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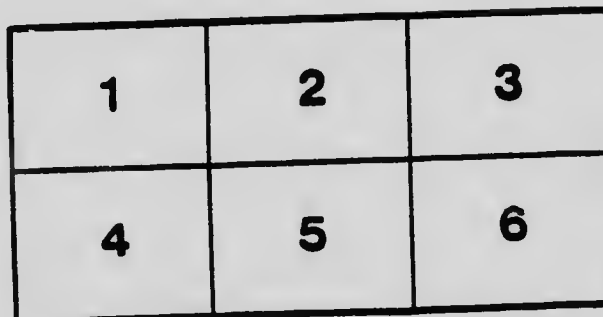
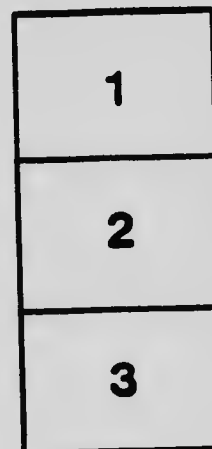
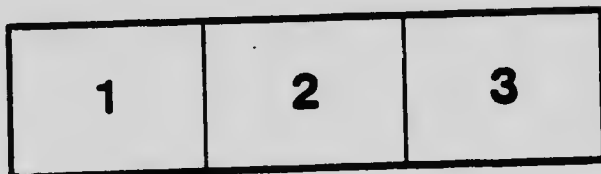
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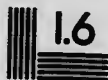
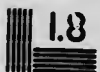
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THE
GREEN
VASE

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J. C. B.



THE GREEN VASE



THE GREEN VASE

By

WILLIAM R. CASTLE, JR.



TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS
1912

PS3505

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TO
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THE GREEN VASE



BOOK I

· · ·

HELEN



CHAPTER I

THE train came to a stop with a jerk that almost threw the passengers to the floor.

"Confound that engineer," Henry Murphy said. "He's nearly knocked us down at every station since we left New York, and I guess this time he just remembered the last minute that the Boston station wasn't located on State Street. Come on, Helen," and then, to a group of fellow-passengers, "Good-bye and good luck to you."

He took his wife's arm and pushed his way across the crowded platform to a cab. While he went with the driver to find their trunk she leaned back somewhat dispiritedly against the worn leather cushions of the carriage. The day was blustering and dismal. Their honeymoon was over. During the first week, at Niagara, she had found herself pitifully unable to share Henry's enthusiasm in the wonder of the place, and at the same time had been thrilled with the realisation that he was somehow, in his splendid young strength, a part of it all. Then had followed a fortnight of ecstatic, if perhaps a little wistful joy in New York. At the Waldorf, at Delmonico's, she

had brushed against men and women of the world. And yet she had suffered. To be among them, unnoticed, was not to be of them. To touch them in passing was not like speaking with them, eating with them; and yet, an outsider, she had felt kinship with them. Henry had been interested in them only as he was interested in a play in which he had no wish to take a part. Then, more acutely, as vaguely before they were married, she had wished he was different, not in any specific detail perhaps, but that he might be more obviously a gentleman—like the men in evening clothes who seemed to have so much to say. She had not phrased it so clearly as yet.

Now they had come home. Where they were to live she had no idea. Henry had wanted to surprise her—as though she were a child—and she had been unwilling to spoil the eager joy of his anticipation and had refrained from questions. After all, he would only have rented and they could decide during the coming year where to live. She wanted to be among the people whom her father had known and loved and whom her mother, in their poverty, had lost sight of after his death. Beacon Street and Commonwealth Avenue were beyond their means, but people were moving out. The Fenway and the Bay State

Road were building up, and she believed it would be an easy matter to persuade Henry to settle there since his sense for financial opportunity was as keen as hers for social. She knew that she was not a "climber." She wanted friends, as she had wanted them all her life—people in whose interests she could really share.

Henry spoke to the coachman, evidently naming a familiar street, and then jumped into the carriage and fell, rather than sat, beside her. He never did things calmly. He was often boisterous in the vitality of his youth, and so, almost roughly, yet with the tenderness that came of great love, he threw his arm over her shoulder and drew her close. "Now, dearest," he said, "home! What a home it will be! Just us two! A thousand times better than wedding tours. No swells to look at our clothes and wonder who the country folks are. Just us two. Aren't you glad, Helen?"

"Yes," she whispered, "yes, dear," and nestled closer. At that moment, as always when she was alone with him, she shared fully his feelings, let her love shine clear, meeting his as frankly and unreservedly as their eyes met. She delighted in his strength, his touch, his whole-hearted, protecting love. She was willing to let herself sink contentedly into

its limitless shelter and to rest, to be unreservedly happy in his care, as he was in the right to care.

She had almost forgotten that they were moving, going home, until she looked out and saw unfamiliar streets. She watched vaguely a moment, then acutely. Their carriage was lumbering along toward the South Boston bridge. Her first impulse was to cry out. Surely he had not taken a house there—or perhaps they were going to Roxbury. She quieted at that. Roxbury was not the Back Bay, but good families still lived there. It would be only temporary, and at any rate she must not disappoint her husband, must not let him see anything but the happiness he so confidently expected. Then they turned to the left, over the bridge. "Where?" she cried involuntarily, "not South Boston?"

Henry looked at her, surprised. "Yes, dear, South Boston. Why not? We're not social swells and nothing is prettier. You just wait."

"I have never been there," she murmured, but she kept her face away from him, looking unseeingly over the forests of shipping. South Boston. People had silver weddings there, and sometimes the engagement was announced in the papers of a clerk living in Somerville or Charlestown to Miss Murphy of South Boston. Murphy—that was her name now, and per-

haps she belonged there. But she did not—she was sure of that—not for long at any rate. The name, Murphy, always troubled her except when she was with Henry, and then, in her admiration for him, she forgot about it. Perhaps there were nice people in South Boston, but she doubted it because they were never mentioned in the society columns, the real society columns where people did not pay and which were not called society to please the politicians whose names and speeches were reported. It was among the political items that their home-coming would be reported. “Henry Murphy, the rising young politician, has just returned from Niagara and New York with his bride, who was a Miss Helen Smith of Cambridge. The young people have taken a house in —— Street, South Boston, where they will be pleased to see their friends.” She could not imagine the Elliots and the Blands and the Sawyers reading that notice—and the combination of Murphy and South Boston made her almost glad.

The carriage was bumping along now over paved slum streets where babies and mangy dogs swarmed in the gutters, and where rumpled sheets and turkey-red tableclothes streamed from the windows. Slatternly women with market baskets gossiped on the corners. Helen almost envied them be-

cause she was sure they never thought beyond the day. Happiness there must be on the top rung of the social ladder. A kind of sordid acceptance there must be on the lowest rung, too, where one must recognise the impossibility of the climb and where envy would only be for the money that Mrs. Delancy's diamond tiara would bring, not for contact with the lazy men and women who saw it glitter and came to pass idle, precious words with its owner. And all the time Henry had been talking, loving her, taking her home, masculinely unconscious that she was less radiant under the gloomy skies than he. For him the time had not yet arrived, if it ever would, when he could distinguish between a brave smile and a joyous one. She did not let him see her eyes.

"It's lucky for us," he was saying as they passed into tree-lined streets where the houses would have been suggestive of Beacon Hill had it not been for the little ugly signs of "Front Room To Let" in the windows, "that the swells missed seeing what a really good thing South Boston was. We could never have come here if folks like that had bought up the land. Are you tired out, love? We are almost home." She had turned to him, and he had caught a suggestion of the suffering in her eyes, only to interpret it wrongly. "Here we are now."

The carriage turned up a sharp, short hill and came to a stop at one side of a shaded but somewhat unkempt park before the door of an old-fashioned, red house with a high stoop and ornate iron railing. In front was a little grass-plot where a few purple crocuses showed their faces. About the whole square was an air of respectability, almost of gentility, Helen thought, as she glanced over it, suddenly reassured. And then, in the window of the next house, her eye caught a sign, "Large Front Room To Let."

Henry led her up the steps and hand in hand they passed into the hall. He was too deeply moved to speak, and Helen, when she saw his face, threw her arms around his neck. "Our house," she whispered. "Dearest, how happy we shall be."

The parlour had red walls, red of an almost bloody shade, but touched with magenta where shadows fell across it. The woodwork, heavy all of it, but overshadowed by the huge mantelpiece that tried ineffectually to hide behind an intricate network of jigsaw tracery, was of lifeless black walnut. On the centre of the mantel, crushing all hope of better things, was a fat green vase, up which sprawled red and yellow roses, all in high relief, all shining as though varnished. It was the wedding present from Henry's Uncle John, and Helen had cried when it

came. Uncle John was rich and she had hoped that his riches might be associated with good taste. The furniture suited the room, as she realised sadly. It, too, was of black walnut, upholstered in bright green corduroy, and it had obviously been newly revarnished. She sat down on the hard tufted sofa and covered her face with her hands. The sofa was unyielding and she moved to a chair. It was stiff and uncomfortable but from it she could not see the green vase. She was in the grip of despair but knew she could hide her feelings from her husband after he came from superintending the trunks. She only hoped the stairs were long, so that he could not finish quickly. There were coarse lace curtains at the windows, a blue white in colour. She had not noticed them before. They looked like the curtains one bought in shops where furniture is sold on the instalment plan. They were just the hue of a dead body. She thought of tearing them down, and then she heard the front door slam. Henry was coming.

She stood up to meet him, afraid of herself, afraid of her surroundings, but with the same brave smile on her face that he so eagerly mistook for joy. "Well," he cried, "pretty flossy parlour for beginners, ain't it?" She looked at him with staring eyes, the smile still hovering on her lips. Somehow she

had expected his personality to dominate the room, to push back the ugliness, to sweep her up into his own optimism. And he did dominate, become the moving force of all the surroundings, but not, as she hoped, by crushing them back on themselves. Rather he seemed at the moment to assimilate them to himself, to be himself the ultimate test of vulgarity, finer only because stronger, and through his strength less capable of change. Suddenly she sank down on the inhospitable sofa and shook with great wrenching sobs. She cried because at the moment her dreams were shattered; because she recognised the impossibility of moulding her husband into a type different from that of his birthright; and because, contradicting as he did all her masculine ideals except that of power, she yet loved him.

He was on his knees beside her, his arms around her, talking to her as he might have to a child with a broken toy, very tenderly, with a gentleness she had hardly believed was in him. "Poor little girl. Poor child—tired out and I never knew it. And then, after all the excitement of the trip, coming to a new and strange home. But you'll feel better soon. And I have a surprise for you—a surprise that'll make you very happy, a new wedding present."

"Not another green vase!" she cried, straighten-

ing suddenly and drawing away from him. "I—I couldn't stand that."

He laughed happily, holding both her hands. "No, not another green vase; I'd forgotten you didn't like that. You'll learn to, I guess. A much bigger, costlier present than that. Uncle John did help with it, though, in a sort of way. See, here's his letter," he added, producing the document from his pocket. "It's what I call a good letter. Read it." He thrust it into her hand, and sitting on the sofa beside her drew her close to him.

"DEAR NEPHEW HENRY," it began. "I am glad you took the straight road to your uncle. Who should you go to quicker? I have been thinking over your plan and have decided to help you. But along with the help here goes a bit of advice from an old man who has been through life, to a young one just beginning. From what you say I opine that you are marrying a sensible young woman like your Aunt Mary was when she and I made up together. Miss Helen has earned her living so she will know how to be economical and keep your house shipshape. She will have no social bee in her bonnet, thank God. The germ of that kind of ambition in a woman is the worst kind of sickness to fight. It is sometimes contagious and then you might as well call in the financial undertaker. But I guess you are safe and I would say Miss Helen was if I did not know the suscepti-

bility of womankind. There is no such thing as being too careful in these matters. Therefore, which is the reason for all this, buy a house where there will be as few chances of contagion as possible. If you buy in the city get away from what the papers call the tide of fashion. Strike into a back water if you can, some place that's just got left out. You never can tell what will happen in a new place if the dam breaks, because any tide is a curious thing and reaches the most unlikely places. But a back water has been tried already and things are apt to keep on pretty steady like. The hill in South Boston is one of such and so are the streets north of Franklin Square. In both you can buy cheap and good, reaping the fruits, so to speak, of the fashion hunters that made a mistake. But I put South Boston first because it's farther from the danger line and because the park will be a fine place for the children to play. Of course there is not much chance of land skyrocketing there, but you will be buying a home, not a wildcat speculation scheme. That is not what I am lending money on, but on a permanent investment, as permanent as marriage itself. I am lending you money to build up a God-fearing, righteous, fruitful home, and after all that's the only thing worth while in the long journey of this life. I want you and Helen to start right and keep right, and nothing is more likely to do it than a bit of land and a tidy home that is your own. Therefore when you need the money your old Uncle will hold the mortgage, believing it will be the sound-

est investment of his life. God bless you both, my boy. You're just the sort I would have liked my son to be if he had ever been more than a dream-child, and it's up to you to keep on living up to my ideal of what he would have been.

"Yours affectionately,

"JOHN MURPHY."

Helen read the letter through, dry-eyed and emotionless. "Have you bought the house?" she asked finally, in a hard voice.

"Yes, dear," he answered. "That was the surprise. Isn't Uncle John a wonder. The deed's in your name. How does it feel to be a property owner? Better than writing letters in Stuyvesant and Bond's office, isn't it?"

"Henry," she said quickly, "you're too good to me. I'm not worth it. Shall we go upstairs now?"

He looked vaguely disappointed as he followed her, but could not have told why. He was far from grasping even a suggestion of the undercurrent of her thought, far from seeing that the fulfilment of his brightest dreams was the shattering of hers.

CHAPTER II

A WEEK later Helen sat before her mirror doing her hair. She was proud of the wonderful masses of it, deep, rich chestnut in colour, and as she drew it back not too tightly, coiling it into a great knot at the back of her neck, she watched the ripples of light that played along it. The sun was shining across her window, and through a golden haze she could look out over the shallow harbour and the marshes to the Dorchester hills, already stained with the warm, soft, green of spring. The call of a fishmonger, made musical by distance, the notes of birds in the trees, the smell, languorous yet deeply irritating, of the earth waking to new life in the hot spring sunshine—all these stirred her more profoundly than she knew, disintegrating the despairing calm that for seven days had only given way before tempests of self-accusing love for her husband. So, as she leaned forward watching herself in the glass, her bare arms resting on the cool marble top of her dressing table, she felt the pain of her defeat acutely resurgent. Bitterly she repeated the hard, common-sense phrases of Uncle John's letter—the house that was his soundest invest-

ment because they would live in it, always; the park where the children could play—dirty, South Boston children she saw them, their father's commonness without his redeeming strength; she saw them in school, in college, always dragging on a noisy, colourless existence; saw them married, the girl perhaps to that vulgar boy next door who threw spitballs and whose mother took boarders at sixty cents a day. In anticipation, for them, she rebelled. It would be better not to have children, and at that her pity reverted to herself. Did not the woman looking back at her from the mirror deserve a better fate than drowning in the slough of South Boston respectability? She was not a vain woman, but she knew the value of her face and figure. There was nothing plebeian in the soft oval of the face, in the deep brown eyes, the firm nose and chin, the small mouth that drooped pathetically at the corners. Why should there be? Her poverty had not affected her inheritance of birth. She held up her arms and let the loose sleeves of her dressing sacque fall to the shoulders. There was strength as well as beauty in the pliant lines of her figure. She knew that her body was more than Henry had said—"little, and warm, and soft to cuddle." She thought of it then frankly, as a social asset more potent than jewels and bro-

cares, and yet she longed for the jewels and brocades to hang upon it, longed for them with much the same feeling that a priest has for the diamonds with which he embroiders the robe of the Blessed Virgin. The precious stones do not enhance the value of the object of worship. They seem merely, through the senses, to give a first impulse to the worshippers. Henry loved to have her well dressed—"as well as you can, my dear, without being extravagant. I want my wife to look well so people can't say I'm stingy, but it would be the ruin of my career to have them think we were trying to put ourselves over them." Was she, then, to be merely an aid to his career, to spend her life being polite to the vulgar wives of vulgar constituents? Perhaps that was a wife's duty, but she had married, partly at least, to escape the grind of duty, but most of all, she knew even in her despair, because she loved Henry Murphy. There was nothing in the whisperings and the pervasive scent of a warm spring day to impel her back to the cold fact of duty.

She stepped to the window and stood looking out as her husband so often did, but unlike him, she got no pleasure from the commercial aspect of the scene. When he exclaimed at the lovely tints of the water as a cloud let fall its long, quivering shadow, or pointed out the yellow in the budding woods of the

Dorchester hills, she was sorry, as he was glad, that the water was stained with coal dust, and that under the trees were the squalid huts of hundreds of labourers. So to-day she was only conscious of the harmony of colour, restful after the garish crudity of her house. She was seeking to order her mind, to draw out of the chaos of her dissatisfaction a thread of active purpose. She was not of the stuff which yields weakly to environment, that inertly allows itself to be broken on the wheel of chance. Her ambition was clear—social recognition by the men and the wives of the men whom she had seen daily pass through the office of Stuyvesant and Bond and who had in turn seen her, but not as a lady, merely as an astonishingly pretty secretary who would not accept theatre invitations. It had been ambition and modesty that had made her refuse. She knew that if she had wanted the jewels and fine raiment she could have had them, but she wanted them as symbols, not for themselves. In Henry she had seen a young man, already well off, prospering in business; she had heard him spoken of as a coming financier, and—she had fallen in love with him. There was no doubt of that. She loved him first, perhaps, for what he might become, then with proud submission to his splendid strength. Of the nature of that strength

her intuition had been at fault. She had conceived it to be the power that conquers and then seeks new conquests. She had found it the power that holds, that fastens its roots firmly in its native soil. In imagination she had harnessed her ambition to Henry's strength, and in reality she found them at odds. The question defined itself quite clearly. She must match her wit against his stolidity. Ultimate success would come very slowly and the waiting would be tedious. She must treasure every chance phrase, every act, every rebuff, until at last she should reach the sensitive pride, the craving for approbation that somewhere underlies the shell of every man. She must not let him suspect her ambition. He would think it the "desire," as Uncle John called it. To her it was a craving for the understanding of those who thought as she instinctively thought. She must foster in Henry's mind the belief that social recognition was only the natural consequence of success. In her husband's absence she felt herself able to accomplish anything.

She fastened her dress and pinned a white bow at her neck, looked at herself once more in the glass, touched her hair, and then wondered whether she had ordered supper. She heard the door open and turned quickly.

"Mrs. Jennings from across the park to call, ma'am," said the maid. She had unkempt hair, wore a black skirt, much spotted, and a soiled blue waist.

"Very well, Rose," she answered, "tell her I shall be down directly. And, Rose, next time, please, knock before you open a door."

She smiled rather grimly as the door slammed. "I wonder whether it is necessary to have maids who are dirty and impudent." Then she followed. The hall was always close because the gas had to be kept burning. The red and blue stained glass panel in the front door admitted little or no light except in the late afternoon, when the sun shone through it fantastically.

In the parlour Mrs. Jennings sat stiffly on one of the green upholstered chairs. Even if she had been of a less uncompromising appearance, Helen thought, she would still have had to be stiff in that chair.

"How do you do," she said. "It is very kind of you to call."

"Not at all, my dear, not at all," Mrs. Jennings responded energetically. "It was my duty to call. We all know each other in the *Park*. Of course, too, we knew about Mr. Murphy, and Mrs. Davidson knows a lady in Cambridge who said you'd always been well spoken of there, though a little over-

dressed. It was Mrs. Eusden who told her. Do you happen to know Mrs. Eusden?"

"Yes," Helen said, "I have met her."

"I wish I knew her," said Mrs. Jennings. "Mrs. Davidson is one of the *very* most perticular ladies in the Park. One of her ancestors by her mother's side came over in the *Mayflower*, and her grandfather's older brother—much older, of course—was lieutenant in the Revolutionary war with England. It's strange, though," she continued, "this Mrs. Eusden didn't seem to know much about *your* family. She said there were so many Joneses that you could hardly keep them apart in your mind, though I must say I have known some very nice ones."

"My name was Smith."

"To be sure it was, but no offence. Still it was a natural mistake, and Smith's even commoner than Jones or Murphy."

"Yes, it is."

"Well, you know the old saying, 'a rose by any other name,' so there's no reason why you need to worry. The folks living in the Park don't all of them have fancy names, but they're a different class from the rest of South Boston—with a few exceptions, of course. Ladies like Mrs. Davenant of K. Street, f'r instance, feel misplaced, and I don't mind

telling you that when your house was for sale—it *is* yours, I hear—a good many of us hoped Mrs. D. could be persuaded to take it. Of course, you understand, we don't mind you. We were just afraid some real ordinary folks might get in, and we did want Mrs. Davenant to get what she aimed for. She has quite a walk to see her friends, and of course we don't often care to go to K Street."

"So the Park considers itself very aristocratic?"

"Well, now, I wouldn't just say that. Of course we can't help seeing that we're different from the rest of South Boston, but that don't mean we're not democratic. Perhaps some might call us just a little bit sniffy to our neighbours, and I do think of it often that perhaps we ought to do something for them, being placed so different. We might have an annual picnic for them in the park, or fireworks on the Fourth. But then, you see, if we gave a finger they might take a hand. They might even call, and of course we couldn't have that. You understand, don't you."

"Yes, I think I begin to." She remembered blazingly a remark she had not thought much of at the time, a casual remark she had overheard Stephen Bond make to a man leaving his office: "Yes, it's just as I always said. The test of a gentleman is that he

should be able to treat his inferiors as though they were equals, and without toadying, to recognise his superiors when he sees them."

