West side, was ready, waiting for the day's pay. He paid him twice over, with that instinct of weakness before destiny which is inherent in the superstition of man, silenced his thanks and sent him out.

Then he came and stood in front of her chair. She did not appear to notice him, sitting in the same rigid pose, the same unseeing stare in her eyes. He watched her, baffled as always by the veiled depths of those eyes into which he had searched so often, only to lose himself in confusion.

"Inga."

Her glance came back slowly — was it from the future or from out the past? She saw him, rose slowly and laid her hand upon his arm almost as though swaying against him for support.

"Just a moment," she said, with a long breath.

While he waited, she went past him to the window where she stood half turned from him, a free and slender line against the white of the outer day. He followed until he stood just behind her, waiting for her to speak.

"You know what it is, don't you?" she said at last but without turning towards him.

"No," he said, and yet at the first sound of her voice he knew. The moment has come, which he had known for months must arrive.

"Do you remember what we said to each other here once?" she began, but with much hesitation,—the promise you gave me."

"What promise?" he said mechanically.

"You said—" She stopped, turned towards him and tried to lift her eyes to his.

"Come, Inga," he said, "what's got to be said must be said. You've known that all along and so have I."

"Yes, I know," she said, but her eyes dropped down and her hands came together in a straining nervous clasp.

"You mean, then," he said, "the time has come when you want to go out of my life. Is that what you're trying to tell me, Inga?"

She raised her eyes again and again, her glance fled from his, but she nodded her head twice in silent acquiescence.

"Oh, Inga!"

He had known it for weeks and yet now that it lay between them immutably written, forever fixed by the nod of her head, he felt dazed by the suddenness of the blow. He caught her up to him, crushing her in his arms and what he said to her in the wild unreasoning phrases that came pouring from his lips he did not know, only that for the moment, faced with the sudden ache of parting, it seemed to him that he loved her completely, absolutely, deliriously, as he had never loved her before.

She neither tried to check nor to answer him. Her head lay weakly on his shoulder, powerless against his strength, and when again he regained his calm he saw the tracks of tears across her face.

"Inga," he said angrily, catching hold of her wrists, clutching them until they must have hurt her, "you're not going to do this, you understand? It's not going to end this way. I won't have it!"

"I want to talk to you," she said, shrinking back.

He stopped, walked away from her, buried his head in his hands, and gradually fought his way back to self-control again.

"I want to talk to you," she repeated, helplessly.

"Yes, yes," he said, with a sudden feeling of contrition for the intemperance of the emotion which had carried him away. "I am sorry, I couldn't help it. Let's talk to each other, then, but facing things as they are, as we should have talked to each other long ago."

"Oh, yes — please."

All at once a presentiment of the finality of her decision came over him and with it a longing to preserve this one spot so garnished with the memories of what they had been to each other, free from the memory of what might come between them.

"Very well," he said, "but not here. I don't want — you understand — not here, Inga."

"I understand," she said, and without looking at him moved over to the door.

He joined her and because they did not wish any one to see their faces at that moment they did not call the elevator, but went slowly and darkly down the stone descent. In the street he held out his arm to her with a longing to feel again the intimate clinging pressure of her bo[illegible]

"Take my arm," he said.

She hesitated and then slipped her hand into its protection and thus they returned to their apartment.

When they had come into these outer surroundings which represented all that was recent in their existence together, he felt that not only outwardly but inwardly, they had passed from one life into another. He saw all at once what he had refused to see — how utterly out of place she was against the formal correctness of his new home, this gilded cage into which he had imprisoned her, and perceiving this, all at once he felt, too, how helpless he would be before the logic of her plea.

A moment before, under the spell of the old haunts, he had been for the moment the Dangerfield of the past, the man who had come into her life as life was natural and instinctive to her. Now he was suddenly aware of all the difference that lay between them, of the far poles of society from which they had started on their groping journeys for one moment of which destiny had brought them together. He took her things from her as deferentially as though it had been for the first time, and going into the hall rang for the butler and sent him away. Even this action, instinctive in his training, showed him the division between them. She would never have thought of this.

He came back to her and with a sudden wave of gentleness laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Inga, I know that this is hard for you," he said, "I won't lose control of myself again. Now let's understand each other. When man and woman have been to each other what we have been, something remains which can never completely pass away. You feel that, don't you?"

She nodded.

"We could never do anything to hurt each other — consciously do it. I am ready to do anything that you feel you need. Now that the air is clear, let's say what we think. We have tried so often and failed. It is my fault, for I have known for a long while that you have been unhappy."

"No, Mr. Dan," she said, gently, "not unhappy. I have been, well — just lost."