"But"—Mrs. Jennings reverted to the charge—"we are in a democratic country and so we try to be democratic. I guess you'll think we are when you hear the ladies talking over the *Social Life* in the Sunday paper after church. Why, you wouldn't believe it, Mrs. Murphy, the way we *despise* all those snobs and rich folks in the Back Bay. I guess they wouldn't feel so almighty important if they could hear us talk them over. Why, the way those women drink cocktails and champagne and run around with other peoples' husbands is something scandalous, and then to go and pay the papers to put it all in. Why, it's a disgrace to America, I say."

"They don't pay the papers."

"Don't pay! Well, I'd like to know. Didn't Mrs. Searles that lives next us have to pay to have a notice of her daughter's engagement to that young Adams of Charlestown put in? And that was real news; the other ain't. Who'd care to know what Mrs. So-and-so wore to the opera. Why should the papers put it in if not for pay?"

"To increase the circulation, I suppose."

"Increase the—well, I never! Who'd ever buy a

paper to read that stuff excepting perhaps those that want to see their own names in print. That might help some."

"Don't you read it, Mrs. Jennings?"

"I? Well, of course, I just take a glance at it, seeing it's lying on the parlour table and I don't want to appear ignorant walking home from church. But that's not saying I'd go out and buy it, and what's more, if the stuff wasn't there I'd never look at it. As it is, I only read it to make myself thankful that I'm not that kind."

"Newspapers have to make capital out of all sorts of motives, Mrs. Jennings. Much of their circulation is due, I suppose, to the desire of entirely worthy people to have tangible cause of congratulation that they are not what they have had either no opportunity or no inherited instinct to become."

"I dare say," Mrs. Jennings assented, not quite sure what Helen meant, nor whether it was intended for her in particular. "All I know is that if I was running the papers they'd be different."

"I am sure of it. Fewer murders and more silver weddings."

"Yes, or at least golden ones. Why, would you believe it? When old Mr. and Mrs. Cranston had theirs a few weeks ago the *Herald* only gave two

or three lines to it, never spoke of the golden-shower—a yellow party, you know—and Mrs. Stone and I had worked days over it, as we told the reporter. But all that really don't matter. I called to see what I could do for you, neighbourly like, you know."

"Thank you. I think of nothing."

"Nothing. But goodness gracious, was there ever such a young married woman! Who's your butcher?"

"I really don't know. Henry orders on his way to the office."

"Henry orders! There now—and you said there was nothing I could do. I presumed your kind of work was no training for housekeeping, and that proves it. Do you know what'll happen? He'll get a roast every day and then he'll get the habit of not coming home to dinner, not having any surprise waiting for him. Just now, when you're pretty to look at and things are new for him, it may be all right, but you make a man do a woman's work as well as his and he's going to get grumpier and grumpier unless he kicks over the traces altogether. I know men."

"You don't know my husband, Mrs. Jennings."

"Don't I, though? Didn't I come to this house

when he was here with the agent and go over it with them, looking at it to see if it would possibly do for Mrs. Davenant?"

"Oh, so it was you. How funny," and Helen laughed convulsively, because she tried not to. But there was a soft, musical quality to the laugh, something curiously private, as though her soul were full of laughter, the reason for which the world should never, never know. It was like a bird song, spontaneously bubbling from a secret spring, intensely but unconsciously selfish.

All this Mrs. Jennings could not feel. She was merely irritated by it. "I believe you were saying——" she remarked frigidly.

"No. I had quite finished. I am sorry I laughed." She had an insane wish to relate Henry's version of the meeting. She had told her of a woman who came to pry into her affairs—"snoop around," was the expression he had used—and who had asked the most personal questions. Then, seeing the growing anger in her guest's face, she added, "It struck me as so curious, Mrs. Jennings, that you, who were really the only person of whom I had heard, should be the first to call. It was absurd to laugh, I know, and I am very sorry."

Mrs. Jennings smiled at last. "I don't blame you

a bit, my dear. I know how hard it is to get settled, and all the strangeness of a new house, and a husband, and new friends, and not knowing anything about anything. I'm only surprised you laughed instead of cried."

Helen sighed with relief. It would have been terrible to make an enemy so soon. It would have made Henry unhappy and perhaps would have done real harm. "Yes, it is hard," she said, "but I hope I shall learn."

"Of course you will, my dear, if you'll let us help, and now I must be going. Mrs. Searles, your next door neighbour, is coming to see me at eleven-thirty."

"Please don't give her too bad an impression of me," Helen said, smiling.

At that moment both were startled by a violent pounding at the door. The maid stood there defiantly, a box in her hand.

"Well?" Helen questioned.

"Flowers for you, marm. If I have to run up from the kitchen many more times, you won't get no dinner." She flung the box on a chair and turned to go.

"Do you have trouble with maids, Mrs. Jennings?" Helen said, turning to her despairingly. "I

can't keep a girl like that—so dirty, and so terribly rude.”

“Don't be too hasty, though. It ain't always easy to get a new one. And what's more, I don't believe you can cook.”

“I can't boil a potato. We can go to town for dinner and to-morrow Henry will get another maid.”

Again Mrs. Jennings gasped. “Well, my dear—he getting a maid! If you are not digging your own grave by this foolishness, I miss my guess. And him so good to you. Ain't you going to look at those flowers?”

“Oh, yes, the flowers. I had forgotten them.” She took up the box and tore off the wrappings. “I wonder who sent them?”

“Well, I never,” Mrs. Jennings cried. “A bride of a month and not knowing whether flowers come from her husband or not. They're a useless extravagance, anyway.”

“Oh, but so lovely—and such a joy to have.”

“Orchids!” Mrs. Jennings almost shrieked as Helen opened the box. “Well, of all the wicked waste. Henry Murphy ought to be ashamed of himself.”

Helen opened the envelope that was tied to the

flowers. She gave a gasp of surprise as she read the name.

"It is from a man who was very kind to me before I was married," she said quietly, "so you must not blame Henry, Mrs. Jennings." She laid the flowers carressingly against her cheek.

"Then I consider it very improper and not as it should be," Mrs. Jennings said vigorously. "You a bride of only a month and getting flowers from young men when you ought to be thinking of nobody but your husband. It ain't right."

"I'm sorry, very sorry, Mrs. Jennings. The flowers are as much a surprise to me as they are to you. And can you think of a more charming way to remember a young woman—a bride—than by sending her flowers?"

"Orchids!" Mrs. Jennings retorted. "Orchids! Probably fifty dollars' wort. of orchids. Money wasted that might have been spent on a new cook-stove."

Helen laughed. "But I don't need one. And besides, that would not have been proper. Flowers always are—who can tell why?" She let them rest against her cheek again. "I only know that anything else would have been an insult—that flowers are the expression of a chivalrous thought."

Mrs. Jennings tossed her head. "I guess you'll find Henry Murphy agrees with me," she said. "I guess you'll wish those flowers had never come after he sees them—if he does. Good-bye, Mrs. Murphy."

She sailed from the room, leaving Helen, still smiling at the orchids in her hand.

CHAPTER III

"HELLO, dear. Had a good day? Better than me, I hope. I'm dead beat."

"You poor boy. You mustn't work so hard. I don't care about so very, very much money, you know." Helen laughed affectionately as she helped him with his coat. He liked her to do it always because of the touch of her fingers on his neck and the little pat she gave as the coat slipped from his shoulders. To-night she touched him more than usual and her fingers tingled on his skin. She was excited. Her cheeks were flushed and the lights sparkled in her eyes.

"It's great—work," he said, pressing her close and covering her forehead with his large hand the more deeply to gaze into her eyes. "It's great, because you're something worth while to work for. You don't know what it meant to me in the office to-day, thinking there was you to come home to and a cosy little dinner waiting, and a long, quiet evening with you and my pipe before the fire. I wouldn't go out to-night for worlds."

Her face fell. "Oh, Henry, I am so sorry. We

must go out. I didn't know you would be so disappointed. We haven't any dinner."

"No dinner? Damn that market. Didn't they send it?"

"It wasn't the market. The maid has gone."

"Maid gone? Well, what in the devil's name——"

"It was my fault. She was impudent and I sent her away."

"Impudent, was she? And you shipped her? Well, good riddance, anyway. Only I wish I could have told her what I thought of her."

"So you see, dear, we'll just have to go out. That's why I dressed. We can go to town to a hotel and have a cosy little dinner, just the same."

"Cosy, nonsense—in a hotel full of people. Not for me. I'm going to stay planted right here. We'll cook the dinner ourselves. You trot along upstairs like a good girl and get off that silk thing, then come down and help. It will be great sport." He was already off, whistling as he clattered down the dark basement stairs.

Helen stood dispiritedly in the hall, her happy excitement gone, then went slowly upstairs. But as she lighted the gas in her room she pulled herself

sharply together. "This is absurd," she said aloud, and started at the sound of her own voice. It suddenly became clear to her that no dreams could come true if she allowed her mood to be swayed by momentary disappointments. What if she could not go out that night. There would be many others the same. She knew that her husband was not a man to be won to her way of thinking by complaints and tears. Just so long as he believed their way of life was best he would calmly, tenderly, forgivingly, she knew, bear with her moods, struggle to make her happy in his way, and remain impenetrably blind to hers. His love for her was too deep, too far-seeing to be swayed through momentary pity into action that would mean to his saner thought ultimate suffering. She must learn from her husband the lesson of subordinating present trouble to future happiness, must live in the consciousness of the happy moment, and construct from the sum of the moments gay or sad the foundation of the palace of her dreams. It is one thing theoretically to realise that only through successful dealing with trivial matters can greater ends be accomplished, quite another to bear the actual pin-pricks without flinching. Fortunately for Helen she was a woman capable of action and of endurance, one who seldom postponed the beginning of a hard

task, because she knew that with progress difficulties melted away.

She was consequently smiling, apparently happy, when she opened the kitchen door a few minutes later to find her husband broiling chops and frying potatoes over the range.

"That's right," he said, looking approvingly at her blue gingham and white apron. "I knew folks like us couldn't be scared away by a saucy Irish maid. She forgot we were Irish ourselves, as the name shows."

"That was a long time ago."

"Thru ye' air, me darlint, but it don't take many drops of the owld blood to leaven the dough. Now, do you be settin' the table while I git the praties off."

A little later he put her into her place with a flourish and then kissed the tip of her ear—"as the butler would do in one of the grand houses," he remarked, "if his mistress was half as pretty as you."

"In other words, be impudent, like Rose, and lose his place."

"He'd risk it, and if he was half as handsome as me would be forgiven. You ought to have said that, and you've made no remarks about the praties."

"They're delicious." She wished he had troubled to put on his coat—or even to take off his waistcoat.

Stephen Bond would never have eaten in his shirt-sleeves, even after cooking potatoes—if he knew how to cook them. There was something pleasant in the idea that he did not. It justified the shirt-sleeves. She liked men who could do things.

Then she remembered that she must tell Henry about the orchids. "Mrs. Jennings called to-day."

"The wife of Abe Jennings who runs this district?"

"I don't know—the one who lives in the house on the corner—the hideous one with the tower."

"That's him, all right. I hope you made her purr."

"Purr? No. She was a cat, though. She tried to scratch."

"For Heaven's sake, why? You know, dear, I must stand in with Jennings if I am going to have any future."

"You ought to have told me that. At any rate, she's the scratching kind. You know her. She helped you buy the house."

"That woman! Good God! I hope you didn't let on."

"I almost did. I told her you remembered it and that it was funny she should be the first to call. I had to say that, because I laughed."

"But she finally liked you, I hope." He was playing with his knife and fork and watching her closely, with an alertness she had never seen before, that suggested his mastery and that insisted on subservience to his prospects. "She left in a pleasant mood?"

"No. I did not say that, but it was no fault of mine."

"What happened?"

"Some flowers came for me, and when she said it was very extravagant for you to send them, I told her you had not. She thought it very improper—that flowers were a waste of money for any one."

"Why didn't you tell her who sent them? Who was it?"

"Mr. Bond."

"Bond? Why should he send you flowers?"

"Just out of kindness, Henry. Surely you do not mind. See, here is the note which came with them. I brought it down to show you. Read it aloud."

" 'DEAR MRS. MURPHY,' he read, 'I saw you at the theatre last night with your husband and am sending you these flowers as a welcome back to Boston. May your life always be as happy as it deserves to be. Sincerely, STEPHEN BOND.' Well, I must

say that sounds decent. Why didn't you tell Mrs. Jennings?"

"Because I knew she would not understand. She probably knows who he is and—after all, Henry, it was mere curiosity."

Henry lighted his pipe and leaned back in his chair, looking thoughtfully at the table. "I can understand your feelings," he said slowly; "still, I don't know. I think it would have been better to explain. You want to be on friendly terms with the ladies in the Park, and of course it's important to me."

"More important than my self-respect?" she asked quickly. "No, I didn't mean that, but I wanted you to take my side, instantly, completely."

"I hope I always will, dear. Only sometimes our ideas may differ. For your sake as well as mine I want Mrs. Jennings to like you. So far as I am concerned, you know, you could do nothing that would make me love you or trust you less. Let's go upstairs and light the parlour fire."

She followed somewhat reluctantly, dissatisfied with him and with herself. Perhaps she had not been wise, but neither had he been sympathetic. What was more, she felt that he was not pleased with the flowers, as she had been, and at the same

time that half her pleasure was gone because he did not share it with her. For the first time something real, if intangible, had come between them. She knew that it was only a cloud, easily to be dissipated, but even the cloud troubled her. She needed his love and his support too keenly to draw back, but before she could speak the door-bell rang. Henry went into the hall, and then followed Mr. and Mrs. Jennings into the room.

Mrs. Jennings bowed stiffly, the hard, straight line of her mouth making her thin lips disappear altogether. She looked quickly about the room and smiled grimly as she saw the flowers were nowhere in sight. "This is Mr. Jennings," she remarked as though introductions were unpleasant tasks. "We came to give you a little advice, seeing as you are new to the Park. I notice the flowers are not in sight."

"No," Helen said quietly. "We have just finished our supper and I was going to get them when you came."

"It was about them, mostly, that we came to talk," Mrs. Jennings went on. "The ladies in the Park agree with me that it ain't right for any woman to be getting gifts of flowers from strange men—especially brides."

"Are you thinking of the flowers Mr. Bond sent, Helen?" Henry asked.

"Oh, she's told you, has she? I'm sure she never told you about any others, nor about how she kisses them, and goes on about them."

"Mrs. Jennings!" Helen cried, her cheeks flaming.

"Yes, Amanda," Mr. Jennings interposed soothingly. "Ain't you going a bit fast?" He was a little man, with sandy grey hair, who kept himself discreetly in the background.

"I'll thank you to hold your tongue, Mr. Jennings. You wasn't here." Mrs. Jennings turned fiercely to Henry. "What have you to say about this?"

"Nothing," he answered, putting his arm around his wife, "except to say that you are mistaken. Here is the note that came with the flowers. Perhaps you would like to read it?"

Helen put out her hand to stop him, but he insisted. Mrs. Jennings glared at her, then at the note. After reading it, she folded it precisely and handed it back. "All I've got to say is," she remarked, "that buttered words don't hide the tiger's claws."

"Really, Amanda," Mr. Jennings interposed

again, "you may be mistaken, you know. We did not come to scold, but to give advice."

Mrs. Jennings glared at him, then at Henry. "All the same, young man," she said, "you're young, and foolish, and poor, and there's a queer kind of fascination about a rich man that sends expensive flowers to a girl who thinks she's safe because she's married."

Henry, still holding his wife tightly, answered her at last. "We want to do what is right, Mrs. Jennings—Helen just as much as me. We want to be friends with all the nice people in the Park, but we want them to know that we have just as much morals as they have, and that in little things we must decide for ourselves. Helen I trust as I do myself."

"We'll see," Mrs. Jennings answered frigidly. "We want to be friends, too, and it's only friendly to sound a warning. Come, Mr. Jennings."

She stalked from the room, followed at the usual discreet distance by her husband, who stopped at the door to say softly, "I'm awfully sorry about this. Amanda's hard to manage when she's riled, but it'll blow over. I want to talk to you some day about this car strike. Things look pretty black, and we must get in some good work, what?"

"Any day," Henry answered; "it would be rotten to have the service tied up."

"Mr. Jennings, I'm waiting." Mrs. Jennings' voice sounded angrily from the hall.

"I'm coming, my dear, I'm coming. You won't be down on us, will you, Mrs. Murphy?"

She smiled at him as brightly as she could. Her lips quivered and she was cold, but Mr. Jennings pretended to see only the smile. "Thank you, my dear," he said eagerly, as he hurried after his wife.

For a short time they stood silently, Helen looking into the fire and feeling helplessly that the tears, one by one, overflowed her eyelids and ran down her cheeks, Henry, beside the table, playing abstractedly with a huge, yellow wooden paper-cutter on which was burned the word, "Yosemite."

"May I see the flowers?" he said, at last, very gently.

Helen brought them from her room—a mass of exquisite pale violet orchids with throats of royal purple. They were in a plain glass bowl she had at last found in the kitchen after trying them with painful result in all the gaudy glass and china vases with which the various mantels and tables were punctuated. She set them down now in front of her hus-

band, saying, "I should have left them here if they had not been killed by the hideous red paper, and even without it, nothing could look well in a room with that dreadful vase of your uncle's."

He glanced at her furtively, wondering whether she remembered that the paper had been his choice, but saw that she was suffering too keenly to be consciously cruel. He took up one of the flowers and studied it closely, holding it between thumb and forefinger, and with the other hand bending back the enfolding petals so that he could see through the purple throat the yellow heart of it. "How beautiful," he said at last, "the shading of the different colours. I have never seen an orchid before, except in a florist's window."

Helen shivered. "Henry," she cried sharply. "Why didn't you speak up for me?" She caught the edge of the table and stood, swaying slightly, searching his face across the purple cloud of flowers. He was still peering into the orchid in his hand.

"I guess it was these," he answered, indicating the flowers.

She drew back a little. "These? But you just said they were beautiful."

"So they are—but——"

"But what? Henry, surely you understand. You

said the note was quite right. You did not let what Mrs. Jennings said affect you?"

"Mrs. Jennings be damned. I'm not that kind of a fool. It was the flowers themselves—the orchids."

"The flowers themselves, Henry? I don't understand," she said piteously.

"Of course you don't, dear." He threw his flower into the fire and drew her down beside him on the sofa. "That's the goodness and the sweetness and the dearness of you. Why, you never told me they were orchids."

"I wanted to surprise you."

"Yes, I know—but orchids aren't easy to explain."

"Why?"

"Well, it's just this way. Those flowers cost probably fifty dollars."

"I never thought of the price——"

"But I did and Mrs. Jennings did. When a man sends flowers to a friend he doesn't spend fifty dollars. He sends roses or violets or two or three orchids, or two or three of those newfangled, sweet-smelling white things——"

"Gardenias."

"Yes, gardenias. A bouquet like that he sends to

a chorus girl or a—well, a woman he doesn't respect. He wants to impress her. He thinks she'll warm up to the price more than to the flowers."

"And that's how he thought of me—as some one to impress with his money. Oh, Henry, how could he? And I was so happy——"

"Well, he showed bad taste and he made a big mistake."

She winced at the truth of his words, hurt deeply that Stephen Bond should instinctively put her in a class from which she shrank, miserable that her own instinct had not taken warning, and angry that Henry should have to teach her a lesson she should have known. Her childish delight in the flowers was turning into loathing.

"But, dear," she said suddenly. "He never gave me anything when I was in his office. Why didn't he then, if that is what he means?"

"Because he's that kind of a man—the kind that doesn't want what's under his nose and that's his for the asking, but that wants it bad when it belongs to somebody else and he's got to be mean to get it."

"Then you don't think he sent the flowers just to be kind."

"No, I don't. I did just at first, but the more

I think about it the more I don't. He wouldn't throw away fifty dollars like that."

Helen jumped to her feet and stood before him, her eyes and cheeks burning, her lips compressed in a white line. "There, at last, you're wrong. I know him, and you don't. He's not that kind. You were right to say the flowers were an insult because it was wicked of him to think me the kind of woman who would calculate the price. To-morrow I will take them to the hospital. But Mr. Bond is a good man. Haven't I seen the courtesy in his treatment of the girls. Why, he never even sees them when he says 'Good-morning.' He had the luck to be born a gentleman, and he never forgets it."

"Shucks! He was born a dirty, howling little brat like all the rest of the world, and then, when he began to grow up, his mother, who was a snob, taught him all that gentleman fairy-tale business, and he learned it so hard that he can't find out that other boys and girls he never knew may grow up to be as good as him. How about what he thought of you?"

"Of me?" She put her hand to her throat. "Of me? Why, I suppose he thought—oh, instinctively classed me with so many working girls. I haven't had his advantages. I wish—so much—I had."

"Rot. That kind of talk makes me sick. You're as good as the best. I'd like to hear any one say anything else of my wife!"

"How about Mrs. Jennings?"

"Mrs.— Oh, Helen, forget it. I did all I thought I could with that kind of a woman. Come, let's go to bed. Any one to hear us would think we'd been married ten years instead of a month. To-morrow I'll go for a servant girl."

"No," she said, "I think I had better do that."

CHAPTER IV

THE Bond house was one of those dignified old yellow brick structures, the windows of which overlook the Common. Stephen lived there alone. For years the Mothers' Campaign had raged around him, but the old house was still without a mistress. Even the butler, who had stood behind the master's chair on the night that Mr. and Mrs. Elisha Bond had returned from their wedding trip and had officiated tearfully at the funerals that one by one marked the passing of members of the family—even he, the faithful Spriggs, had ceased to remind Mr. Stephen that he was the last of the name and that it would be well once more to hear a woman's laugh in the wainscotted library. Stephen was obdurate. He was not averse to marriage, but he was decidedly unwilling to be driven into marriage. He had laughed when a friend said to him, "You would have married Katherine Bland, Steve, if it had not been for her mother's frenzied first-aid-to-the-injured"—but the laugh had not been without its tinge of hidden bitterness, because he really had liked Katherine uncommonly well ever since they had played as children

together, and had been quite literally frightened away by her mother's overpowering welcome when he had begun to show a deeper interest. He had watched Katherine grow from girlhood into a charming, unspoiled womanhood, fresh as the woods around her father's country house. And then, lately, he had seen her harden, caught the first sparks of cynicism, and had wondered, fearfully, whether he had been a little to blame.

He was a true Bostonian in his distrust of enthusiasm. It seemed to him as a rule vulgar, at its best, as denoting extreme youth. He always wanted to make up his own mind quite calmly and without a suggestion of coercion. If his fruit-dealer was loud in his praise of a new brand of Oregon apples, Stephen, who loved apples, would certainly choose a box of sound-looking Gravensteins, only to eat with delight at a friend's house the next day a sample of the new variety. On the stock market his attitude was the same, inherited from his father. He was afraid of anything new.

As it happened, Stephen and his companion at dinner, Philip Moncrieff, were discussing this very question of enthusiasm over their coffee and cigars in the dim library one evening late in May.

"It has always struck me," said Moncrieff, "that

you Americans, here in this little corner of the country, have hardly outlived the eighteenth century. You have quite the attitude of mind of Englishmen of the Georgian period. You have never had a Reform Bill to make you conscious of the rights of the average man. I wonder whether you even know there is such an individual."

"We ought to. Few cities are more vilely governed."

"The city—yes, as a political entity. But the city is not American. It's Irish, Italian—anything but American. And the Irish politicians who govern you—they're not average men. They're deucedly clever, far-seeing, vigorous-minded—all for themselves, of course. But, after all, so are you, the ruling classes, as you are falsely called. You don't rule, however, because you think it vulgar to take a really active part in politics. You're afraid of meeting the average man for fear that you might contract some of his enthusiasm. 'Sufficient unto the Hub is the central pivot thereof' might be your motto; you, the aristocracy, being that pivot."

"So you would suggest a little more energy in the pivot. I always supposed that should be stationary."

"Analogies do not always hold—certainly not here.

Call Boston a machine, if you will, but grant it life. Its wheels grow and spin faster day by day. It may be the hub of the universe, as one of your wits put it—that is, *you* may think it is. But all the same, to the majority of its citizens it is the universe, and they're going to make what they can out of it. They are not going to allow their splendid new machine to go to pieces because of any inadequate pivot. The pivot has got to keep pace with the rest of the growth or be discarded. That's about where the Boston aristocracy finds itself to-day. It used to be adequate when the city was a village. To an outsider it looks rather silly as the representative of a modern city."

Stephen laughed. "I like your energy, old man, but what am I going to do about it?"

"Get some enthusiasm. Be absurdly bold. Do something extremely silly that you will spend years in publicly regretting while you rejoice over it in private. That's the kind of thing that makes the old world live."

"But if such things don't appeal to me?"

"Then give up the game and move to Concord, where there is no progress to stand in the way of. Sit in your library and shiver at the intellectual heresy of Chesterton, and if you feel that you must do

something shocking, tell your gardener to plant a bed of pink and scarlet zinnias. But, heaven on earth, Steve, you're not that kind. You've got it in you to do things, big things, startling things. The same blood crawls through your veins that crawled through the veins of those fellows who threw the tea overboard—only it didn't crawl any more when the time came. I suppose you are a bit ashamed of them, as you are of the abolitionists."

"I do rather think they lost their heads."

"Of course they did, God bless 'em, for he that loseth his head shall surely find his soul."

Stephen laughed again. "A dangerous doctrine, that, my dear friend. But since you have established yourself as mentor you might suggest something definite."

"Suggest something definite," Moncrieff shouted, "suggest— Oh, Lord, how like a Bostonian. Here I tell you to lose your head, and you ask me the most approved and entirely aristocratic way of doing it."

"As I remember, I had no particular wish to lose my head," Stephen said, somewhat peevishly. "You were the one who seemed to think it would be a valuable experience."

"So I did—now don't spo

tha

admirably behaved temper of yours instead. That wasn't what I suggested. Let me think. Are you religious?"

"I am a Unitarian."

"So I might have known. No hope there. To be religious one must have faith, belief in something. I don't suppose you'd be willing to turn Roman Catholic?"

"Emphatically, no."

"Quite right. You couldn't possibly digest real faith. I only mentioned the matter because if you are to lose your head for the civic good it is important that you should have to hunt for it among the despised average men—and the Roman Church is full of them."

"Such men don't bother about logic."

"On the contrary. That's why the Roman Church is so full of them. They're logic mad, and if there is any institution more founded on logic, fed on logic, damned and saved through logic, it's Rome. That's how the Church gets converts—through logic, and that's also why she does not get many really intelligent converts, because the man of well rounded intelligence has learned the limitations of logic. You're illogical—you Unitarians—because you neglect one-half of human nature, the emotions, just as people

like the Methodists neglect the other half, pure intellect."

"You suggest the bull, then, that I lose my head through logic."

"Exactly. There never has been such a potent cause of insanity—but it's not for you. I ought to have known that. How about politics? You probably have a horribly developed sense of duty, and if you could be made to feel that the salvation of Boston depended on you——"

"But it doesn't. The salvation of Boston—the present city of Boston—is quite unimportant to me. Beside which I cannot and will not get myself into any predicament that will call for public speeches."

"I see. Vanish the political madness. Since you have your motor, I don't suppose the present tram-car strike interests you."

"I am not so selfish. Of course it interests me. It's an abomination."

"Good. That's a vigorous word, abomination. Would you go out and die for the strikers, or would you like to run cars through their lines and shoot all those who try to interfere?"

Stephen got up and began to pace the floor. "Neither. Fortunately, I can see matters too clearly for that. Both sides are at fault."

"Oh, Lord!"

"They are. Of course, hotheads like Murphy see only one side of the question. He talked in my office yesterday morning like a boy orator—the company had been cutting off wages here and adding on extra work there until now the men lived like dogs—got home to their wives late at night, ready to drop, they were so tired, and with just money enough in their jeans to buy the bare necessities—not enough, when they had large families. To him they were martyrs undergoing the sufferings of a veritable inquisition."

"And the other side?"

"The other? The company? He simply ignored the fact that it, too, had rights, and obligations to its stockholders. I admitted that the men were not properly paid and that their hours were too long, but I told him the Union could not be allowed to dictate terms."

"Are they trying to?"

"Are they? Well, rather. Their first demand is that certain old and trusted employees who are not Union members should be discharged."

"Well? What did Murphy say?"

"He said there never was a reform carried through that could please every one, that the few had to suffer

for the good of the many. I could not follow him there, practically, because I could not see what good would result from the obviously unfair treatment of these old servants."

"H'm. What Murphy?"

"Murphy?" Stephen stopped abruptly in his walk, took down a book from the shelf nearest him, and began aimlessly to turn over the leaves. Moncrieff watched him curiously. "He's a young man down town—had a legal training and has taken up stocks, I believe. No particular family, but personally respectable. Making a name for himself in politics as well as in trade. Decided ability, I should say, but a bit raw. Irish, generations back, I suppose. Family's always lived hereabout. My grandfather used to buy horses from his."

"Married?"

Stephen looked up quickly, then back at his book. "I have heard so."

"Indeed." Moncrieff grinned. "Had you heard he married your bookkeeper?"

Stephen tossed his book on the table. "Certainly I had heard it, but how in the devil did you know anything about it, and what difference does it make, anyway?"

"I heard at the Club last night."

"At the Club! I might have known it. Of all gossiping, scandal-mongering places that is the worst. Now, what possible reason could a lot of American gentlemen have in telling a stranger about my bookkeeper and Henry Murphy?"

"Really, my dear Steve, there's nothing to get hot under the collar about. They were talking of the strike and the leaders, and naturally mentioned Murphy. Then some one said, 'Is he the fellow who married that pretty girl in Stuyvesant and Bond's office?' and some one else said, 'Yes.' That was all—not very scandalous, I thought."

"But totally unnecessary. One does not identify a prominent man by reference to his wife."

"Oh, yes, one does, often, if she is pretty. I merely happened to mention it and quite unexpectedly struck a spark. How pretty is she?"

"By George, Phil," Stephen cried angrily, "that's going a bit too far, you know. I'm no Don Juan, and what's more to the point, Helen Murphy is a lady."

Moncrieff shrugged. "That's all right, old chap. I didn't know she was a lady. You seem to have a deuced lot of interest in her. Why didn't you discover her sooner?"

"Why didn't I?" He stopped abruptly and

picked up the book from where it had fallen on the table. "Have you ever seen this copy of the 'Hours of Idleness'—a splendid tall one. I picked it up at Sotheby's one day last summer."

"And these days find Byron more congenial than Emerson. He does seem to fit extraordinarily with certain moods. Come along, Steve, tell me more about her."

"There's nothing to tell. She is married."

"That wouldn't matter to one who had courage, and enthusiasm—and who dared lose his head."

"That's just it, Phil, I don't dare—because I hope I'm not a cad."

"And couldn't be if you tried. Tell me; I'm not a Bostonian and I am your friend. If I could help you find yourself—well, old man, it would be jolly well worth my little voyage over here. She was in your office——"

"Yes." Stephen seated himself in a deep chair before the fire, and with hands in his pockets, his legs stretched out straight before him, seemed to talk more to himself than to his companion. "Yes, she was in my office. She was young, and quiet, and very pretty. I knew it subconsciously, because I never really looked at her. One of the most stringent rules of the office is that the girls shall be treated like ladies

—like machines, it might be fairer to say. If any clerk forgets it, or any girl either, for that matter, we fill the place with some one who will remember. All that may sound quixotic and visionary, but the result is that we have a splendid, self-respecting force of workers. This girl, Helen Smith, came to us direct from Simmons College, and was put on the books. She fell instinctively, gratefully, I think, into the office regulations. I liked her because I always felt that she was ready to learn and to make the most of her opportunities in the way a self-respecting girl should."

"And all this time you never thought of her?"

"As a woman, no. I should as soon have thought of making love to my mother's parlour-maid as to her—sooner, if I had been that kind, since I naturally feel personal responsibility about the girls in the office. Then one day she came to me to say she was leaving—she had been with us two years. I asked her why; and she said she was going to marry Murphy. I told her he was a lucky man—quite the normal thing to say. She was married the next week, I saw by the paper."

"And then?"

"Well—there isn't much more, and I don't know why it should interest you. When they got back

from their honeymoon, I saw them one night at the theatre. I had almost forgotten her, I thought, but seeing her there, like any other lady, I realised that she was really a woman and that—well—— It's all this old Boston feeling—same the world over, I suppose. It blinded me. Until I could see her as I see other ladies I had never really seen her at all."

"Was her family respectable?"

"Quite—distinguished, in fact, two or three generations back, but unfortunate. Her father died when she was a baby, and her mother sank into a querulous and incapable widowhood—simply vanished because she had not the character to wear poverty with dignity."

"And was this all?"

"Just about. The next morning I sent her some flowers. I wanted the best there were and I sent orchids—too many. It was bad form, and her note showed that she was hurt."

"Her husband is a decent chap, you say?"

"Splendid. She is probably happier than she ever would have been with me—and then I never should have married her if he hadn't, because I never should have seen her."

"Shall you meet her again?"

"Yes, I go to her house to-morrow night. A

dinner of those interested in putting an end to the strike."

"You will not lose your head?"

"No, I think not. There are generations of reserve behind me."

Moncrieff gripped his shoulder affectionately. "Be careful, old chap," he said. "To lose your head in this case would be to damn, not to find your soul."

CHAPTER V

THEY were waiting for the guests. Helen had protested against being seen at all, but her husband had wanted her to receive them and to give them coffee after dinner. "It's just as well not to let it be too masculine," he said. "Knowing you're here may make them less violent. There's nothing like a pretty woman to make men see sense."

"Or lose what little they have."

"Of course. But not in the way I mean. Nobody is going to lose his head over my wife when I'm around."

"In some ways it must be annoying to be so literal, Henry," she responded.

"I suppose I am that—not much imagination. I made a fool of myself, as I told you, about Bond. He may have ideas I don't go in for—but he's straight. I like him right through, especially since he spoke about the orchids himself and really apologised for sending so many. Be good to him tonight."

The parlour, where they were waiting, was brilliant, with every gas-jet lighted. Helen said it looked

as though they were preparing to take a kodak picture of each guest, but her husband thought a dimly lighted room would seem gloomy. To him brilliant light was a sure indication of festivity, and although the dinner was to be a somewhat grim business meeting, he was anxious to make the setting as gay as possible. "It's lucky the paper is shiny," he said, "because if it wasn't, all the gas going wouldn't light it up. The reflection on the walls is pretty, isn't it?"

"Very," Helen answered; "it brings out all the purple in the paper." She was tired and worried. The house seemed unusually hideous, and she dreaded having Bond see it. Could he possibly think kindly of her in such surroundings? Would he not always picture her—if he thought of her at all—in a setting of shiny black walnut and purple red walls—all dominated by a dreadful green vase—her own taste, of course, since a woman is always held responsible for her house.

The first to arrive was Mr. Jennings. Helen had grown almost fond of the absurd little man. She liked his sandy hair and his little, twinkling grey eyes that disappeared when he laughed. She respected him because Henry did, and most of all, she knew him her ally with the busy gossips of the Park.

"Well, well, well," he cried, as he bustled into the room. "This *is* pleasant to see you, Mrs. M. I hope you are going to eat with us to keep the lions and the jackals in order. What?" It was amusing, his increase of self-respect and assertiveness when parted from his wife.

"No," Helen said, laughing. "I should be terrified. I stay decently in the background, emerging only for an instant to give you coffee."

"Alas, and is it so. I think I shall go home—after coffee—unless I can persuade you to take a turn in the Park."

"Never. The Park has eyes as well as ears, and I could not risk your reputation in your home precinct."

"My reputation? *Fol de lol!* It is yours that would suffer to be seen abroad with such a rake as me. What?"

Mr. Staples, second vice-president of the Traction Company, came next. He was an able man in his office, but when he saw Helen, seemed to swell visibly and walked stiffly, as though the floor were hot. Her presence gave the dinner a social significance that displeased him. He and his wife lived in Brookline, and considered themselves important factors in the social life of that suburb. It had been a trial for

him to go to South Boston at all, but as he had remarked on leaving home, "I am simply going to a business meeting. It wouldn't do, if any of the neighbours should drop in, to say I was *dining* in South Boston. Of course, for any one in our position, that would be ridiculous." As a result, he was confused, being unwilling to allow these people to consider him, even for a moment, one of them, and at the same time conscious that for the sake of the company he must not offend them. He succeeded in giving the impression that he wanted to be affable but did not know how, and he wished sincerely that he had insisted on having the dinner at the Country Club, of which he had recently been elected a member, and where he still felt the sense of proprietorship characteristic of the new member.

"Your little park, here, is very pretty," he said to Helen. "Livin' in Brookline, as I do, I have never been so far afield as this, and did not suppose South Boston had any such open spaces."

"It is a pretty park," Helen assented, "but of course it must seem small to you, living more in the country."

"Indeed Brookline is not country. It is suburban, but a very fashionable suburb."

Her answering smile flattered him, while to an-

other it would have shown her ironical appreciation of his pompous self-satisfaction.

"I don't suppose you—that is, I mean people in South Boston, have much opportunity to go to Brookline," he continued.

"Seldom, Mr. Staples," she said sweetly.

Mr. Jennings, who had been standing near, chuckled. "I am glad to see you stand up for old South Boston. What?"

Helen laughed. "I should want to do that, you know."

O'Leary and Donovan represented the strikers. They entered awkwardly, but with the awkwardness of limbs accustomed only to toil, not through any feeling that they were out of place. They shook hands with her heartily and with frank admiration on their faces, but she heard one say to the other as they turned away, "I hope there ain't going to be any women messing in this. It's man's business."

Last to arrive were Stephen Bond and Paul Dunbar, the young attorney for the company. They, at least, were not ill at ease, awkward neither by reason of untrained limbs nor through fear of compromising their position socially. It seemed to Helen as though in the moment after his entrance Stephen completely fulfilled his own definition of a gentleman. Clearly

the men liked him—all except, perhaps, Staples, who was, nevertheless, almost unctuous in his greeting. She noticed with amused understanding that the cordial, “How d’y do, Mr. Staples,” was followed by, “Very well, Bond, and you?” Evidently Staples aspired to a familiarity that Bond was unwilling to admit, and was irritated that his own progress, to which he held tenaciously, brought no echo. Helen knew that the impalpable hint of reserve behind Stephen’s cordiality was more galling to Mr. Staples’ social vanity than would be all the bitter remarks to which she could so well have given vent.

But the bitterness vanished when Stephen came up to her. “It is so good of you, Mrs. Murphy, to be here. It makes an unpleasant meeting a real pleasure.”

“My husband wanted me to do it. I should far rather not be here.”

“That’s unkind.”

“It sounds rude,” she said quickly, “and I did not mean it.”

He looked around the room, and Helen shivered as his glance fell on the green vase. But he noticed, apparently, only the people. “I can understand, I think,” he said, “how you would feel out of place.

The strikers are hardly normal dinner guests, and Mr. Staples, as you may have discovered, is a rather absurd person."

"Absurd, yes," she said, "but in a harmless and amusing way."

He laughed. "I am glad you saw him in that light."

"Can you two stop to let us have dinner?" Henry broke in, putting his hand on Bond's shoulder. "Come, gentlemen. It's time to feed the inner man. It seems mean to leave you, Helen."

"How would it be to add her to our committee," Stephen said. "She might be a pacifying influence—if that's needed—and anyway, she's probably as intelligent as the lot of us."

"We must not forget that this is strictly a business meeting," Mr. Staples remarked severely, and Donovan and O'Leary looked their relief.

"My intelligence is certainly sufficient to keep me out of the dining-room," Helen said. "And then, you know, it would be quite improper for me to be at the table unless Mrs. Staples and Mrs. Jennings were there, too."

"Impossible!" Staples cried involuntarily, looking scornfully at Mr. Jennings.

"Yes, I guess it is." Mr. Jennings grinned his

appreciation. "And I guess, too, that this matter can be settled best by masculine intelligences. What?"

The last thing Helen saw, as they passed through the folding doors into the dining-room, was the look of repressed amusement in Stephen's face. When Henry had closed the doors after them, she turned off some of the superfluous gas-jets and then sat on the hard sofa with her embroidery.

The air was oppressive and she opened a window. Her pride was hurt by the undisguised snobbery of Mr. Staples, but, as she analysed the pain, she knew it came more from the fact that she was in the mental state to be hurt than from anything he had said or looked. Why should she not ignore him, laugh at him, as Stephen would do? She cared nothing for the opinion, adverse or complimentary, of a middle-class snob. She recognised, almost pictorially, the intricate structure of the American social edifice, built tier upon tier on the solid foundation of work, refreshingly simple and sturdy at its base, rising into a confused ugliness, and beyond that into a more delicate beauty. Only the middle portion was pretentious. She saw, as Mr. Staples could never have seen, even had he had the imagination to conceive such a structure, that the soaring towers were not

equally symmetrical nor equally dignified; that some, heavy with superfluous ornament masking their crude design, were carried on buttresses flung out from the vulgar middle stories; that others, sturdy, harmonious, reached upward in powerful granite lines that traced their way undeviating from the base; and that still others, distant and glistening white, seemed to float against the sky, supported by unseen columns that had their origin deep in the virgin soil.

Helen was calmer as the vision became more distinct. She saw herself the denizen of one of the high white towers, astray for the moment, perhaps, but still able to ignore the jeers of those who looked out at her from gaudy, rococo windows. If only the time might not be too long before she found her way home. Home! She had never thought of it quite in that way before, and she knew that she had never before thought truth. She was lost and she was lonely. Who should be her guide? Stephen Bond? She shivered slightly, why she could not have told. After all, he was hardly more than an abstract personality, a citizen of the high places who had accidentally crossed her path. But crossing it as he had, as her employer, could he ever think of her as his equal, as a girl of his own class who had lost her way and wanted to go home? Would he not rather

connect her aspirations with those of other working girls, as the lust for money with its attendant vulgar display, or at best as the longing for lazy comfort, undisturbed by the need to work, work, work? Perhaps he knew of her origin, of her father, but more probably not. What he might know was of her uncared-for childhood, her slatternly home in Cambridge. And knowing this, was there any reason why he should think of her as different from all the others? What was more, she was married to Henry! She felt for a moment an angry resentment against him whom she had chosen as her guide for better or for worse. And then she heard his voice through the closed doors, and an equally unreasoning tenderness swept away her resentment. He was speaking earnestly, and she caught a word now and then, enough to know that he was pleading the cause of the strikers, fighting, as he believed, a just fight. She would not have had him different then, even if she could not agree with all his ideas, because he was proving his strength. Was he not building, block by block, one of those sturdy, symmetrical, granite towers, the dwellers in which met on a proud equality those in the others, the distant white towers that gleamed against the sky? He was her husband, and she knew—ah, if she could only have the courage always to cling to the knowl-

edge—that he was a husband of whom she need never be ashamed.