"I don't quite understand that," he said, sitting down beside her, so close that their knees brushed one another's, their heads almost touching. He took her hands in his.

"Yet it isn't anything that I have done, is it? I haven't hurt you?"

She shook her head slowly and tried to smile.

"Oh, no, you couldn't. You've done more than you should. I have known that."

"That isn't true," he said, firmly. "I haven't made one sacrifice or given up a single thing I wanted on your account."

"Please, Mr. Dan — oh, please. You said it. We must tell each other the truth!" she said, with a sudden intensity. From this moment all indecision passed from her, as though she had finally dried the one rebellious tear which had come uncontrollably to her eyes.

"This is the truth," he said, with an attempt at openness. "If it were not for you — not because I should be afraid for you, but because I know you would hate the life, I might drift back into a certain purely formal society that once made up my life. But what would that mean to me? Absolutely nothing. As a matter of fact, it might represent a danger. It is hard to seek out the world without being in the end a slave to it so that, don't you see — and I've been absolutely honest — what you might think I've done for you, is really the thing I should do for myself."

She did not answer, but sat considering what he had said, turning it over from every angle as women do, seeking the chain of motives and the reasons which it might reveal.

Seeing her indecision he believed that he had found the reason of her renunciation.

"Inga, why always sacrifice yourself, always think of me?" he burst out. "For that at the bottom is what it is. There's something rigid and cold about it which is like the country you come from. You want to go out of my life because you think that that act will set me free. You rebel because you think I am held to you by a sense of loyalty and gratitude. Now listen. You may think that another woman may come into my life, a woman brought up in the superficial life which I have known. You're utterly and absolutely wrong and the trouble is you undervalue yourself. There's no other woman — there can be no other woman in my life. What you are to me is absolutely what I need, the companionship above all others."

She turned and looked at him with an expression so inscrutable that he felt uncomfortable beneath this challenge as though he were guilty of some evasion and had been caught in the act.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he said, uneasily.

"Mr. Dan," she said, impulsively, "don't you see the truth — it's not you I am thinking of! It's myself, my life."

"What!" he said, completely thrown off his guard. "But Inga, doesn't it mean something to be my wife, to share in my success, to feel that you have done it all? Isn't that a triumph for you? Isn't that sufficient? Doesn't that thrill you?"

"No," she said quietly; "all that means nothing."

He looked at her helplessly, feeling as though he had offered everything he had to offer and had finally lost.

"It's strange that you don't understand," she said, pensively, "for you understand so many things, you have such a big way of looking at life."

He rose and sat down again abruptly.

"We are beating about the bush, we are coming to nowhere, Inga," he said desperately. "There's another man come into your life who means more to you than I do. You want to go to him, isn't that it?"

"Yes."

"I gave you my promise to free you, I shall keep it," he said, though the words were hard to bring forth.

"And you — you understand?" she asked, gently.

"I shall try to understand." Then despite himself he broke into a laugh, a bitter echo of the mocking laughter of the past. "Understand? No, no, I shall never understand you!"

"Perhaps I can make you," she began. Then she drew in her under lip, pressing her sharp little teeth against it till the blood surged around them.

"Mr. Dan, I do care for you, and if you ever needed me, as you did once, I would have to come to you, no matter where I was or what else was in my life. I mean it. But I have never really belonged to your life. There's all the difference in the world between us, you know it and I know it. That's why I didn't want to marry you. And you know it now, too, you feel it the moment I come here into this room. Only you are very loyal, very kind and very generous, but it is so."

"It wasn't always so," he cried impulsively, and then suddenly stopped, realizing what the admission had been.

"I belonged to you but I don't belong to your life. I can't. I don't want to, Mr. Dan, it bores me. You don't know how completely lonely I have been."

"Inga," he said, interrupting her, "it isn't entirely that. You, too, are not telling the whole truth. Perhaps I understand you in this better than you do yourself. Frankly, you are not interested in me any more."

"What do you mean?"

"You are not interested," he said, quietly, as though for the first time he were capable of standing apart and judging themselves impartially, "because you've finished your task, because there's nothing more for you to do."

"Yes, Mr. Dan, there is nothing more for me to do," she said, sadly. "I can't give you anything more. I don't count. And the truth is, we're just good friends. I suppose other marriages are happy like that. It is killing me."

"It seems strange," he continued, staring at her, "that there should be so little vanity in you. Other women would feel a sense of pride, of possession, of parading what they had accomplished, but not you. You were happiest, you only really loved me when I was trembling on the edge of the gutter, when you were the last hold which held me back, and now you miss that, you miss the dramatic side of it, the struggle, the tremendous tax on every nerve of your body, on every shred of your will. You've won out, you've made me and now I no longer interest you. You miss the struggle."