The dinner seemed to her interminably long, but at last the doors opened. Already she had made the coffee and was ready for them as they filed into the room. Their expressions interested her keenly. O'Leary and Donovan looked surly and left with hardly a word. Henry spoke a moment with them at the door and to Stephen, she noticed, they were cordial. To Dunbar they showed a grudging respect, and Mr. Staples they ignored altogether.

He came over and sat on the sofa beside her, much to her surprise and chagrin. "Well, well, well," he said, "that was a very good meetin', quite satisfactory. And the dinner good, too, very good. I compliment you, madam."

"Thank you. Will you have one lump?"

"Two, please. I believe you used to be in Stuyvesant and Bond's office. That's so, isn't it? I thought I remembered seein' you somewhere."

"Yes. I was there two years."

"A good place to be—Stuyvesant and Bond's. They have a fine business—in a conservative way, of course. I suppose that's how you happened to know Steve Bond so well—ha?" He looked at her slyly.

She turned quickly to Mr. Jennings. "Will you come over here?" she asked, "I have a message for your wife."

"Oh, if that's the way you take a little well-meant pleasantry——" grumbled Mr. Staples, rising awkwardly. His face turned slowly to a dull brick red. "I guess you would find more to say to Mr. Jen- nin's. I found him most amusin' at dinner."

Mr. Jennings smiled at him—a peculiarly guileless smile. "Glad I gave you a good time. There's more of 'em coming, what?" Then to Helen, "Has that piece of a circus been insulting you again? I reckon I'd better kick him out of the house."

"He's going of his own accord and Mr. Dunbar with him."

"Then I'm sorry for Staples. Dunbar's sharp as a pin, and I opine a bad half hour for Mr. Vice-President. If he succeeds in making such an all-around, nicely patterned, verdant ass of himself many times, I can see walking papers from the company for his. I don't suppose you really have a message for Mrs. Jennings?"

"Just to tell her from me, please, that you have been delightful company and came to my rescue gallantly."

"Well, now——" Mr. Jennings shook his head

dubiously and put his fingers through his thin locks. "I reckon that's a message that might as well be kept for my own private enjoyment, what? You see, Mrs. J. has the reedicrous idea that I'm something of a lady-killer, which suspicions I shouldn't want to confirm, and then she hasn't entirely got straight bearings about you yet, and I wouldn't like for her to get started on another tangent. Amanda's a very good woman—she always prefers for me to say lady—but she has her prejudices like all of us. Do I make it clear?"

Helen laughed. "Oh, quite, Mr. Jennings. I leave everything to your discretion."

"That's all right, then. Good-night."

"Good-night."

"I must be going, too, Mrs. Murphy," Stephen said, coming up to her. "The evening has been intensely interesting, even if not satisfactory. Have you and Murphy talked over the strike at all?"

"Indeed, yes. Perhaps I don't entirely understand things, but Henry always talks over with me the problems that are interesting him. It is wonderful to think I am worth consulting, and I really am learning."

"And teaching, too. A college instructor once said

to me that the only way really to learn a subject was to give a course in it. So don't be afraid to express your ideas."

"I'm not," she responded, smiling. "That has never been one of my faults. In fact, I'm always jumping at conclusions and expressing them."

"And quite rightly, if you have the courage to admit sometimes that you are mistaken. People brave enough to define conclusions that still need proof are the ones who carry the world forward. Now I," he added somewhat sadly, "I am quite the other kind. I shall never do anything big, either bad or good, because I spend all my life crawling around questions and testing the validity of every proposition. By the time I am convinced the question is no longer vital; the world has accepted an answer—usually a right one, too—and has gone ahead to new problems."

"If you are that kind, perhaps it would be a good thing for you once in a while to lose your head," she said.

He quivered. "That remark startled me," he said at last, quite calmly, "because it is exactly what my friend Philip Moncrieff said to me last night. I wonder what it means."

"Obviously nothing, I suppose," she answered,

turning to him again—"or else a great deal, since it was stated by two quite different people."

Henry, who had been talking on the steps with Mr. Jennings, came in. "What are you two talking about?" he said.

"Mr. Bond was just telling me about the dinner and asking whether I knew anything about the strike," Helen answered.

"And I am sure, Murphy," Stephen added, "that a woman must give advice that is really helpful. I wish I could stay now to share in it, but I must go."

"We must get together again soon about this business," Henry said. "To-night was useless, and we might work out some solution alone—or with Helen, here. She sometimes cuts right down to the heart of things."

"There is nothing I should like better," Stephen said. "Why can't we—why won't you both dine with me next Wednesday at my house—just the three of us. Would you accept such an informal invitation, Mrs. Murphy? It's business, you know, as well as pleasure for me."

"If Henry has no engagement, it would be delightful. But do you really want *me*?"

"Sure we do," Henry asserted. "Between us we

can construct a proposition that people will *have* to assent to."

"It's settled, then. I am so glad. And now I really must go. Good-night."

"Good-night, and thank you," Helen said, giving him her hand.

"If it hadn't been for that fool, Staples," Henry said, when the door was closed, "we might have done something. But it's all in the day's work. And nothing matters so long as I have you at the end."

"No," Helen assented, resting her cheek against his shoulder, "nothing else really matters."

CHAPTER VI

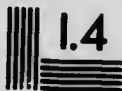
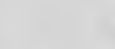
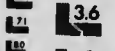
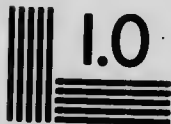
SUNK deep in the corner of a huge, soft, leather-covered sofa, Helen let her eyes wander over the room and intermittently to the faces of the two men. Her sensation was of infinite content and peace. The rich colours of the books, contrasting, separated, and at the same time brought into harmony by an occasional volume bound in warm vellum that seemed to have absorbed the sunshine of its hundred years of life; the severe lines of the furnishings; the mellow panels, some glowing like wrinkled satin in the light, others vanishing into a velvet blackness; everything softened even as it was brought into being by the light that came, one hardly knew from where—all seemed to her an expression of herself, of some far-distant, ancestral self that had never had a chance to live. Her senses were rested, not dulled. She was mentally alert, ready to answer questions about the strike or to throw in suggestions, all the time that subconsciously she was drifting back into a past which she could not remember, but that she knew to be her inheritance.

“Then you feel sure,” she heard Henry say, “that



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the company would agree to the terms we have outlined?"

"Of course I cannot officially answer for the company," Stephen responded. "I am only one of eleven directors. But I feel reasonably certain. I only wish I could be equally sure that you can make the men see the injustice of turning out those non-union employees who have worked so long and so faithfully."

"The men are reasonable—or were. I never saw that side of it before. I guess I never understood what a corporation conscience was. Don't you think, Helen, from what I've told you, that the men would agree to let it be an open field if they got better pay and shorter hours?"

"The men—yes," she answered quickly, "but you must count in the influence of the national union leaders who are in Boston. To them it is not the individual. It's the principle at stake. They may insist."

"That's exactly where I'm worried, Mrs. Murphy. Human nature is going to stand for the square deal every time, but in cases like this human nature doesn't usually have a chance to show up. Is there much theoretical socialism mixed in with all this strike agitation, do you think, Murphy?"

"No, not much, so far as I can make out. It's

just the wish to get cash enough to feed themselves decently. Of course there must be some cases of the rankest kind of socialism. O'Leary, one of those fellows at my house the other night, seems pretty reasonable. He is the kind who would be, and his word carries a lot of weight. But he says, just as Helen suggests, that the labour leaders have been stirring up trouble, says they urge the men to declare a strike right off and tell them to make their own terms. Confound it! Why can't they let us run our little show ourselves?"

"Because, individually, in their eyes, we don't count. A fight for principle in Boston, even if unsuccessful, counts in San Francisco, and it's the national aspect of the thing they're looking at."

"But a successful fight would count for more, and by rushing into things unprepared they're weakening their chances of getting what they ought to have."

"That may be so from the point of view of the men and their families—the actual employees in whom you are interested—but not from that of the unions. The leaders are clever enough to know that they can best manage men who are actually on strike, who see everything magnified through their passions. A man will not usually do violence while he is capable of thinking sanely, but once let passion get the upper

hand of sanity, and physical violence is the natural consequence."

"I don't believe there will be any violence."

"Don't be too sure. A few cars destroyed or a bridge wrecked makes a big noise from one end of the country to the other. Noise is what they want."

"But surely," Helen said, "notoriety gained in that way must prejudice people against them."

"So it does," Stephen answered, "in the minds of men and women like ourselves, but not in the minds of the masses, especially those in distant cities. What they see is merely that so horrible were the abuses of the company that self-respecting men were compelled to stand up for their rights by force, persuasion having failed. There is a bit of sneaking sympathy for the anarchist in all of us."

"I don't believe it," Henry interposed. "Was there a man in the nation that didn't curse Czolgosz?"

"I am afraid there was—more than one. But that was a peculiar case. McKinley stood out as a famously good, mild-mannered, and above all, inoffensive man. And then you must add that social unrest in America has not, as yet, developed into active hatred of government, but only of riches, especially of corporate riches."

"What do you mean by 'as yet'?" Helen asked.

"Just what I say. The logical result of social unrest is social revolution, unless causes of grievance are removed in time. We have let matters slide too long. The cry of our labouring classes originally was that special privileges be cut away. Now they have become so used to the idea of special privileges that instead of equal opportunity they demand special privileges for themselves, and, what is more, privileges more monstrous than were ever enjoyed by corporations."

"But this notion of special privileges," Henry said, "seems to me dead against the principles of socialism, and that, I gathered from things you said at dinner, was growing to be mighty dangerous."

"Isn't it something like this?" Helen put in. "When people begin to think about the injustice of society socialism seems a pretty obvious remedy. Then they preach their doctrine, and the masses, who have passions, but not trained intelligence, take up the doctrine because it means to them an easy way to get money and a punishment for those who have been more successful."

"A sort of universal get-rich-quick scheme," Henry said.

"Most young men who think go through the so-

cialistic phase," Stephen answered. "I did. There was a time when I wanted to give away everything I had because it was inherited, not earned. Even now I should be willing to give up this house and everything in it, for example, if I was convinced it would do any good. But I am not willing to have it taken away from me and to have my books used to light fires."

"I should think not," Helen cried.

"There we have it," Henry said laughing—"the thing that will save the country from socialism. The love of a woman for things that are hers."

Stephen smiled. "How about the women, Mrs. Murphy? Do they envy their neighbours?"

"All women do, Mr. Bond. I don't know the wives of any of the strikers, but I imagine they are no better than I am—than we all are."

Stephen laughed out. "That is the first time you have descended to generalities. For what do you envy your neighbours, I wonder?"

"And the first time you have descended to personality. Do you really want an answer?"

"Yes."

"Well, then; I envy them the opportunity to be entirely themselves."

"That is enigmatic."

"And will have to remain so, I fear. What one cannot explain to oneself is impossible to explain to others."

"May I use your telephone, Bond?" Henry broke in. He had been thoughtfully pacing the room, paying no attention to the conversation. "Some of the strikers whom I know well are having a meeting this evening where I can get them, and it might be a good scheme to get them thinking along the lines of what we've been saying. None of the Union leaders are with them."

"Good idea," Stephen said. "You won't make anything definite, of course, as we have no authority. My man will show you the telephone." He took him to the door and then, returning, stood with an arm on the mantel looking down at Helen. "You interest me even more than the strike, I am afraid," he continued. "What you said a few minutes ago, that you envied the wives of these strikers the chance fully to express themselves. I should have said that you very fully expressed yourself—were yourself, might be better."

"That may be because you know me so little. I am really two women in one—I suppose every woman thinks that of herself. But I feel it very sharply, even though vaguely. One part of me is the natural

development from the child who has been brought up in poverty, who has had to work for everything, who has gained what little refinement she has against sometimes bitter odds. The other woman—well—she is the one I cannot explain—one who is sensitively satisfied with this room, for example. Perhaps that will make it as clear as anything I can say.”

“This is a very masculine room, my friends tell me. It needs a woman’s hand to make it expressive.”

“That is not what I meant. And yet just because of its masculine severity it is even more satisfying. What I mean is that it does express that instinctive refinement, that shuddering away from anything that is ugly, that the other woman in me feels every day. It is a craving that is seldom satisfied, so to-night I have let it have full sway. When I get back to the red walls and the polished black walnut and the vase with roses sprawling up it that Uncle John gave us—well, then, you see, the first part of me takes the helm again.”

“Good God, how you must suffer!”

“No,” she said, smiling up at him. “On the contrary, I must, and do find happiness, in order to let myself develop. Suffering would kill the part of me which appreciates the better things of life. My mother suffered. I don’t think she ever really

understood as my father would have. She suffered because she had lost her comforts, and she spent her life in querulous complaint, never in the attempt to make a little go as far as it could be made to go. My father was not like that. He always held the candle in the dark places—so I have heard, and so I believe, and from him I must have inherited what strength I have.”

“Go on,” he cried harshly.

“No,” she said. “That is all there is to tell. I am not usually egotistical and especially in talking to a man I hardly know.”

“Don’t say that. You do know me—what little there is to know—because you know, as I do, the grip of old traditions, old conventions. But not so numbingly, perhaps. They have become the very expression of myself until I am afraid there is nothing left but the hard, unyielding surface of me. I am too proud of a coward ever to shatter that surface and give air to the poor, starving kernel of a real man within.”

“That is not true, because the picture you paint is of a self-centred, selfish, passionless creature, and everything you do disproves it.”

“Everything I do disproves it? Everything makes it more certain.”

"No. Your courageous interest in these poor working people when everything should keep you in the ranks of those who cry them down; your unfailing courtesy to the girls in your office; your including me here to-night because you knew it would give me pleasure——"

"Stop. What is my interest, really, in these motormen and conductors but an example of the old Bostonian's idea that he must have some charity or some fad to keep his mind broad. Broad! Good heavens—and every activity like that is simply a sop to his self-congratulation. And the girls in the office! More efficient service—that is all, with perhaps a gleam of prudish, conventional joy in the fact that scandals don't occur in the offices of Stuyvesant and Bond. And you here at dinner! Oh, if you could only realise how little I thought of your pleasure and how much of my own."

"Simply because you are big enough hearted to take greater pleasure in pleasing others than in pleasing only yourself."

He laughed bitterly. "Rather call it the self-imposed punishment of the man who has been blind to the happiness that he might have had, and when at last he sees, lies on the ground at night and cries impotently for the stars."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," she said, her voice quivering a little. "I have heard that a blind man who sees at last, often mistakes a tallow candle for a star. Perhaps you are that man, Mr. Bond. There are ignoble things in life as inaccessible as the stars, but the man who struggles to reach them is burning the gifts the gods have given him, while the one who aspires to the heavens climbs high."

"You, too, fight with the rhetoric of convention."

"I know its strength," she said, smiling; "and I know the candle is beautiful only when out of reach."

"You are right," he said, bowing his face in the hollow of his arm. "You are always right. I shall remember."

She looked into the fire, her pleasure gone, her faith in him broken through the unwilling revelation of himself that was contrary to his nature. She took up a print that lay on the table beside her, attracted perhaps by its colour. But as she looked at it carelessly it riveted her attention. She had never seen a good Japanese print before, and this one was a supreme example. It was by Harunobu, of a young man and a girl standing in a simple room. Through a paper screen one saw the shadow of a pine tree. "This is real," he said tremulously.

"Yes," he answered. "That man saw and ex-

pressed the harmony of life that we, here, have lost sight of."

She held the print in her hand, gazing and gazing at it, trying, in its simple truthfulness, to creep away from this knowledge that had come to her so unexpectedly and so terrifyingly. Here was none of the convention, none of the sad complexity of life that had caught her in its grip. It stood out for her as representing the simplicity of truth in a mass of lies—the one true thing in the room. At last she laid the print on the table, but it had burned into her consciousness so that she felt she could never forget it.

For a moment they were silent. Then, as Henry opened the door, Helen rose, a little unsteadily, and turned to a bookcase. Stephen stood erect before the fireplace, his hands clasped behind his back. "Well," he said quietly, "did you get them?"

"Yes, I got them. Not very satisfactory, though. They seem to be mixed up with these visitors who are crying for trouble, and who are trying to make them decide things, not as would be better for them, but in a way that would make most impression outside—just as you said."

"I hope we are not too late. I only wish we could have got to work sooner. You will do what you can, of course, and so shall I."

Helen wondered how they could talk so calmly. The last half hour had been a time of violent readjustment for her, but she had come through the ordeal with the eyes of her soul seeing more clearly than they had ever seen before. At first, before Stephen had spoken, she had thought sadly of the miserable little shelf of worn books in her sitting-room as compared with the riches beside her; of her red walls, and his glowing panels; of Mrs. Jennings, and the ladies who sat at his table. Now, she thought only of her husband, and of Stephen. One she loved, the true, fine heart of him underneath the common surface. The other was only a symbol of a life she longed for. As a symbol he counted for much; as a man, for nothing. And his self-betrayal affected her curiously. She was frightened, afraid for an instant that he was the kind of a man Henry had thought him when the orchids came. But now, she saw him as he was. She recognised the situation in its completeness, the man, blinded by convention, letting slip the opportunity he had not seen, and crying out afterward, as a child would cry for a rabbit which, trapped, he did not quite dare to touch, and which later darted through the long grass into cover. What was more, she understood, without completely understanding, his love for her. In the future he must always be dif-

ferent to her—much nearer and more to be trusted, yet more to be kept distant. She knew that Henry would never have so revealed himself to another man's wife, whatever had been his feelings, and at the same time knew him so true to her that he would not be tempted. The knowledge thrilled her, and intensified her love.

"We have overstayed our welcome," she said, turning to them. "Now that you and Henry have hit on a solution—that satisfies you, at least," she added, as she saw his gesture of dissent—"we really must go. Our carriage came long ago."

"It can wait. We have much more to say—all of us—and you ought to pity a lonely bachelor. Since you have been here, Mrs. Murphy, the room has seemed again like a refuge—as it did when my mother was alive."

"But even for that," Henry said, taking his wife's arm, "we cannot stay forever, you know. And it's late enough now, in all conscience. I'm beginning to have an uneasy feeling already, that my wife belongs here instead of in South Boston."

"In a way she does," Stephen said, not looking at Helen. "Not here in this house, perhaps, but among her own people, her own kind. Think of the people she must have to associate with while you are

away. We men are thoughtless creatures. We go daily into the world and meet all kinds, and our women must stay at home, alone, or with the people who live near at hand. That's what I mean. I don't know her, but I don't believe the wife of that politician, Jennings, is Mrs. Murphy's kind."

Henry looked at him thoughtfully. He felt that Stephen was "butting in," as he would put it later to Helen, but at the same time he felt the basis of truth in what he had said. Finally he fell back on the old argument. "But we're not swells, you know. I'm just a plain South Boston politician—not even rich—and my wife must take her chances along with me."

"Not at all," Stephen said quickly. "That is contrary to the whole trend of American life. It may be true in Turkey, or even in Germany. Here the woman must strive to rise in her way as the man does in his. There is nothing more un-American nor more cowardly, it seems to me, than the idea that whatever is, is right. Our motto is rather to keep pace with opportunity."

"You mean she ought to rise socially?" Henry asked. "But why is a woman better off dangling onto the gilded skirts of what you call society than she is among men and women of her own station?"

"Why it should be so is hard to answer. Perhaps because we have no fixed station. But facts speak for themselves, and I am not talking of the scandals and the divorces and the drinking and the gambling. I mean the great class of ladies and gentlemen who meet for pleasure on terms of intellectual and social equality, people who, after dinner, can talk, and don't need to be entertained by parlour tricks and charades. For the men, too, Murphy—it is almost invariably among such people that you find the really important men in public life."

"You wouldn't call Jennings really important? He has tremendous influence and has done a lot to clean up politics."

"No. He is a good man whose vision does not extend an inch beyond South Boston. You do not want to confine yourself to that."

Helen looked at him gratefully.

There came a knock at the door and Spriggs appeared. "Mr. Moncrieff, sir. Shall I ask him to wait?"

"No. Tell him to come up."

"Then we may really go," Helen said, smiling at him. "Your little sermon is over and you have not even the excuse of loneliness."

"But wait just a minute. I want you to meet Moncrieff. He is one of my oldest friends, and is seldom in Boston."

As he was speaking they saw Moncrieff run up the stairs two steps at a time. "Hello, old chap," he cried, not seeing that any one else was in the room, "lost your head yet?"

"I want to introduce you to my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy, who have been dining here."

Moncrieff turned to them quickly. "By Jove," he said, shaking hands, "I'm awfully sorry I bounded into the room that way, and awfully glad I didn't scare you out."

Helen looked at him and then at Stephen. This, then, was the friend who had also advised him to lose his head. She blushed because she felt the chance remark as an unconscious thread between them, and because she knew that Stephen, also, was thinking of it. "We were just going, Mr. Moncrieff, so you could not have frightened us away."

"Oh, no!" he said. "That would be too bad. Steve told me about you both the other night, and I want to know you."

"I guess it'll have to be through Bond, then," Henry put in. "Our carriage will go off without us or else the driver'll charge us an unholy fee. Good-

night, Bond. We'll get together again when I've seen the men."

"Make it another dinner here. Will you do that, Mrs. Murphy?"

"No, indeed," Helen answered. "Next time you must come to us. Will you?" For the last time her eyes strayed to the Japanese print as though she wanted to take with her the memory only of that true, simple fact.

"Of course I will. Good-night."

When Stephen came back to the library, Moncrieff was stretched out on the sofa, a Scotch and soda on the table beside him. "I've made myself comfortable, Steve. Was that the woman? She's a ripper for looks—hair and eyes good enough to bowl any fellow over. Nose a little inadequate, I thought. How'd they happen to be here?"

"Probably because I invited them," Stephen answered, a little stiffly. "Murphy is one of the best fellows I know."

"Yes, of course he is. You'd have him here often if it wasn't for his wife. He's just your sort, I should think. Why don't you put him up for the Club?"

"It strikes me that you're just a little bit drunk,

Phil." Stephen was lighting his pipe and his fingers trembled with irritation.

"Drunk? I'm as sober as a corpse at its own funeral. Drat it, man, don't be a prig. You've known me too long to pretend. If a friend of mine wants to make an ass of himself about a pretty woman I'm not going to stand in his way."

"For God's sake, Phil, drop that nonsense. I like Mrs. Murphy. She's one of the most charming and thoroughly civilised women I know. I shall see what I can of her, and I am neither a prig nor a cad."

"Of course not. There is no reason on earth why you should not have an innocent flirtation with the wife of a South Boston politician—a girl who used to be in your office. Everybody will understand perfectly that it is quite aboveboard. Let's talk about something else."

Stephen turned abruptly, and stood, his hands in his pockets, looking down at Moncrieff. "I think I *must* have lost my head," he said slowly, "or my senses. Of course the world would be cynical. And, O Lord, what an intolerable position for her!"

Moncrieff looked back at him, a smile just twisting the corners of his mouth. Finally he took up his glass of Scotch. "Here's luck," he said.

CHAPTER VII

"I'M sure," said Mrs. Jennings, president of the South Boston Thursday Morning Ladies' Intellectual Improvement Society, as she rose from her chair and rapped by force of habit on the table at her side—"I'm sure that we have all profited greatly by the talk Miss Barnes has so kindly treated us to. This subject of Gothic Architecture in England and France is very important, and one that we have long felt the need of knowing more about. Now, when we make little trips to Europe again"—Mrs. Jennings had been on a two months' personally conducted tour some time before she was married—"we will be able to understand why the cathedrals are beautiful. I know you all want to exhibit your gratification to our kind lecturer by a vote. Will some one make a motion? Thank you, Mrs. Fritch, that was very well put. Now will every one that is in favour of Mrs. Fritch's motion please say 'Aye.' Contrary minded, 'No.' It is a vote. The secretary will please inscribe the vote on the records of the society." The ladies all said that Mrs. Jennings must have learned from her husband how to preside so emphatically and without

waste of time. A few even hinted that her haste prevented any dissent from her views, but these were the insurgents whose husbands did not like Mr. Jennings' political control. "And now," Mrs. Jennings continued, adjusting her glasses and unfolding a slip of paper, "I am pleased to say that at our next meeting, on Thursday the 14th, we shall have the pleasure of listening to Mrs. Solway, who will talk to us on 'How to force tulips so they will come into bloom before Easter.' You all know that Mrs. Solway won the fourth prize for kitchen-forced tulips at the South Boston flower-show last March, so you will all await her words with eager interest. The meeting is now open to general discussion." She sat down, folded the slip of paper precisely, and put it in her bag. Then she looked expectantly around the room. Through the windows came the indignant shrieks of a child, and one of the mothers made a hasty exit. At last the silence was broken, and Mrs. Jennings' face darkened as she saw the speaker rise to her feet. Mrs. Smythe was not a favourite with the Club.

"It appears to me," the lady remarked belligerently, "that in these stirring times there are more important matters to discuss than Rheims—she called it 'Reems'—Cathedral and kitchen tulips. Just now,

when the city is topsy-turvy with strikes and when we ladies hardly dare to go to Boston in the cars, and when, I might say, we go in fear of our lives when we open our front doors, it does appear to me that we are not fulfilling our mission as the helpmates of our husbands, to be setting here listening to pretty little talks about bulbs and churches. Those are my sentiments, and I suppose I have a right to hold them."

"You certainly have," responded Mrs. Jennings, her voice quivering with anger. "This is a free country, as I've had occasion to remark many times. But the South Boston Ladies' Thursday Morning Society is not a political organisation nor any more is it a woman's rights club. As I understand it, we meet for intellectual improvement." There was vigorous nodding from some of the company, a little less emphatic shaking of heads from others.

"It appears to me," Mrs. Smythe retorted, "that this Society would accomplish more on that line even, if it was more up to date."

"I don't know what our sister means by that," some one put in. "The French churches still stand and I was looking over a tulip catalogue just this morning."

"But the churches and the tulips we will always

have, and the strike, I hope, we sha'n't," said Mrs. Smythe.

"That's just it," said the president. "We meet together to discuss things that are lasting, not things of the moment that are to-morrow cast into the fire and consumed."

"But, Mrs. President," said a new voice from the back of the room, "these strikes are, after all, matters which are moulding our national life. To understand the forces that are making our country what it is should be a very important part of our intellectual equipment."

There was a general craning of necks and twisting in chairs, and thirty pairs of eyes were focussed on Helen. She looked back at them calmly, with complete self-possession, yet not defiantly. Almost every one felt that she had spoken well and without undue self-assertion, yet almost all were annoyed that she had spoken at all. She was the latest member, and she had not yet been tried according to the various standards of the Park. Perhaps Mrs. Jennings felt it most keenly. Had she not, after a talk with her husband, in which he had expressed himself more forcibly than was his custom, taken Helen under her special protection? Had she not even abased her pride by telling a new and much more kindly—she

would hardly have admitted truer—version of the orchid story? Had she not finally made it a personal matter to get her elected to the Society? Certainly it seemed to her base ingratitude that Helen, the first time she spoke, should take a stand against her, allying herself moreover with that dreadful Mrs. Smythe. But Mrs. Jennings tried to be fair. She knew that Helen had never met Mrs. Smythe, probably had never heard of her. What was more, the question at issue had in her mind no importance aside from Mrs. Smythe's championship. She therefore determined to be magnanimous.

"What you say, Mrs. Murphy," she answered, after a moment of ominous silence, "sounds reasonable. Of course, it does seem to me that we can learn about all we want to know about the strike from the papers, but then, if anybody's got anything to add, why, I don't know but as we'd be willing to listen. What's more, I feel constrained to add on second thoughts, I don't see exactly what a local strike's got to do with national development. Perhaps you can tell us that right now."

"I am hardly prepared to give any very illuminating views at a moment's notice," Helen said, smiling, "even if I ever could. It seems to me, however, that the strike is a symptom of the national unrest. Every

clash between labour and capital sets our knowledge of conditions one step ahead, and at the same time makes the situation more complex and difficult of a satisfactory conclusion. But I don't want to talk about it. I want to hear some one who is really well informed."

"I guess you know more than any of us," Mrs. Jennings said. "My husband tells me you're one of a self-appointed sub-committee with Mr. Murphy and that Mr. Bond to settle the thing *sub rosa*."

"They are very good to let me listen," she answered, blushing in spite of herself as she caught the furtive glances of understanding that passed from woman to woman. "I am learning a great deal."

"Couldn't you tell us what you have learned next Thursday?" Mrs. Jennings continued. "We don't have meetings every Thursday, as a general rule, in summer, but as you say, the question is very agitating just at present and might not be at one of our regular dates—I am sure, ladies, you could not think of disappointing Mrs. Solway two weeks from to-day—and that would make it a month. All in favour of having an extra session next week to hear Mrs. Murphy talk on the strike signify it by saying 'Aye.' Contrary minded, 'No.' It is a vote."

"But," Helen cried. "I can't make a speech, and as I told you, I want to learn myself."

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Jennings said. "You ought to have spoken sooner. It's a vote now, and a vote's a vote, just as a law's a law. You'll just have to do your best."

"But could we not get some man who really knows?"

"Some man! Well, it's pretty clear that you haven't been in this Society very long. A man, indeed! We believe that women are just as able to talk and think as men, and we voted long ago never to listen to a man after one we asked refused to come. Ladies, the meeting is over. Before disbanding, shall we sing our usual hymn?" She began beating time, and then burst out shrilly with the words, "Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love."

Helen joined her as they went down the steps into the hot June sunshine. "Really, Mrs. Jennings, how can I speak next week? I have never done such a thing."

"Then the sooner you begin the better, my dear. I advise you to write it all down and then you won't forget. Of course, when you have talked in public as much as I have you won't find that necessary, but

you're young yet and haven't had much experience, and I presume the words don't always come easy. Now, I went to a Sunday school where the scholars all had to get up and recite Bible verses, and it gave me confidence on my feet. Did you have to do that?"

"I never went to Sunday school."

"Never went to Sunday school! Well, I must remark! Your mother must have been a peculiar woman."

"She was not well, Mrs. Jennings, and on Sundays she needed me at home. About next Thursday—what made you think I could talk?"

"I didn't."

Helen looked at her quickly. "You didn't. Then why do you make me?"

"Well," Mrs. Jennings answered slowly, "I guess I did it to give you your chance. You see, it's just this way. When you first came here, I made a mistake about you. I thought you were different and uppish, somehow. I guess you sort of riled me, too. I thought you were putting on airs, and I couldn't see where you had any occasion to. All that made me mad. I told one or two of the neighbours about the orchids, and they spread the story in a mean, gossiping sort of way until all South Boston—that

is, all the Park and Mrs. Davenant of K Street and a few others—was talking about it. And then the minister of our church—I really wish you went there, Mrs. Murphy, he preaches such edifying sermons—well, he preached on that text about how some people have tongues that are sharper than a serpent's teeth and made me feel how mean and unchristian-like the other ladies of the Park were, so that I felt ashamed of them. And then, that very evening Abraham asked me if I wouldn't use my influence—I really do have a great deal, if I do say it as shouldn't—to stop the talk. He said it was very necessary, because if I didn't he would lose Murphy, who he thinks is a great help to him in politics. So I went around and told the ladies what I thought of them. I knew it was the right thing to do."

"Thank you. What then?"

"Well, then things were quieting down all peaceful until you had Mr. Bond to dinner."

"It was to discuss the strike."

"Yes, so Mr. J. told me when I remarked about it to him, but it did set folks to talking again."

"I'm afraid it can't be helped. Henry finds Mr. Bond too good a man to work with to throw him over on account of silly gossip."

"Of course I don't know about it's being all silly

gossip, but it was dying out until Mrs. Salsbury saw you talking with a man she thought must be Mr. Bond on Washington Street last Monday morning. That naturally makes things worse than ever."

"I was talking with him. We met Henry later and had luncheon together. But what has all this to do with next Thursday?"

"Just this. I don't believe there is much of anything in all the stories I hear. So you see, it occurred to me that if you talked to them it would make the ladies see you different and give them something else to think about."

"But won't they think merely that all I tell them I got from Mr. Bond?"

"Maybe. It's a risk, but a risk worth running. It gives you a chance to get on the right side of folks, and I hope you'll take it."

"I shall at least try," Helen said, "and I thank you, now that I understand. This is your house, and I must hurry home. Good-bye."

Life seemed to Helen just then to be a tangle of contradictions. Mrs. Jennings, who did not like her, was acting openly as her champion because Henry was politically useful to Mr. Jennings; she was doing her best to further Henry's ambitions, and those ambitions seemed to her unworthy of consideration; she

was seeing more and more of Stephen Bond, almost always through her husband's wish, and yet every time she saw him she knew that through the growing distrust of her it made Henry's position in South E ton more insecure; and finally, that being with Stephen was cruel to him, since each meeting made his hopeless love for her more violent, even as the fact lessened her respect for him. And yet she clung to him as the only link which connected the life she led with the life she longed to lead. With a little gesture of despair she sat down on a bench beside the fountain and watched the swarms of children splashing each other as they waded in the huge stone basin. She had been there only a minute, it seemed, when she was startled by a voice at her side. "What luck, Mrs. Murphy. May I sit down? I had no idea of finding a friend here."

"Mr. Moncrieff," she cried, "you in South Boston! I can't imagine what should bring you here."

"Quite a commonplace reason, I assure you. To be accurate, the heat."

"The heat. That should be a reason to keep any one away."

"On the contrary. Your ocean is always cold and there are no sea-baths in Boston." He took off his

straw hat and laid it on the bench beside him. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Not at all." But as she answered she wondered whether Stephen would have done it, whether this man would have, if he had thought her one of his own kind.

"You've seen a good bit of Steve lately, so he tells me," he said, when he had lighted his cigarette.

"Yes, we have met several times. He and my husband seem to have a great deal to say about the strike and they are good enough to let me listen." She was angry with herself for saying it. She was tired of the phrase and suddenly angry at the need to justify herself. Why was her right to see him less than the right of any other self-respecting woman. Yet she had excused herself to Mrs. Jennings and again to this man. "I always enjoy being with him," she added hastily, "because I like him very much."

"He is an attractive chap—curious one, too. He's hard to make out entirely, so deucedly reserved and calm. One can't quite imagine his 'slipping his trolley,' as you say over here, and yet he has it in him to do something startling."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing specific. I was thinking of his character. He feels things just as keenly as you and I

do, a bit more keenly, I think, sometimes, but he has his own practice of years and the practice of generations back of him not to show it. He would meet crisis after crisis and you'd never know anything more important was happening than the ringing of church bells. He'd go through a financial panic without a quiver and would hold onto his property when other people would think the bottom of the world had dropped out. Repression, subordination of life to reason—that's the keynote of the man."

"Why, isn't all that very fine?"

"It is—Lord, what a noise those children make! It is, so far as it goes, but it's all pure intellect. In that way it's like the Unitarian religion, capable of satisfying to a certain point and to meet a good many crises, but not all. It fails at the most critical moment because it discounts the emotions, and they're just as true, if not truer, than the brain. Steve doesn't realise yet that passion has a quite silly and quite outrageously thorough way of demolishing beautiful theories."

"I don't think I understand."

"I do generalise a bit too much. It's a bad habit I have fallen into. To be more specific, then. Suppose Steve should fall in love." She looked at him involuntarily, but he was staring at the fountain and

apparently thinking aloud. "Suppose he should fall in love, I mean, with a quite impossible person, some one not of his own class, or married. He would hold onto himself, of course, and bubble and boil inside, and have a great deal to say about platonic friendship—oh, I've heard him discourse on that silly subject until I'm sick to death of it—and he'd go on seeing the bright star of his adoration, his love becoming all the time worse and worse and all the time more easily to be explained by that infallible reason of his, and then, inevitably, there would come a time when the dikes would break and reason—well, it would be just a bobbing cork on a rushing river. It's not only his own passion but that of all his ancestors that would get loose, remember."

"That sounds rather fantastic to me," Helen said, "and even if it is not, why borrow trouble? He must see too many girls of his own class to go hunting for one in the wilds."

"Ah! but the girls have mothers, and old Steve is rich and much to be desired. The result is attempt at coercion, and from that Stephen flies. Besides, one does not go to the wilds hunting for Love. One finds it by the wayside."

"And there you are afraid Mr. Bond will find it?"

"Or has found it," he said, looking at her directly until she felt the hot red staining her neck and face.

"If that is so," she answered, returning his look bravely, "we must trust, for his sake, that the woman, if unmarried, will remember that she, too, has duties to society, and if married, is as truly in love with her husband as I am with mine."

Moncrieff turned toward her and made a motion as though to take her hand. His face expressed delighted surprise. "It seems to me," he said, "that Stephen is blessed with very good friends—with two, at least, who really want the best for him. I did not realise, Mrs. Murphy, that you would be so quick to see. I thought——"

"It really does not matter what you thought, Mr. Moncrieff. Perhaps it would be better not to depart from the impersonal."

He tossed his cigarette into the fountain. "You are right. Steve told me you usually were. Should you be willing to add me to your list of friends?"

She stood up and held out her hand to him. "Because you have done an unpleasant thing as pleasantly as you could—yes. In the future, however, let us discuss something quite impersonal, labour and capital, for example. No woman could forgive distrust more than once."

"Distrust? Is that quite fair?"

"Perhaps not," she said, smiling. "A stronger word might have been more appropriate. You made mentally a class generalisation, and I fitted into it."

"You see through me," he admitted contritely, "and yet you forgive. You are generous. But my mistake was broader than you think. I had put you in the wrong class."

"Perhaps. I hope so, but I fear that you still have not sounded the depths of your error. In America you cannot generalise as to classes at all. The exceptions are as numerous as the type."

Suddenly she became conscious that a half-dozen dirty and very wet little children were grouped about them, looking up at them wonderingly, and at the same time heard a shrill voice from the fountain: "Hi! Look at lovers holding hands!" She snatched her hand away from his. It must have been a ridiculous picture, the two of them standing there in the sunlight with clasped hands; yet so intent had she been on what they were saying that she had not realized he was touching her. Then another scornful childish voice piped up. "Naw. Them's no lovers. She's the new lady what lives at eight nineteen."

And then to complete her embarrassment Mrs.

Jennings strode into the circle. "Get away, you dirty children," she cried. "It's high time you all went home to dinner," and then, with exaggerated surprise, "Well, for the land sakes, Mrs. Murphy. If this isn't you! And I thought you was hurrying home to dinner a good half-hour ago. But of course"—and she turned with a smile toward Moncrieff—"of course I know that if a lady meets a gentleman she must stop to pass the time of day with him. Perhaps you will introduce me to Mr. Bond."

Helen felt her face burning. She did not dare look at Moncrieff. "I am afraid you have made a mistake, Mrs. Jennings. This is Mr. Moncrieff."

"Mr. Moncrieff?" She looked in amazement at first one and then the other.

"Moncrieff is my name, and I am honoured to meet you, Mrs. Jennings," he said quietly. Then he looked with deep questioning at Helen, but her eyes were hidden from him.

For a full minute Mrs. Jennings was silent, while her face grew more and more threatening. Moncrieff took out another cigarette. The children had scattered, their interest gone, so the three stood alone.

Then Helen laughed convulsively, and at the sound Mrs. Jennings burst out: "Moncrieff! Pooh! Who ever heard of that name in Boston! Mon-

crieff! You might at least have picked out a more likely name than that. And haven't I been watching you through my front parlour window ever since you left me to hurry home."

Helen was staring, fascinated, at Mrs. Jennings, and when she stopped for breath, laughed again. Then the muscles of her face seemed suddenly to freeze into rigid white lines. "Really, Mr. Moncrieff," she said bitterly, "I had no thought of subjecting you to this when you were good enough to stop to speak with me. Perhaps Mrs. Jennings will add one more to your collection of American impressions."

"Tush," cried that lady, turning fiercely to Moncrieff. "And you, Mr. Bond. Aren't you ashamed to lend yourself to such deception—a man with your good name making mock of a respectable middle-aged lady. It's shameful—that's what I call it, and I'll keep on saying so if I have to cry it from the house-tops, that I will. Truly the ways of men are past understanding."

"But, madam," he protested, "this is all a mistake. I assure you I'm not Mr. Bond. See, here is one of my calling cards to prove it." He took out his pocketbook.

"Oh, no, young man. You needn't trouble your-

self. I know all I want to know and I've said all I want to say—to you. Good-day."

"I'm afraid I've made an awful mess for you, Mrs. Murphy," Moncrieff said.

"Oh, no," she answered. "It will merely hasten the crisis. Good-bye. No. Please do not walk home with me; I should rather be alone, if you don't mind."

As he walked slowly toward the car line Moncrieff whistled softly to himself. "I'll be hanged," he thought, "if I understand all this. She seemed so straight, but there can't be all this smoke without some fire. I wonder what she meant by saying it would only hasten the crisis. Oh, damn it all, I think I had better let Steve manage his own salvation."

CHAPTER VIII

HELEN stood looking out of the front window. The low sun still sent a stream of yellow light through the trees in the Park and turned the dust clouds golden as they hissed along the street and against the window. She moved nervously. The hand that clutched one of the blue-white lace curtains rolled it into a ball and unconsciously tore it full of little holes. She was waiting for her husband and strained her eyes to see through the clouded pane. The lonely afternoon had been intolerable and endless. But she knew at last what she must say—that so far as life in South Boston was concerned she had reached the end of her endurance. Only three months—and it seemed as many years. She knew what Henry would answer, all the arguments he would use, the impression that he would fear any change might have on Uncle John, but she felt the strength of desperation and the power to prevail. She caught her breath as she had so often during the afternoon at the idea of his disappointment, at the idea that she had so far been merely a hindrance to him instead of the aid she had so proudly and fearlessly planned to be. But

her ambition for that was as bright as it had always been. Might she not, in taking him out of the narrow horizon of South Boston lead him into greater opportunity?

The telephone bell rattled through the silence of the house and she started with an unreasoning fear. Never had she lost the idea that a telegram meant disaster of some kind, and now the sharp jangling of the bell seemed to hold something equally sinister. She forced her self-control as she went slowly into the hall and took down the receiver.

"Hello."

"Hello, dear, is that you?" She shivered with relief at the sound of Henry's voice.

"Yes. Why are you so late?"

"I'm awfully sorry. I've been rushed all the afternoon, and now I've got to go to a meeting of the strikers. I can't come home to dinner."

"Can't come home to dinner?" In spite of herself she gave a choking sob. "But, Henry, you must. I need you."

"Do you, honey—well, so do I need to see your bonnie face. What is it? You're not sick?"

"No, not really; just sick at heart. Please, oh, please come home. I'm so lonely."

"I wish I could, dear, but it's not me only, or

even you, that I must think of—it's all these poor strikers."

"What do I care for them?"

"Helen!"

She caught herself up sharply. "I'm sorry I said that. I didn't mean it." Her voice was quite firm at last. "Of course you have told Mr. Bond you will not be here."

"I tried to, but I can't find him. It's just as well. He'll drive the spooks away until I get home."

"But, Henry," she cried, "you don't understand. He mustn't come when I'm alone. Something happened to-day. I can't tell you over the telephone."

"Something happened? Not with him? You don't want to see him?"

"It's no fault of his. But these people in the Park—they see everything and imagine more."