"Oh, it is not simply that I miss it," she cried, passionately; "it's that I must have it. I'm that way, it's my happiness. I should stifle if there was nothing in life for me to do."

"I do not say it in bitterness," said Dangerfield, "I am not bitter. I know now that you must follow your instinct and between the other man and myself you must go to the one who needs you now, as I used to need you, isn't that so?"

"Yes, he needs me," she said. She rose and unconsciously a little light, a fierce maternal craving came into her face and touched her eyes, a light that hurt him. "I have waited until I was sure. He doesn't know that I will come."

"I only hope he is worth the giving," said Dangerfield, abruptly. Of all the other emotions, jealousy, passion, gratitude, loyalty, only one remained, a feeling of great tenderness, of almost paternal solicitude.

"He has wonderful things in him, too," she said, "that must be saved, that I'm going to fight for."

Then a silence fell between them as they stood facing each other, knowing that all had been said between them, each suddenly shy and embarrassed.

"You have been very kind to me, Mr. Dan. There are things I can never forget." She stopped, put out her hand to his and said, "and I am glad now that you had your way, that you made me marry you."

"I can't say anything," he said. He took her in his arms gently, as though she had been a fragile flower, her head against his head while the tears from their eyes ran together on their cheeks, trembling against each other as those who have loved passionately, love again at the final parting.

AFTERWORD

THE little fraternity in the Arcade broke up gradually, after one more dramatic interruption. The baron, whose health had faded rapidly in the last months, was gradually confined to his room, where Pansy came each day to watch over him with the tenderness of a daughter. Twice Drinkwater attempted to follow his wife into the intimacy of the room but each time the intrusion roused such a tempest of fury in Mr. Cornelius that he actually drew a pistol and threatened to shoot him, and the lawyer retreated precipitately. Of Drinkwater's assiduous curiosity and the plan of blackmail which had long matured in his crafty mind, Pansy had not the slightest suspicion, as was afterwards evident. Of all who had wondered at the lawyer's impulsive marriage with the girl who had won Mr. Cornelius' confidence, the baron alone divined the reasons for his action. His hatred for Drinkwater was something uncontrollable and terrifying in its rage. The resemblance of Pansy to the baron, so marked in the upward lift of the right eyebrow, the lustrous black of the eyes and the faint similarity of the profile. coupled with the affection the old man had shown to her alone, had suggested a scheme of blackmail to Drinkwater's fertile imagination. At the death of Mr. Cornelius he had planned to claim that Pansy was his true daughter, and through threats of scandal to force a settlement from the estate. For this purpose he had even insinuated the belief into the imagination of the girl — who however was quite guiltless in the attempt that followed.

To bolster up his scheme, it became necessary for Drinkwater to procure first the knowledge of the baron's real name and second some intimate relics which would carry conviction. To this end he had sought vainly an opportunity to force the lock of the great chest, which he rightly guessed held the secrets he coveted. As a matter of fact, it is quite possible that desiring what he did so ardently, Drinkwater had actually been able to convince himself that Pansy was in truth what he intended to claim. The declining health of Mr. Cornelius and his own failure to gain admittance as a friend, undoubtedly impelled him to the rash act which brought so fatal a termination. By some means or other he had procured a key to the door and one evening when the inhabitants of the floor were gathered in O'Leary's studio fêting Tootles' birthday, he succeeded in making his entrance into the baron's room. Some abiding suspicion must have crossed Mr. Cornelius' mind for without explanation he was seen to leave in the middle of the party. A minute later a sudden outcry and the sound of a pistol shot sent them rushing down the hall. In the center of the room Mr. Cornelius was standing, pistol in hand, swaying against the back of a chair which had caught his weight and by the chest, which had been pried open, still grasping a locket, was the body of Drinkwater, quite dead.

The baron did not long survive him. The shock and the memory sent him into a raging fever, and the end came a week later. Every clue to his past was carefully removed by Dangerfield, acting under instructions, who transferred the chest to the control of the lawyers. Only a few personal effects, a few books and the portrait of the woman who had meant the whole of life — heaven and hell — in his romantic tragic career, remained at the end. The few reporters who came in avidly scenting a story drew fanciful pictures of this inexplicable ending, stories that had a remembered touch of Alexander Dumas — though one or two guesses came near the truth. The death of Drinkwater seemed to affect Pansy but little, strong as had been his almost hypnotic control over her during his lifetime. She went back into the old partnership with Belle Shaler, neither richer nor poorer, a little dazed but incapable of deeper emotions.