"Let them imagine. I'll soon straighten them out, dog'on them. Don't worry, but have a good time. I'll be home soon after nine. Now I must run and get a bite before the meeting. Good-bye."

Mechanically she hung the receiver on the hook and found her way back to the window. For whom was she waiting, now that Henry was not coming? For Stephen? She imagined other windows in the Park, all filled with watchful, spying eyes, impelled

to look by that lowest kind of curiosity that seeks to know what the neighbours are doing, whom they are seeing, and why, and hoping always to discover scandal. Helen turned wearily away and climbed the stairs to her room. Again mechanically she did her hair and changed to a simple muslin evening gown. Then she returned to the window and stood looking out on the golden dust clouds, red-shot, now, like flames, by the rays of the setting sun. What, even to the spying eyes of the Park, she thought, what of scandal could there be in this daylight meeting? Then she pictured to herself Mrs. Salsbury next door, she who took boarders at sixty cents a day, crouched, spider-like, behind her curtains, waiting and watching; thought how the spider would quiver at the approach of Stephen to her web of malicious gossip; how she would wait and watch a few minutes longer lest Henry should come like a clumsy bumblebee to break the net; how she would at last emerge joyfully and scuttle across the Park to pour her venom into the incredulous but delighted ears of her sister gossip, Mrs. Jennings. Suddenly Helen felt an imperative need to catch the spy in the very act of spying. She ran from the room, flung open the door, and darted down the steep front steps almost into Stephen's arms. She just caught a glimpse of the cur-

tains moving in the next window before Stephen cried: "Mrs. Murphy, what is the matter?"

"Matter," she answered, laughing, and impetuously, giving him both her hands. "Nothing is the matter. I'm just glad to see you. I've been waiting so long."

"Waiting?" he queried incredulously, "waiting for me?"

"Yes, for you. For any one who will be good to me."

"How absurd that sounds. Who could help being good to you?" he asked as they climbed the steps.

"A great many people," she answered vaguely.

"Mrs. Salsbury next door, who takes boarders, and Mrs. Jennings, for instance."

"But they—what do you care what they do to you?"

"It isn't what they do. It's just— Oh, everything. Won't you sit down. That chair is probably the least uncomfortable in the room." As she spoke she seated herself stiffly on the sofa.

"Why can't I sit there with you?"

"You may if you want to, I suppose," she said unconcernedly, giving him room.

He looked at her, puzzled and troubled. This placid unresponsiveness was as difficult to understand

as had been her effusive greeting. He returned to their former topic. "Surely, you don't care what women of that class think of you."

"Oh, but I do care—what every one thinks. What they say doesn't matter—much—but what people think is very important."

"Why should you care what they think of you, any more than I care what they think of me?"

"I ought not to." She smiled to herself. "Henry said 'dog'on 'em. I'll fix 'em.' I wonder what you would have said." She looked at him curiously.

"I should probably have expressed much the same sentiment," he answered awkwardly. "By the way, where is Henry?"

"He's not at home. He would appreciate your 'by the way.'"

"It was not meant as it sounded," he said, laughing, and then, with sudden enlightenment and disappointment, "I suppose you ran down the steps to meet him."

"Not at all. I knew he wasn't coming. I wanted to see the spider."

"The spider?"

"Yes, don't you know? Mrs. Salsbury next door, who takes boarders. She serves bad meals, I am sure, but she is very industrious. She sits by the hour at

her parlour window, looking out and spinning a wonderful web of scandal. I wanted to see her at work. She is there still, waiting for Henry, and when he does not come she will go scuttling across the Park to give out her big piece of news and get other little ones in return."

"I see," he said angrily. "Why doesn't Murphy come to spoil her little story?"

"He is not coming until after dinner."

"Then do you want me to go?"

"No, why go? The harm is already done, and Henry told me to have a good time with you and forget my troubles. Dinner must be ready."

"How wonderful! Alone with you!"

She stopped him with a gesture. "Wonderful is hardly the word."

Stephen nodded deeply. "I did not mean it in that way. I am a friend who always uses the word wonderful to express disappointment."

"Thank you," she said, laughing. "That will do for an excuse. I was afraid for a moment that Mr. Moncrieff might have been right about you."

"Moncrieff? What did he say?"

"Nothing of importance. Simply that there were some things about you that you did not understand yourself. Dinner is ready. Shall we go in?"

At the table she placed him at her right, leaving Henry's seat opposite vacant. When the maid had served the soup, Stephen said somewhat tentatively, "I did not know you had seen Moncrieff again?"

"I saw him this noon in the Park. He had been having a swim. We had a very pleasant talk, and—we agreed to be friends."

"A compact against me?"

"Surely not. Why should two of your friends conspire against you?"

"Phil has some curious ideas about me. He thinks I need to be protected against myself. You just said that he thought I did not understand myself."

"Nor does any man, Mr. Bond. That is woman's prerogative—completely to understand herself."

"But you say you do not—not completely understand yourself."

"I am learning to. I appreciate now the longings of the other woman, the ancestral woman I told you about, and I know that her demands are imperative. To be myself I must realise her, must live her life."

"And that means?"

"What that means I will tell you after dinner, if you are still interested. Maids—in this environment at least—talk of what they do not understand

to other maids, who in turn discuss their news upstairs, and so the scandal grows. What is the latest news of the strike?"

She laughed at the expression on his face. "That is really the most vital question in these days, you know, and is supremely important to us who live in South Boston and have to shop in Boston. You see, I must go to town almost every day to see dress-makers and all the other expensive people whom we women have to see."

"The strike is as bad as it can be," he said gloomily.

"Really? Tell me all about it."

So the dinner dragged along. Helen talked incessantly, asking, commenting, and arguing when she could make Stephen argue. It seemed to her that she must be dreaming. She took in only enough of what he said to answer with some semblance of sanity, and wondered, as she heard her own voice, whether she was chattering the merest nonsense. She felt that she was exerting every nerve, dared not laugh for fear that she should lose control of herself, was angry with Stephen because he let her carry the whole burden of conversation. To rest, to sleep, if she could—that was all that seemed worth while.

In the parlour after dinner he returned gruffly to

his question. He was in the grip of such emotion as he had never suspected. He hated her because he realised that she had become everything to him and the rest of his world nothing; because he knew that she responded in no way to his growing, almost overmastering love. He felt her to be unattainable, and yet, in a curious, vague way felt her to be his. And through the mist of it all he kept his senses, remembered his own unspotted name, and hers, and her husband's. But he could not keep the gruffness from his voice because he knew it must be that or a passionate tenderness. "And that means?" he muttered as though there had been no hiatus in their talk.

"Won't you light a cigarette?" she said. He did so, and stood leaning against the mantel, his shoulder touching the green vase. "I wish you would move suddenly and break it," she added.

He moved away. "Will you answer me?"

"We were talking about the strike, I think."

"We are not now. You know what I mean. Don't pretend. My Heaven—you will drive me mad!"

She looked up at him and then spoke rapidly. "I said that I must live the life of the other woman. That is true. I have tried and tried, but the people

I know give me nothing—nor I them, except an endless subject for gossip. I must change it all.”

“And you don’t know how,” he cried eagerly, impetuously. “Helen! I can help you.”

She shrank a little in her chair and he came toward her.

“Stop,” she cried bitterly, with a gesture of sudden repulsion. “Would you take away the only friend I have?”

He stood looking at her and slowly his arms dropped to his sides. “Is there no hope, then?”

“Hope?” she threw back at him. “Hope of what? Are you thinking of yourself or of me?”

“Of myself,” he said contritely, the fire dying from his eyes—then, with a whimsical smile, “I told you before that I always thought of myself.”

“No. You told me that you always thought of what others would think of you. You are not doing that now.”

“I forgot to be myself. The shell cracked. Perhaps I lost my head.” He laughed again. “And that is what Phil said, and you said, that I needed to do. I don’t find it a very amusing or uplifting experience.”

“Nor do I,” she said sadly, “but at least it has

brought us face to face—and with shame for me, because I knew.”

“Knew what?”

“Your feeling about me, Mr. Bond. Ever since that night at your house——”

“Yes, I know. Even then I made a fool of myself and you set me straight.”

“But after that—I could not do right. I could not put you out of my life because you represented the things that made life worth living—for the other me. And all that time I have been making you miserable.”

“No, not that,” he said very gently. “You were showing me what life might have meant: And to-night——”

“Oh, to-night,” she interrupted. “Don’t speak of to-night. I was tired, despairing—anything. I used you for my own ends—cruelly, since I knew. I treated you almost as a lover, and I do not love you.”

“I know you do not.”

“But,” she went on hurriedly, “everything I have said is true. I will be myself, the other self that is the true me. I must be. But not in the way you thought—that you had a right to think. I must allow that self to develop out of the one that is here; I

must take what I have and conquer my surroundings."

"Here?" he asked incredulously. "Can you work miracles?"

"No, not here. To-day has made that impossible." She smiled. "Until now I had visions of being an angel of sweetness and light in South Boston, but the angel's wings are heavy and her features so blackened with soot that people might continue to mistake her for a devil. No, I must go away!"

"With your husband?"

"With my husband, of course," she answered proudly. "Have you ever pictured to yourself American society as I have, as a great building, topped with innumerable towers, some white against the sky and springing from an unknown source, others, less graceful, but stronger, built stone by stone from the granite foundation?"

"I think I understand."

"Then you will understand my dream. I thought that I belonged in one of those white towers, but had gone astray and had lost my way."

"You do belong there."

"No, I have no home. I have lost the birthright of inheritance. Long absence does that. But I have

not lost touch with my class. I have married one who is capable of building for himself. When his tower is finished I can meet proudly my old associates. Only in that way, through my own upward striving, working by Henry's side, can I ever reach the goal with happiness to myself and to him. Do you see?" she added, holding out her hand.

He took it, and bending down kissed it almost humbly. "And I," he said, "I have no place in it all."

"Oh, but you have," she put in quickly. "You revealed me to myself. You were the first to hold out a kindly hand."

"But now?"

"Ah, now," she echoed. "Now you must go away for a time—until you are well. Henry and I must stand alone. I have clung to you when I had no right because you gave me courage. But it is wrong, cruel to you, as I said, and for me—I dare do it no longer."

"What a brute I have been."

"No, not that. But I should fear to lose you altogether, as I almost lost you to-night, and I have learned that people will inevitably think evil of me and of you."

"Not my friends."

"Yes, yours, too. I learned that from Mr. Moncrieff. Our positions, socially, are too far apart."

"Only apparently."

"Well, only apparently, if you will, but what seems is often more effective in creating belief than what is."

"And in this misunderstanding it is you who suffer."

"Yes. It is always the woman."

"Then I will go," he said, harshly again, and without looking at her. "Good-bye."

"You will not wait to see Henry? He will want to tell you the latest strike news."

"Strike news!" He laughed. "Is there a strike? I had forgotten. What does it matter?" And then he turned to her once more. "I do not want to see your husband. See him! Good God! And tell him I love his wife, or still play the hypocrite? Which would be the finer thing? Good-bye."

Stephen rushed from the house and down the steps. As he turned to the right to let the tentative east wind cool his face he saw in a half-lighted window the dark silhouette of the "spider." "Eight-thirty," he muttered, looking at his watch under a street light, "much may happen in two hours, my tireless friend. Make the most of it. This is your last chance, for I

am going out of your miserable ken forever. Make the most of it. Your imagination is as narrow as your vision. The truth you will never dream, and what you dream—ugh—a pure woman with the courage of Helen can live down all lies.”

CHAPTER IX

AT the corner he turned back, struck across the Park, and with a last glance at the light in Helen's parlour, where he could imagine her sitting sadly among her hideously incongruous surroundings, swung at a rapid pace toward Boston. In the turmoil of his thoughts he was conscious of pushing his way through crowds of men whose vociferous complaints, and sullen, menacing faces sometimes made his nerves quiver with a pain beyond his own suffering. It was the strike, in action, permeating the atmosphere with its lurid possibilities of terror. On the bridge there was space and air. He stopped, and leaning over the parapet took off his hat and rested, taking long refreshing breaths, until a huge man, dirty and threatening, seemingly an incarnation of the strike, told him gruffly to move on. Stephen looked at him curiously, wondered at the madness in his eyes, and then, too heart-weary for argument, obeyed. He passed unseeing through the deserted business streets, was irritated at the sudden glare and noise of Tremont Street and grateful for the leafy stillness of the Common. Before reaching the foot of the hill that led

to Beacon Street he felt suddenly tired and sat down on one of the benches where so many of the homeless spent their nights. The noise of the city broke at the edge of the Common. It seemed to him suggestive of evil. He had never thought of it before, but as he listened now, and saw dimly the lines of women filing along Tremont Street, vice seemed to him suddenly one of the great, overwhelming facts of human life, damnable, of course, yet insistent and curiously fascinating. The thought died at birth, strangled mercifully by all the traditions of his upbringing and of his blood. It was dead, but its death left him inert and physically weak on this hot summer night.

A woman was descending the hill, walking easily, with the swing of one accustomed to be outdoors. She looked familiar, but he was only subconsciously aware of her until she stopped before him. "You, Stephen," she said, "you, adorning the Common like other loafers. May I sit down?"

"Katherine!" He had not risen, but he turned toward her gratefully. She was a breath of clean, pure air, and it seemed to him that he had been breathing the stagnant mists of sin and sorrow. "I'm glad to see you. But what would Mrs. Bland say?"

"She would be delighted, Steve. You know it, and that's one reason why we never have these clan-

destine meetings. One reason, I said—the other—well, the world moves fast, and one man more or less, or one girl better or worse, doesn't matter, I suppose." She laughed mirthlessly, and he felt a tug at his heart strings.

"Here in the city——" he said. "Do you remember, Katherine, those wonderful days in the open when we were little and loved each other?"

"No," she answered sharply. "I have forgotten all such silly things. Where have you been to-night?"

The question brought him sharply to himself. "I have been dining," he said, "with a woman. Some one you have never heard of and are never likely to hear of. And she is wonderful, Katherine, wonderful."

"Where does she live?"

"In South Boston."

Katherine Bland drew in her breath sharply. "I didn't know you knew—that kind, Steve."

"That kind," he cried. "But, Katherine, I tell you she is wonderful, unspoiled. She has dreams that are like the visions of *our* childhood—and we have forgotten how to have visions any more."

"Yes."

"And she is so sad, Katherine, so borne down

with what she has to bear—and so brave. She never loses courage. She will find her place. Why, just to-night she told me in a word what our society was like—many, many high towers, beautiful against the sky, some white and distant, as though born of air—those are the towers where you and I live, Katherine. And then there are others, equally beautiful, built up bit by bit from the earth, and those who live in them meet us on terms of equality. She means to live in one of those. It is a possible dream, isn't it, Katherine?"

"No," she answered harshly. "It isn't. I don't want to know such people, Steve, and neither do you. I believed in you always—and now. I must go home."

He leaned heavily against the back of the bench. "You don't think it possible?"

"Certainly not. Good-night."

He jumped to his feet.

"Please don't come. I should rather, much rather, be alone."

He thought he caught the sound of a sob in her voice, but gravely took off his hat.

"Not possible," he muttered, turning toward his own home. "Katherine is cynical and all the Blands are hard. But she knows." And then he thought of

Helen, waiting in the hideous room for her husband. Was there, then, no hope for her? He clenched his hands and bowed his head despairingly. At his own doorstep he hesitated a moment, looked down the Hill at the bright windows of the Club, and then entered. Even solitude, with its attendant spectres, was preferable to the talk of his fellow-men.

At the sound of the latch-key Spriggs appeared. "Mr. Moncrieff is in the library," he said. "Is there anything more, sir?"

"No," Stephen responded. "I shall need nothing. Go to bed."

"Yes, sir. Thanking you, sir."

He had wanted to be alone, but there were all the years to come in which he could think. Perhaps Moncrieff would make him forget. He went slowly up the stairs and pushed open the library door. "Hello, Phil."

"Hello, Steve, old man. Making myself at home as usual. Couldn't find you anywhere and wanted to talk, so I just camped out until your return. Where in the devil have you been?"

"Dining out," Stephen answered shortly, as he lighted a cigar and sank into a deep armchair.

"Dining out, ha? A new kind of dinner costume I call that." Stephen had on his business suit.

"It was a business dinner."

"Oh, business. South Boston, I suppose."

"Yes, South Boston. Have you any objection? I hear you were there yourself to-day."

"So I was, but not to talk about the strike. You have some queer types in this country. I think I'll write a book about them—'Impressions of a Tramp,' or something of that sort. Mrs. Jennings, her name is, I think—the particular type that flung itself at me to-day. And then, of course, there was Mrs. Murphy, but her type is world-wide."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing—except that I know a great many people like her."

"Do you really?" Stephen's voice had a sarcastic ring. "I wish I did."

"You? Bah! You have never had the chance because you have never made a study of the underworld as I have."

"You insist on misunderstanding her, don't you, Phil?"

"Quite the contrary. I almost did for a half-hour to-day. But then, I was seeing her without her gentleman husband and she had a chance to play with me. You know—it's a funny thing—but no matter how old I grow a pretty woman can always do that—

while I'm with her. Of course to-day Mrs. Jennings dispelled the illusion more quickly than it would have gone of its own accord. I have known complete recovery to take a month when a woman has been unusually plausible."

"What illusion do you mean in Mrs. Murphy's case?"

"General disinterestedness, my dear boy; love of abstract virtue—personified in marital relations—inocence of social ambition—all that sort of thing."

"And you let a woman like Mrs. Jennings destroy that illusion, as you call it?"

"There was no question of letting her do it. The simple refutation of one belief on my part—and unconscious refutation, mind you, which is the best of evidence—brought down the whole bally edifice with a crash."

"Do you mind telling me how?"

"Not at all—if you're reasonable and won't lose your temper. We were talking about you."

"So I supposed. Go on."

"Mrs. Murphy had actually made me believe that you were nothing to her, that she seldom saw you and then only with her husband. I was glowing with reflected virtue, swore eternal friendship, was prepared generally to make an ass of myself, when

down swooped Mrs. Jennings and demanded an introduction to Mr. Bond."

"And then?"

"Then? If you were not so dense you would see. There was more talk. She still believes I am you because with one such constant attendant another man friend was inconceivable."

"And so, because of one woman's scandal-loving mind you conclude that another deserves the mud flung at her," Stephen spoke sternly.

"The other happened to be young and pretty and poor and dissatisfied and socially ambitious. You don't deny that. It is a combination of qualities that I know the meaning of, even if you don't."

"It's a combination of qualities from which you generalise—as you have a very bad habit of doing, Phil—without taking individual character into account at all. Mrs. Murphy has no connection with the underworld. I should trust her as I should my own sister, if I had one. She is——"

"Oh, yes. I know all about that. She's a woman in a thousand. She is—well, all the things I said two years ago about Lilly Merrill. It's all piffle."

"Lilly Merrill happened to be a chorus girl. It is insulting to bring her in."

"Not at all. Lilly's father was a country clergy-

man—like the fathers of all aspiring chorus girls. I have no doubt if she had been friendly with the leading man he might even have acted the part for my benefit. But what is more to the point, Lilly's intentions were strictly honourable and moral. She wanted to marry me."

Stephen got up angrily from his chair. "We have had about enough of this," he said. "Can I put you up for the night, or are you going back to the Club?"

"That—later," Moncrieff answered lazily, "if you play fair and don't lose your temper. You got me out of a scrape once. I want to square the account."

"But I don't need your help. I am not in any scrape."

Moncrieff helped himself to a whiskey and soda. "They say," he remarked, "that when a man is sufficiently far under water he does not know that he is drowning. But that doesn't prevent the fellows with the grappling irons from doing their work."

"All they pull up is a dead body."

"That is better than nothing. They at least have a memento of the dear departed one, something over which to plant roses and forget-me-nots. Now tell me. What have I said that irritates you?"

"I am not willing to have any insinuations made in this house against the good name of Mrs. Murphy."

"Why?"

Stephen looked down at him for a moment without speaking. "Because I love her," he said, at last, very slowly and distinctly.

"Oh," Moncrieff responded. "Then I beg your pardon. I don't mean to butt in on my friends' little love affairs."

"I love her honourably," Stephen added, in the same even voice.

Moncrieff snorted. "Honourably. Since when has it been the custom in America to love one another's wives honourably? Of course I believe you, so far. You are truthful, and you tell me you have never been alone with her."

"I was alone with her in her own house all this evening. I dined with her."

"The devil you did!"

"And I lost my head," Stephen continued quietly. "I tried to tell her that I loved her and she answered by showing me how truly she loved her husband. That is all that happened and it is the end. The miserable gossips in South Boston have made her life intolerable there. If there are miserable gossips in

the Back Bay I should advise them to come direct to me with their tattle. Now it is time, I think, for you to go back to the Club."

"I think it is," Moncrieff assented, springing to his feet. "My grappling irons have missed to-night. Remember that they are always ready if you need them. You say it's all over and I hope to Heaven it is, but when a man of your kind falls in, Steve, he has a long swim to shore. Good-night."

"A long swim to shore," Stephen repeated, as he threw himself into his chair. "A long swim to the shore of forgetfulness—no, drowning is better. The shore—my God—I cannot even imagine its outlines."

CHAPTER X

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning before Henry came in. Helen had been in bed since ten, not sleeping, not brooding, although it seemed to her sometimes as though her sadness had in it the might of darkness and of death. She was infinitely weary. Every nerve quivered and her muscles twitched convulsively, as though she had been stretched on a rack and was only gradually sinking back into her normal shape. But when her husband came she pretended to be asleep; did not even move when he whispered her name and touched her cheek with his lips before getting into bed. She knew that to talk would be impossible. At last the very effort not to move put her to sleep, and when she became conscious again the room was flooded with light and Henry was already nearly dressed.

"Good-morning, dear," she called. She was not rested, but the new daylight seemed to give her courage.

Henry strode to the bedside, and taking her face in his hands, kissed her. "Oh, my honey," he said,

with almost a sob in his voice, "I love you. I wouldn't give you up for a peck of peanuts."

"Well, I hope not," she laughed, but her eyes filled with quick tears. "Why do you say such silly things?"

"I don't know," he answered, stroking her cheek. "I seem to feel sort of lonesome this morning; sort of to need you more than ever."

"I'm glad," she said, "because I always need you, you know, and if you need me too, you will always want to be with me. And that's what makes me happy. Now go down stairs like a dear and read the paper while I dress. After breakfast you must tell me all about the strike, and I want to tell you—all about me."

A half hour later they were sitting hand in hand on the green sofa. "That was all that came of the meeting," he concluded. "Five hours of useless talk, threats, cursing. My God, what an ass that Staples is! Always says the wrong thing—or the right thing the wrong way. He forgets that God made labouring men just as much as he made little red apples. No compromise—that was what it began and ended with, and there'll be trouble to follow—bloodshed, I guess. Some of the strikers stoned the cars last night."

"How horrible!"

"Yes. But we mustn't blame them too much. They wouldn't do it of their own accord. They're just egged on all the time. Bond was dead right when he said the national union leaders were dangerous."

"They must be brutes."

"They are. Every one fighting for a principle is more or less a brute because they see only one thing. I once heard a peace conference delegate say that he would gladly string up every one that did not fight against the horrors of war."

"And yet just those people who are fighting for a principle to the exclusion of everything else are needed in the world. They are needed for progress."

"You bet they are, and that's just what worries me about these union leaders. If they're honest they must be some use."

"It is not only honesty, Henry. It's honesty backed by intelligence and training. Have they that?"

"I guess not to speak of. That's the trouble. But some men that never had any chance seem to get along mighty well with just honesty and common sense. Now take Jennings, for instance. See what he's done for South Boston."

Helen shivered at the mention of his name, and

Henry pressed her hand. "And that in spite of his wife," he added—"which reminds me that I met him this morning about two, in the Park. He was finding it necessary to cool off. Home was pretty hot."

"So you knew all about it from him."

"I heard a lot of drivel from him. He likes you, but had been stormed off his feet—and he didn't quite know what to answer."

"Henry," she cried, "I have tried so hard, and it has been nothing but misrepresentation and misunderstanding from the beginning. After that awful scene yesterday noon in the Park it seemed as though I could never hold up my head again for shame. I don't dare think of what Mr. Moncrieff must have thought."

"So it was him. I knew it couldn't have been Bond, because I saw him in town about that time. How'd you happen to meet Moncrieff?"

"I was sitting on a bench by the fountain. It was on the way back from the Women's Club meeting. Mr. Moncrieff had been swimming and stopped to speak. But it's not only that, Henry. That was just an incident. It is simply that I cannot live any longer here. I cannot stand the suspicion and the gossip. When I go out I am watched. When I stay at home the house is watched. At first I thought I

could live it down, but it gets worse and worse, and I can't, dear. I just haven't the courage."

He put his arm around her and drew her close against him. "Don't you exaggerate, honey?" he said at last. "They can't be so much interested in you as all that."

"Can't be?" she cried. "Let me give you an example. Last night I felt that Mrs. Salsbury was spying. I wanted to see. I opened the door and ran down the steps, almost into Mr. Bond's arms."

"Well?"

"Didn't Mr. Jennings tell you about it—with picturesque additions."

"So that was the truth of it," he said, more to himself than to her. "I wondered what really happened."

"You see!"

"Yes," he answered, "I see. And it must be devilishly hard for you, but that seems to me hardly sufficient reason for running away. We don't want them to think we were scared. Besides, we own the house."

"I don't care what they think," she sobbed, resting her head against his shoulder. "I wouldn't care if we owned the Park. I'm just lonesome from morning to night—no—I shouldn't mind if I were alone

—but the terror of knowing that one of those horrible women may come at any moment—not to see me, but to pry into our lives—I just can't endure it."

"Helen, sweetheart," he said, stroking her hair and holding her close, and wondering what in the world he could do with her—"Helen—please don't. I've never seen you like this before. Why can't we talk reasonably about it? It's so sudden, you know that I can't think all in a minute what would be best. That's a good girl. I knew you would be sensible."

She had pulled herself together and walked across to the window, where she stood with her back to him. "Of course, a thing like this, dear"—he continued tentatively—"well, it's a big move, and we can't do it in a rush. You say you don't want to live in South Boston any more. I guess you must be out of sorts so you don't think just right or you'd realise. Now what would Uncle John think, do you suppose?"

She turned sharply from the window. "I don't care in the least what Uncle John thinks," she said. "I have no interest in his opinions, and what's more," she added, pointing to the mantelpiece, "wherever we go that hideous vase is not going with us. I never wanted to live in South Boston. I was never consulted. There is not a soul in the place I care ever to see again. I have tried my best and I have failed.

You don't fail when you start to do things. That is why you will never understand, and is one of the reasons that made me marry you and has made me love you. But I have failed. I haven't any courage left to make another attempt, and that is why I say once more—we must leave here as soon as possible." She turned away again and stood looking over the Park.

He crossed the room and put his hand on her shoulder. "Helen, dearest," he whispered.

"Have you made up your mind?" she returned in a hard voice.

He took his hand away abruptly. "No. This is not the kind of thing that can be decided in a moment. I must think it over——"

"Which means that you do not intend to move."

"Perhaps so. I can't say now, because we must think of the future as well as the present. Now I must go to Boston. Perhaps we can talk things over again to-night."

"If I am here to-night."

"Helen. What do you mean?"

She turned toward him and suddenly threw her arms around his neck. "I don't mean anything," she said. "I am frightened at nothing and lonesome. I am silly and cruel, but I want to go away—"

to be somewhere with you where I can help you—not drag you down.”

“That would be impossible—that you could drag me down—anywhere. Perhaps you can help most right here. Then you would want to stay—for the year at least.”

She shivered in his arms, but did not answer. “Anyhow, I’ll think it over,” he continued, “and perhaps talk with Bond. He’s shown himself a good friend.”

“Oh, no. Not with him,” she cried. “I can’t be under obligations to him.”

“Why not?”

She stared at him with frightened eyes. “I don’t know. I don’t want to see him again—not for a long time.”

“Helen,” he said sternly. “Don’t act like a baby. Try to think straight. To-night, when you are reasonable, we’ll have another talk. And one other thing. Don’t go to Boston to-day. I’m afraid to have you ride in the cars. Stay at home or else go and see some of the people in the Park.”

“Very well,” she said bitterly. “Perhaps Mrs. Jennings might like me to drop in with my knitting.”

“That is for you to decide. All I insist is that you do not ride in the cars.”

"Aren't you exaggerating the danger?"

"Perhaps you will admit that I am the best judge of that. Good-bye." He kissed her cheek and hurried from the room. Through the window Helen watched him go, and caught her breath when he did not wave to her as usual.

Then, mechanically, she went about her morning household duties, feeling as she did them the strange hold that routine has even in times of stress. She moved silently, gave her orders to the maid in a curiously repressed voice, as though some one were lying dead in an adjoining room. The surface of her mind seemed to work automatically, while within there was a lifeless chamber of despair. She made her little tasks last as long as possible, because when they were over she knew that she must think, and that she did not dare to do.

But finally all was finished. She went upstairs, her feet dragging, and sat down with her knitting before the open window. She felt physically sick and passed her cold hand wonderingly across her hot forehead. That, at least, was something to think about. She had never been ill in her life and could not understand it. But suddenly the spectre of her despair once more leaped into the foreground of her mind. She looked shudderingly into the future. "After

a year, perhaps," Henry had said. She had not the power to bridge that gap—death might come first—or madness. Again she saw visions, but not ordered ones, consoling, as her visions usually were. Pictures of the strikers screaming their hatred of the world, of herself being stoned by Mrs. Jennings and the women and children of South Boston. Then a blinding glare seemed to overwhelm her and she fell back in her chair. When she came to herself she was conscious that some one was knocking at the door. "Come in," she called feebly.

The maid entered, a letter in her hand. "Why, ma'am," she cried at sight of Helen's face. "You look awful sick. Will I ring for the doctor?"

"No, Mary, I'm not sick—just very tired. Give me the letter. And, Mary, I should like you in the future to wear a cap when you are not in the kitchen."

"A cap, ma'am?" she said. "No, ma'am, I can't do that. I only wears caps when I'm working for the quality, ma'am."

"Oh, is that the rule?" she said gently. "Perhaps it's of no consequence. I think it looks well—that's all. You may go now. I shall not be at home for luncheon."

The maid dropped her belligerent air. "Much

as I'd like to do it to oblige you, ma'am, I really couldn't, you know."

"As I said, Mary, it's of no consequence." She began to open her letter and did not look around as the girl left the room.

"MRS. HENRY MURPHY," she read, "Madam: This is to inform you that at a special meeting of the South Boston Ladies' Thursday Morning Intellectual Improvement Society your name was dropped from the list by a standing vote"—"I wonder whether a standing vote is more definite than a sitting one," she said to herself. "This is a very unusual act," the letter continued, "and is only resorted to in very peculiar and untowered circumstances. It was rendered necessary in this instance for the following reasons. 1st. By your unseemly actions with men in public places. 2ndly. By your entertaining of other men in your home during the absence of your husband. And 3rdly. By your general reputation for light conduct that is improper in a member of a serious intellectual Society. To the above vote and the reasons therefore I hereto set my hand and seal in the presence of witnesses.

("Signed) AMANDA J. JENNINGS, President."

Helen laughed almost light-heartedly as she folded the letter. If this were tragedy, surely it was tricked out in all the beribboned costume of farce

comedy. Moreover, it was something tangible, meaning isolation, perhaps, but at the same time relief from the importunities—perhaps from the curiosity—of her neighbours. It was something she could grasp. She took out a sheet of note-paper to answer immediately, and wrote:

“MY DEAR MRS. JENNINGS: Your communication has just reached me. I accept gladly the decision of your Society in the hope that your action—which must seem to you the extreme of punishment—will cause you and your friends to look with more charity on my doings, during the remaining time that I shall be among you, and that, perhaps, since you need no longer feel responsible for me, you will not consider it necessary to give up so much of your valuable time to the inspection and discussion of my movements. In justification of myself I must add that since living in South Boston I have done nothing of which my own conscience disapproves nor to which my husband finds it necessary to take exception. Thanking you for the many kindnesses which you so carefully explained to me yesterday morning, I am, sincerely,

“HELEN MURPHY.”

She glanced over the note, smiled to herself, and, calling her maid, sent it to its destination.

But when it was gone and she had taken up her

knitting she felt again the dangers of her imagination. It was always imminent—her despair—ready to close in upon her. Suddenly she remembered that she had said she would not be at home for luncheon. She would go to Boston. Among the people in the streets, in a hotel dining-room, perhaps, she could regain her poise, look the world squarely in the face once more, be ready to talk with Henry rationally—the only way, she felt, that could possibly have any effect. Had she not decided long ago to lead him, through his reason, to her way of thinking? Well, it had come sooner than she planned. She could not carry him with her insensibly, step by step. But even so, she realised that hysterics would be of no avail. Time must be replaced by keener wit, gradual persuasion by cogent reasoning. For that, perfect control of mind and body was essential, and never before had she so thoroughly distrusted both. She could not be on the verge of illness. She had no time for that. And yet she feared it because every fibre, physical as well as nervous, quivered. Obviously she must have distraction, and hurriedly, almost blindly, she changed into a street suit and left the house.

As she turned down the hill to the car line she stopped short, remembering Henry's injunction that under no circumstances should she ride in the cars.

But her hesitation was only momentary. In its place flared up an unreasoning anger. She felt toward Henry as an unjustly accused prisoner might feel toward a goaler who had been extraordinarily kind to him, who trusted him, and who had yet tried to cut off a chance to escape. To Helen this excursion to Boston was an escape, a release from surroundings that had become for the time being intolerable. Still more did it mean a possible lifting of the veil, a chance to regain the balance that she knew to be imperative to any effective discussion with Henry. She continued down the hill.

At its foot she met Mr. Jennings. "Sakes alive," he cried, as he seized her hand. "You do look sick, Mrs. Murphy."

"No," she said irritably, "I am not sick; I am merely very hot and rather cross."

"I don't believe it—the last, I mean. You ain't that kind, even if things do rub the wrong way. They have done that lately, what?"

"Things? I admit that nothing very pleasant has happened. And I dislike being watched."

"I just bet you do. It's about the meanest feeling a feller can have—begging your pardon for calling you a feller. Don't I know how it feels? Every time there's any political move on don't they all watch

me as if I was a menace to the public peace, just setting in my room devising tricks to plunder the city, when they all know, way deep in their minds, that I'm as innocent as a blasted lamb. But I got used to it—just as you will. When I feel inclined to get to ruminating over it I just says to myself, 'Let 'em watch. There's nothing they can find. My conscience is easy, and if the poor things can get so all-fired much pleasure by guessing nonsense about things they know ain't true—why, just let 'em guess.' Then I just naturally don't care a durn more about it."

"I'm afraid I'm not built to take things so philosophically."

"No? Well, women ain't, as a general rule, but I guessed you might be different. It's their nature to take things hard—even good advice. Now, f'r instance, when Mrs. Jennings was talking about you last evening I told her just about what I've told you—about me being watched and what I thought. And she—well, she sure took it hard."

Helen could not help laughing. "That was how Henry happened to meet you in the Park?"

"Did he tell you that? Now, that isn't what I call real neighbourly—to give away a fellow-man. But, nevertheless, since you know about that, I don't mind telling you that in the present uncertain condi-

tion of the weather I wouldn't overly like to be seen talking to you on the street corner." His eyes twinkled as he said it.

"You need not worry," she said. "Personal inspection, except accidentally, does not extend beyond the Park."

"That's true. They haven't done anything more to you, have they?"

"Only to call a meeting and expel me from the Club. And by a standing vote, too. Is that very terrible—a standing vote?"

"Now I call that rubbing it in," he said angrily; "you mean from the S. B. L. T. M. I. I. S., don't you? It took me quite several years to learn that. But I guess you're bearing up, ain't you?"

"Yes," she answered, smiling. "I seem to be bearing up. I'm going to Boston to forget all about it. Here comes my car at last."

"You're not going by trolley? I wouldn't do that, Mrs. Murphy. It might be safe, but then again it mightn't. I don't believe Henry would like it."

"So he told me, Mr. Jennings; but I must go to Boston and I can't walk."

"Why not take a cab?"

"It's too expensive—and I have not time."

"Then let me go along with you," he cried, as she stepped into the street to hail the car.

"And lose your hold on the strikers by riding in a car managed by strike-breakers? No, Mr. Jennings. Please. I should rather be alone."

"By gosh," he muttered as the car moved away. "If women don't beat all. Anyhow, I guess there ain't any real danger. And now for a pleasant family reunion with Mrs. J."

CHAPTER XI

STEPHEN rose that morning after a night of mental and moral torture. At one moment he resolved never to see her again—at least not for a year. Then the time was cut down, and down, until he was convinced that the only strong course would be to see her immediately to show her that he could be a man. At that point he always switched on the light to look at his watch. Again he contemplated flight—abroad—to Africa—anywhere that forgetfulness might be found. At such moments he was obsessed with a deep-lying anger against Helen, that she had brought him to such a state. Or again he slept fitfully—only to dream of her—until some horror dragged her away and he woke, coughing, sometimes almost strangling, it seemed.

Soon after six he was out of bed and roaming about the still quiet house in his pyjamas. A cold shower calmed him a little, so that he looked less haggard when he demanded breakfast from the startled Spriggs an hour later. After breakfast a reckless gallop through the Parkway so much further restored his mental equilibrium that when he entered

his office, as usual punctually at nine, his stenographer noticed nothing out of the way. Like Helen he found temporary forgetfulness, or better, temporary obscuring of the more active portion of his mind, in the anæsthesia of routine duties. He found to his surprise that he could devote himself, apparently as clearly as ever, to consideration of the multifarious demands of his customers. But always, when there came a cessation of work, there surged up the imperative question of what he should do, and he knew himself as far from decision as ever. At last he pushed back his chair and closed his desk. "I am going over to the office of Mr. Henry Murphy," he said to a clerk as he passed through the outer office. "If anything important comes up you may telephone me there, during the next half hour; and, by the way, I may have to take the one o'clock train for New York, in which case I shall not be here to-morrow."

"You remember, sir, that Mr. Thompson is coming on from Chicago to-morrow. You usually see him yourself."

"I had forgotten. Well, if he comes and cannot stay a couple of days as usual, turn him over to Mr. Stuyvesant."

As he walked down the street Stephen marvelled at himself. He thought rather grimly of a little,

exquisitely embroidered bookmark his grandmother had worked for him while he was still a schoolboy and which he carried always in his pocketbook—a narrow slip of faded ribbon with the motto "KNOW Thyself." It had been his monitor, and until yesterday he had believed that he had fully lived up to its teaching. To-day he was a stranger to himself. He had left his office on impulse, said he might go to New York, on impulse—he, who had never spent a penny without due consideration. Moncrieff was right in saying that the man in control only of the intellectual part of himself was like an automobile run by a mechanic who understood perfectly the engine but had no conception of the steering gear. He felt only too keenly the mad indirection of that supposedly excellent machine, himself.

He hurried, as he walked, and at the same time wondered why he should hurry, except that he was doing everything unreasonably. Even as he took the elevator to Henry's office it occurred to him that he had nothing in the world to talk about, that the call would only uselessly irritate his already overstrained nerves. For a moment he thought of going back, and then remembered that he had said at his office where he was to be and that a telephone message might come for him. He felt that he could not go

through the ordeal of explaining anything to anybody.

Henry was glad to see him, and Stephen knew that anger and contempt would have been a more appropriate reception. "You are a busy man," he said quickly. "I shall not keep you long."

"I am never too busy to see you," Henry replied, "because I always learn something worth while. Besides, I particularly wanted to talk to you. I suppose you came about the strike."

"Yes," Stephen answered vaguely, "about the strike. How is it?"

"Bad, damn bad. It's got beyond us, I guess. Both sides are out for blood now, and I must admit at last I don't much blame the company. They've tried and they've made concessions. Of course that fool Staples prejudiced their case, but still, if it could have been settled without interference it would have been. Now, with these union representatives making trouble it looks as though there'd be the devil to pay."

"Serious trouble, you think?"

"It looks like it—and that will mean every newspaper in the city against the strikers. At the commencement they had public sympathy."

"It is important, I suppose—public sympathy?"

"Important! Of course it is. It's nearly the whole game, and if they try violence—as they will—every one will cry them down. What were they working for at first? For a living wage, clean houses, decency. That appeals to every one. Now what is it? That the union shall dictate. That don't appeal to any one—especially when the car service is almost at a standstill and self-respecting women don't dare go into the streets of an evening. And now they'll kill for what they want. The decent fight was all used up on the decent object."

"You really think there is danger, then?"

"No, I don't think. I know it. Haven't I been telling you so for ten minutes? I am so sure, I told Helen she must not think of coming to town to-day. What's the matter with you, Bond. You don't seem a bit like you usually do this morning."

"Don't I? It must be hard on Mrs. Murphy to feel that she must not leave South Boston. I don't believe she is very happy there, do you?"

"No, she isn't," Henry answered gloomily, "and I wanted to get your advice about it—though she said I mustn't. She isn't happy and I can't see why she shouldn't be."

"Is there any reason why she should be?"

"Yes, you bet there is. She has a good home, with

every comfort; it's in the best location in South Boston, airy, good view, and easy to the cars. Mighty few young women start life so well. What's more, it's a first-rate spot to bring up a family in."

"Good Lord!" Stephen interrupted involuntarily. "Don't check up advantages with respect to possibilities. There are enough horrible actualities."

"A man must think of the future."

"To be sure he must, but never to the extent of letting the future play havoc with the present. Remember that the future is built on the past and that if the past is ruined the foundations will never hold. South Boston will not have many advantages as a playground if there is no mother to bring children into the world."

Henry grew very pale and gripped the arms of his chair until the veins of his hands stood out like cords. "What do you mean?" he muttered.

"I mean," Stephen said bitterly, "that even if a woman lives in a palace, where the life-giving airs of the world blow through the chambers and where the view from every window is a delight—that woman will still starve and droop and die without appropriate companionship. She may lose her ideals and live—in the companionship of servants. Your wife has the high, pure flame that flutters toward like

flames that burn in the minds and hearts of her equals. Quench the flame—starve the flame that is in her, and you have killed her—the part of her, at least, that makes her beautiful.” He stopped suddenly and stood up. “I am afraid I am talking foolishly.”

“I guess you are,” Henry said doubtfully. “It sounded to me something like the rot we had to read in school. But I did gather that you thought I ought to take Helen away from South Boston—too much water there for her ‘fluttering flame’ or something of that sort. Was that right?”

Stephen walked up and down the room before answering. “Yes. I am tired, Murphy. Things seem to get on my nerves and I never knew I had any nerves. I will try to be understandable in giving advice that I have no right to give. Mrs. Murphy is a peculiarly fine and sensitive woman. She is lonely because there is no one with whom she can associate, and women, far more than men, are dependent on companionship. That terrible thing that happened yesterday with Moncrieff—well, it seems to me final. No husband can have the right to risk the repetition of such an ordeal.”