After this tragic interruption, the floor seemed to disintegrate all at once. Tootles went off to Paris for further study, thanks to Dangerfield, who sent him as a sort of tribute to the past, the one touch of generosity permitted him. King O'Leary ended by marrying Millie Brewster and went with her roving down into Central America, where, thanks to her practical ambitions, he found opportunities and began to make his way. Flick remained of the fraternity of Bohemia, never at loss to turn a quick dollar, incapable of saving one, wandering through many trades, always on the point of discovering the sudden road to fortune, always awaking in a garret, nor being greatly depressed by the failure.

Schneibel and Miss Quirley drew back into their respective shells. Other tenants succeeded to the sixth floor but the association which had been begun with the arrival of King O'Leary and Dangerfield was never resumed.

And what of Inga? Despite her explanations, she remained as great a mystery to Dangerfield as on the first wild night when he had opened his eyes to find her in his studio in self-assumed command of his destiny. Despite his pleadings and remonstrances she had refused to take from him the slightest assistance. Free she had always been and free she remained to come and go.

That she had loved him and still loved him he knew, for on the rare occasions when they passed each other in the crowd, her eyes showed that she still remembered. Yet was this love as deep and encompassing as her impulse towards the other man? And what part had he played in her life, in both their lives?

Luigi Champeno he met once, two years after her marriage to him, at the opening of the fall academy, where two groups by the young sculptor were the eyes of the exhibition, for their uncanny originality, a daring representation of the squalor of a crowded tenement stoop in which, curiously enough, it seemed to him that he found traits of his own way of looking at things.

The meeting had been accidental, the introduction unavoidable. He had given his hand with a feeling of deepest kindness, strongly stirred, at the sight of Inga, at the somberness and poverty of her dress, divining all the struggle and the happiness that it revealed.

Only a few words were said and those quite inconsequential. In the eyes of the young man he had seen the sudden leap of hatred and animal jealousy which once, he remembered, had torn his soul in shreds in the days of his own infatuation. That Champeno adored her with a clinging idolatrous faith was evident. Dangerfield had looked eagerly at Inga, into the sea-blue eyes, seeking some clue there of regret, of complaint, of renewed triumph or of restlessness, but her eyes as always retained their veil. He could divine nothing.

Yet of the man himself he retained a singularly illuminating memory, an impression of a morose and tortured child, of violent moods and moral weakness,— a precocious child tortured by a spark of genius, utterly undisciplined and untamed, incapable of standing alone.

" The battle there will never be won," he thought, with a sudden comprehension, and he added with a little touch of poignant regret, " and he will adore her fiercely, tyrannically as I never could."

The answer to many perplexities seemed to be there. Inga had adored him and by the other she had been adored. With him her reason for existing had been accomplished, with the other it could never end. With him she had never quite been herself, conscious of intangible social demarcations, while with Champeno she went arm in arm, child of the people to the last.

He moved over to where De Gollyer was standing in critical admiration before the exhibit of the young sculptor which had attracted general enthusiasm. It was a group of immigrants, mother and babe, with children clutching at her skirts, marooned on a flight of stairs, looking hopelessly out on the sea of New York; powerfully repulsive, startling in its fidelity, revolutionary but convincing.

"What puzzles you?" he asked.

"My boy, it has a suggestion of you," said De Gollyer, with his head on one side. "Fact — reminds me of things you've done."

"You think so?" he said, surprised that his friend had noticed what he had felt at the first glance.

"It's strong — best thing in years. The boy's got it fairly," said De Gollyer, "came out of the slums himself; the iron and the gall are there. There's a story he started in an East Side gang and was railroaded up to the reformatory for a year. Probably fiction. But he's felt what he's crying out to us. No mistake about that. And yet, Dan, if you'd signed it I shouldn't have been surprised."

Dangerfield didn't reply. He was staring at the strangely revealing group, wondering what else she had taken out of his life to give to the other.

He never remarried. He did big things. It is true he just missed the final enduring touch of genius, but it is doubtful if he himself realized it, nor what he might have been if Inga had not left him and the world made him its hero and its slave. For his own day, he was master and leader. For whatever the judgment of posterity may be, as De Gollyer was wont to remark: "It is better to die as Sheridan than to die as Shakespeare, for Shakespeare never knew."

The world naturally completely misjudged Dangerfield. In his career they saw nothing but the oft repeated story of devouring genius; the man growing beyond the woman who had regenerated him and sacrificing her once he has arrived. Dangerfield himself was aware of this hostile attitude but he never sought to explain it away. De Gollyer, it is true, told his version of the romance in strictest confidence to a multitude of friends, but De Gollyer's reputation as a raconteur was against him. His listeners were amused, grateful and stubbornly incredulous, knowing full well from their own experience that women like Inga Sonderson do not exist.

THE END

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