“Did Helen tell you about it?”

“No, Moncrieff did.”

“I’m sorry you heard about it. As to moving,

you don't understand the practical difficulties. Besides, I don't want the people in South Boston to think we were scared, and turned tail and ran. I want Helen to live it down, to make those people respect her."

"What does she care for their opinion?"

"She ought to care for the opinion of all respectable people. No man and no woman can afford to go without it."

"And so, for fear of risking the bad opinion of the Jenningses and their kind you are willing to ruin the health and the happiness of your wife, who is so much above them that she ought not even to know they exist——"

"That's about enough," Henry interrupted angrily. "It appears to me that you're making out a mighty poor case because you underestimate my wife. She's not such a weakling as you think. It's true, she was upset this morning," he added a little less confidently. "But a year from now, when she has made good with the people you despise so much, nobody will be gladder than her that she stuck it out."

"Made good," Stephen echoed. "She will never make good with them because they are incapable of understanding her. The longer you stay the nastier will be their gossip——"

"Perhaps there wouldn't be as much of that if you hung around a little less."

Stephen sprang to his feet. "That remark was quite unnecessary, Murphy," he said. "I shall not trouble her again with my unwelcome attentions. But mark my words, a woman like Mrs. Murphy can stand just so much vulgarity and no more. She is already bent far under this load. Be careful that she does not break." He took his hat and strode from the room, glancing once, as he passed through the door, at Henry, who sat at his desk, his head bent, thinking.

As he walked along the street toward his own office Stephen felt the old doubts return, the old questions clamouring for an answer. For the first time in his life he thought of himself as adrift, without a compass. He remembered suddenly a story that a friend had told him of some foreigners who were racing in American waters, against American boats. "I found," the man had said, "that they were racing without a compass. I offered to lend them mine. 'Oh, no,' they answered, 'we can just follow the American boats.' But," his friend had added as he passed them the compass, "you must take it, anyhow. If the good Lord should let you get ahead, what in the devil would you do?" For him there was no

friend with a compass, and had there been he could not have used it. He was sailing through uncharted seas and the magnet of conscious virtue which had always been his guide had failed him. Helen was the only magnet in his life now and to her influence only he responded.

In obedience to this he took a car—there were very few passing—to South Boston. It was not to be nearer her, he argued, but to study the strike where it was known to be most virulent. Perhaps he would see again the mad-eyed giant who had ordered him off the bridge the night before. From him he might get news. At the corner of Broadway and Dorchester Avenue he continued on foot. The street was almost deserted, except for occasional groups of unkempt men who dispersed, or fell into a sullen silence, at his approach. Among them he recognised the faces of conductors who had taken his fare in the past. They glowered at the cars that occasionally went by, and once or twice he saw a brick hurled, half-heartedly, and falling short of its mark. There was something horrible in the Sunday quiet, in the aspect of the shops that looked as though they had retreated into back rooms, in the utter absence of children's voices. It was as though the world were holding its breath as it watched the cars, magnified into senseless

importance, crawling back and forth. He thought of Helen, sitting lonely in her house, and in the leaden silence and emptiness even she seemed to shrink.

And then he saw her. She was sitting in the third seat of an open car—almost the only passenger—and she was staring ahead, absorbed in her own thoughts, pitifully unconscious of the mute emptiness of the world. "Perhaps," Stephen thought, "it matches only too well her own blank vision." From a group of strikers near him he heard a gruff voice remark, somewhat anxiously, he thought, "Two women on that car," and the answer, "If they're such damn fools they've got to take the consequences."

The meaningless, but in some way significant words, stung him to instant action. He dashed into the street, caught the car, and swung himself aboard.

"You!" Helen cried, startled from her apathy.

He could not speak for a moment, the sudden exertion making him cough and breathe hard. "I thought—Murphy told me—that you would not ride on the cars to-day."

"Is there real danger?" she questioned, her eyes opening suddenly very wide.

"I think so. I don't know what. It's in the air."

She looked around, as though to see for herself

what he meant, realised the deserted streets, the groups of men who watched them curiously as they passed, and shivered. "If there is danger, why are you here?"

"I saw you."

"But why are you in South Boston at all?"

"I don't know. I was looking over the ground. Perhaps I wanted to be near in case of trouble."

"That is Henry's place."

"Yes, I know. You don't need to remind me. But he thought you would stay in the house all day."

"And you did not?"

"It seems now as though I *knew* you would not. At the time—I just let myself go where instinct led me."

"You said last night——"

"Yes, I have gone back on my word. But I did not set out meaning to see you. I'm not sorry."

The car stopped at the corner of Dorchester Avenue to take on passengers, eight or ten of them. As it was about to start a man tore himself from the grasp of his mates on the sidewalk and sprang to the car. He caught Helen's dress and pulled her. "Get out," he cried roughly, "I won't have you here!"

Helen drew away from him, terrified. He was

hatless and coatless. His hair was a tangled mass, his face was stained with dirt, and his shirt, torn open at the neck, showed his great hairy chest.

He pulled Helen again, almost tearing her dress, and crying over and over, "Get out! Get out!"

Stephen, raging with a sudden fury, leaned across her and struck the man in the face. The blow knocked him from the running board, and, as the car was already moving, he fell heavily into the street. Women screamed. Every one, except Helen, stood up to see what would happen, but to the surprise of every one the strikers, instead of following, picked up their fallen comrade and drew back to the sidewalk, where they stood, silently, watching the car as it sped toward the bridge.

Stephen sat down and wiped his hands. "The brute!" he said. "Did he hurt you?"

"No," she answered after a moment. "He did not hurt me—but I am horribly afraid. That was O'Leary, I think—you remember—who had dinner at our house weeks ago."

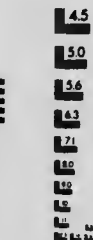
"O'Leary? He didn't see me, I think. And why should he act like such a brute? I thought he was a very decent fellow."

"I don't know—but I'm afraid—horribly afraid, I tell you. I want to get out. Come, please come."



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The tears were running down her cheeks. "Oh, why isn't Henry here. He would take me away. He always knows what to do." She stood up, but Stephen caught her to prevent her from jumping from the swiftly moving car.

She struggled to free herself, and then stiffened as a deep roar shattered the air. "The bridge!" some one screamed. The whole structure seemed to crumble away. The car rose bodily, tipped forward, hung quivering a moment, then plunged through the great rent in the pavement down to the brown water.

BOOK II
..
STEPHEN

CHAPTER XII

IT was late summer. Stephen sat at the desk in his office reading the morning paper. He was very pale, almost grey, in startling contrast to the clerks, who were brown, with a normal summer's tan. His cheeks were hollow and his sunken eyes were dull and lifeless. He looked up wearily as his partner entered the room.

Mr. Stuyvesant was a man of about fifty, smooth-shaven, with iron-grey hair, tall and lean, but quivering with life. He was always immaculate in his dress, bordering on the dandy, his friends told him, but was too thoroughly masculine ever to be called effeminate. He patted Stephen affectionately on the shoulder as he sat down. "I want to talk to you, old man," he said, "seriously."

Stephen smiled. "Fire away."

"I don't know quite how to begin. It is hard to tell a fellow you like that he looks like hell—but you do."

"I have had a suspicion of that for some time myself," Stephen answered with a mirthless laugh.

"But I never considered myself an Adonis, you know."

"It isn't a question of personal beauty, my boy, it's a matter of health."

"Oh, as to health—I am well enough. Trained down a little fine, perhaps."

"That's rot. No man who sits at his desk all day and coughs, is well. It doesn't take a doctor to tell you that."

"I have always had a cough. It is nothing but an irritation in the throat."

"Yes, that comes from trouble lower down. You ought to take a vacation, out in the open air."

"I did take a vacation last June—for a month."

"But where? You disappear without giving any warning except that you might take the one o'clock to New York—and the day at that of our beastly bridge explosion." Stephen let fall the paper-weight he held in his hand and stooped to pick it up, coughing violently in consequence. "Yes, and no word for a week—then only a line that you are not well and will stay away two or three weeks. You send no address. You come back at last looking as though you had been through the third degree and then stick to your desk all through the hot weather while I am abroad."

"I always went away from Friday to Monday."

"Yes. To New York. The Lord knows there isn't any open air there. I am worried about you, Steve, genuinely worried. Will you see a doctor?"

"No, I will not."

"Wil' you take a month off?"

Stephen hesitated. "Perhaps I will. I'll tell you to-morrow."

"Good—so long as you decide to do it. Go to Canada shooting, or West—New York won't do you any good."

"If I go I promise not to stay in New York," Stephen answered.

"All right. That's something accomplished. Now I must beat it for the stock exchange. Be good to yourself."

Left alone Stephen began once more his mechanical reading of the newspaper. But suddenly his apathy gave way to an alert attention. The article that caught his eye was headed, "Strange and Improbable Echo of the Bridge Disaster. Story told by sailor may have bearing on the mysterious disappearance of the body of Mrs. Murphy." Stephen laid the paper on the desk, and supporting his head in his hands read rapidly. "The *London Standard* this morning prints the following article: A sailor off the ship *Constance* from New York and Boston has an

extraordinary story to tell of a man and a woman who were rescued from the water immediately after the famous blowing up of a bridge in Boston, U. S. A., last June, a disaster, it will be remembered, which was the culmination of the great strike of the employees of the street railway company in that city. It appears, from the sailor's story, that the *Constance* had her clearance papers and was proceeding down the harbour when the explosion occurred, well within sight of the ship. Some few minutes later, the tide running strongly in their direction, a man was made out in the water, supporting the unconscious form of a woman. A boat was immediately lowered and the two taken aboard. The captain, much irritated at a possible delay and inquest, was only too glad to proceed immediately on his way to New York. The man, who gave his name as Fales, resident in New York, said that he and his wife were rowing when the explosion occurred, and that a block of stone demolished the boat and injured the woman. As the *Constance* carries a doctor, this Fales was only too glad to proceed immediately to New York, hoping so to escape the publicity that would be forced upon him by the American press. On reaching New York, the sailor asserted, the man, Fales, had his wife removed in an ambulance, leaving as an address a

well-known hotel. The sailor, who claims that he was in command of the boat that rescued Mr. and Mrs. Fales, asserted that he afterward called at the hotel, but could find no trace of the people in question. Unfortunately the captain of the *Constance* died on the voyage to England, and before the sailor became loquacious the ship had sailed on her return voyage to America." The editor then continued in his own words. "This story seems to us in all probability the invention of a man thirsting for notoriety. It is unlikely that the destruction of a rowboat would have escaped the notice of the hundreds who claim to have witnessed the disaster. The only point worthy of note is that one body, that of Mrs. Murphy, is known not to have been recovered, and that, as Mr. O'Leary testified, a man was sitting next her when the car approached the bridge. Who this man was, or whether his body was one of those recovered, will never be known. On the whole, the story may well be put down as fictional, although naturally examination of the facts should be made when the *Constance* again reaches America."

Stephen sat for a long time, his head still resting in his hands, staring blindly at the paper. The crude account, by its omissions as well as by what it actually told, brought back with terrifying vividness

all the details of that hideous morning. Of its possible import to him, to-day, over three months later, he took no account. Its only effect was to set once more in motion the pitilessly final procession of events. At the beginning they were chaotic—a bewilderment of noise, of falling, of struggling in the water. He had believed it was death, and his only endeavour had been to hold fast to Helen. The first clear impression had been one of wonder when he found his head above water and looked down at the face beside him, white except for the blood that trickled from a deep gash in the forehead, apparently the face of a dead woman. Then the rescue, when he laid her, still living the doctor told him, on a seat in the cabin of the ship. Only then, as he looked down on her unconscious form, had the desperate longing and hopelessness of the past weeks suddenly culminated in decisive action. With reason in complete abeyance, he had been conscious only of an impelling need of her. Was her life not owing to him, and therefore his, to do with as he would. He had not thought. The arrangement with the captain to take them to New York had not looked beyond the moment. The future must take care of itself. And he had never had a regret—he was sure of that. During all the weeks that he had watched her as she lay unconscious

—on the ship, and later in the little cottage he had taken in a secluded village in Jersey—all the time he was glad. It had been a long, bitter fight with death. The necessity of work for her, when he was with her, of planning for her when he had to be in Boston, had kept him from thinking—much—of her awakening. It might come at any time now, the doctors said—must indeed come soon if it came at all. They had warned him of the possibilities—madness or idiocy or obliteration of the past. He had taken it all stoically, they thought—but they did not know what joy there was in his heart at what seemed to them so dreadful. If she woke herself—well, it did not seem possible that she could take any other point of view than his because to him it was so obvious. But deep down in him there was a consciousness that remembered her cry, “If Henry were only here!” He preferred that it should not be an issue, sure as he was of success. If she had lost her mind? He could look on that possibility with equanimity, even if with profound sorrow, because he had found that his love for Helen was not an extraneous thing, dependent on any conditions. He did not love her that way. Rather was his love an outbreathing of himself, as much a part of him as life. He could, therefore, give himself up to an endless care of her

without self-sacrifice, without even the internal suggestion of deprivation, without thought or need of reward. His attitude was selfish and selfless, the former because unconsciously it emanated from his overwhelming need of her as the fulfilment of himself, the latter because in it all he thought only of her. Practically never, after his course was determined, had he thought of any outsiders as having possible influence on their lives—and to him all, without exception, were outsiders.

This newspaper article, therefore, with its mention of Helen by an alien name--she was no longer Mrs. Murphy, since he had saved her from death--seemed to him an unwarranted and presumptuous attempt to unite the splendid realities of his own life, emotionally complete, at last, beside her silent form, with the peevish unrealities of what the world called life. He was angry that the past should obtrude itself, and yet knew that for all time the past must reach its arm into the present. "I am not yet fit," he said suddenly, standing up—"not fit until every vestige of the past has lost its power."

He took up the paper and tore it slowly across, then folded it, tore it again, and tossed it into the basket. As he did so a clerk opened the door of his office. "Mr. Henry Murphy, sir; will you see him?"

Stephen gripped the edge of the desk to support himself. He tried to speak, but only coughed. The clerk came forward solicitously, but Stephen waved him back. At last he nodded his head and managed to say, "Show him in."

Stephen did not look up at first, as Henry came through the door. He stood with head bowed, holding tightly to the desk.

"I hope I am not intruding," Henry said quietly; then suddenly, "Good Lord, Bond, you're sick. What is it?"

Very slowly Stephen raised his head and held out a trembling hand. "No," he said, "I'm not sick. I'm glad to see you. Sit down, please." He sank into his own chair and the strained look gradually passed from his face.

"I didn't know whether you would want to see me," Henry continued. "Last time we were together I talked like a cad. But since then so much has happened—I know that you appreciated Helen as few did—and I wanted so much to talk about her with some one who understood, that I came."

Stephen looked at him curiously. "I knew," he said, "that she would not stay at home that day as you told her to."

Henry shook his head. "I was asking too much.

I did not understand her—perhaps not as well as you did. She was too fine for me—then. I might have grown to her—because I loved her so much.”

“So did I.”

“You?”

“Yes, I. We can never understand each other unless you know that. I should never have told you—before the accident. But now you ought to know.”

“You loved her, even though she was my wife?”

“I did. I could not help the accident that she was your wife.” He talked brokenly because his breath was short.

“Did Helen know this?”

“She knew it.”

“And did she—— Oh, no, I cannot ask that. Life holds little enough as it is.”

“She did not love me,” Stephen interposed quickly. At the cost of a lie he would gladly have given that solace to the suffering man. The truth was harder to tell, but he told it. “She loved you—only you. That was *my* tragedy. She liked me, for myself, I think—but she held to me only because I was a representative, as it happened, of the people with whom she belonged.”

Henry leaned forward and put his hand over Stephen's. “Thank you, Bond,” he said in a quiver-

ing voice. "It was hard for you to tell me that. That's how I know it's true. The future looks pretty dark to me sometimes, without Helen, but I always have her love to remember and that gives me a purpose—to make myself more like her, more like she wanted me to be. And if the memory of her love had been taken away—well, there wouldn't have been much to make the struggle worth the price, would there? If I had thought *she* was false I couldn't possibly have believed any one. That's why I thank you."

Stephen looked at him searchingly. It seemed to him that already the man's face was finer, that he was reaching out toward appreciation of the more delicate things of life. Almost overpoweringly he realised that Henry had always been a *better* man than he, that now he was beating out for himself, inch by inch, a knowledge of those things which were instinctive with those fortunate enough to be gentle born, and that when he had succeeded he would be not only a better, but a finer man. And if a finer man, a fitter mate for Helen—— But no—that was not a possible question. She was no longer Mrs. Murphy, and this man, Henry Murphy, had no more claim on her than any other. He himself believed his wife to be dead—and she was. Mrs. Murphy had

been killed in the bridge explosion on June 16th and her body had never been recovered. The white-faced, scarred, unconscious woman in the little New Jersey town was a quite different person, the wife, not yet publicly acknowledged, of Mr. Stephen Bond.

To Stephen there was no doubt of this, yet his intellect liked to play with the question, especially now, with the man who might, if he knew, put in some preposterous claim. "Much as she loved you, however," he said, "I do not believe she would have been able to bear, indefinitely, the life she was living. She might not have ceased to love you, but I think she would have left you. The incessant irritation of her surroundings, the absolute contradiction of every instinct of her real self, would gradually have broken her power of resistance."

"Of resistance to what?"

"To me, for example." Stephen smiled. "After the accident, I realised that the point had nearly been reached where I should have thrown prudence and decency—as the world considers decency—to the winds. And I could have offered her everything that you denied her."

"You could have offered her nothing, except regret and sorrow," Henry said sharply. "But if she had been blinded as you were, I think, after a time, I

should have understood—as I understood many things when it was too late.”

“What should you have done?”

“I should have asked her to come home—and she would have come.”

Stephen started. “What makes you think that?”

“Because she loved me and would always have loved me.” He said it quite simply, as admitting of no argument. “But why discuss such questions? Impossible as they are, they stain Helen’s memory and your honour. You have thought about it so much that you have lost the sense of your own moral strength.”

“No. Instead, the accident has taught me that I have a moral strength that would rise above the tenets of conventional morality, that would seize for its own what greater love and greater need had made its own. I have swept aside the grave-clothes of my over-civilised ancestors—cerements of conventionalised morality that each generation has sought to bind about its descendants. I have conquered once more my heritage.” Stephen’s face glowed as he talked. He stood up, erect, looking straight ahead, as though into the eyes of a vision. “You have had her past. Her future is mine.”

Henry, too, rose from his chair and stood looking

into Stephen's shining face. The tears were in his own eyes. "I am glad you told me that you loved her," he said gently. "The love of two good men is finer than the love of one, because it shows the beauty of her character, that could inspire such love. Her past, as you say, is mine. Her future"—his voice trembled—"you have a right to. You cannot take away my memories, nor I your visions."

"You say that," Stephen cried—"even you. Then indeed I am free. Even the lingering Puritan in me should be satisfied."

CHAPTER XIII

As he stepped into the worn station carriage in the little New Jersey village on the following Friday evening Stephen drew a long breath of happy anticipation. He had arranged with his partner to be away a full month. The details of that month had no significance for him. They were sunk in the one great, absorbing fact that he was to be with Helen—Helen, his wife. He had no misgivings now as to the ethics of the situation.

While his carriage rattled along the dark road, however, he thought of little. He was for the time a truant, setting out for a long holiday with only a single companion, the best of all. The joys of truancy, in the days stolen from school so long ago, were symbolic of the more vivid joys and sorrows of this manly truancy, just beginning, and reaching mistily into the future, with only the rough wall of death to mark their end. And his mind strayed back to those childhood delights, especially to one memorable day when he and Katherine Bland stole away in the night—much such a night as this, when the full moon cast long, black, fantastic shadows on the

grass—only they had seen it, he remembered, just before dawn, and now he could still imagine a feeble yellow glow in the west. They had climbed to a hill-top to watch the stars go out, and sitting hand in hand had shouted their welcome to the sun. On what strange peaks might not he and Helen watch the pale stars swim away into the golden radiance of morning? He remembered how, with Katherine, he had searched the woods for nuts and had shaken the last red apples from the bough, and then how they had spread their table of leaves and garnished it with fruit for breakfast, and that she had told him, while she made everything ready, to go beyond the clump of trees to bathe, and how he had come back, his short hair dripping, his body glowing from the cold plunge, and had kissed her shyly before they ate their food. It was in this spirit that he was going to Helen, with all the generous, pure-minded enthusiasm of a boy. So vivid was the impression that he felt a glow like that after the cold plunge of long ago; so vivid that he put his hand to his forehead to feel whether his hair might not be dripping wet. He laughed as he did it, light-heartedly, as he might have laughed at one of Katherine's sallies. And then suddenly he remembered the ending of their day, how she had slipped and sprained her

ankle, how he had bound it with long blue strips from his shirt, wet in cold brook water, and how he had carried her the last mile of their way, singing, and telling her brave tales to make her forget the pain. Alas—his long day with Helen had begun with trouble, deep trouble, which stories of the troubadours could not reach. But he laughed at the augury. Did it not surely presage a happy ending?

Stephen leaned from the carriage to breathe in the clear, cool air. It had lately rained, so that the moonlight glistened on the leaves. He saw that they were approaching the house, but for once the delight of his nearness to her did not give way before any foreboding of what the nurse might have to tell him. Usually there had been the haunting fear that she might be worse, or the almost equal terror that she had regained consciousness and that her first cry would be like her last, for Henry. Then he had longed for a continuance of the peace of her unconsciousness. But to-night his lingering misgivings were gone. He felt himself literally the primitive man returning triumphantly to his mate.

At the doorstep he sprang from the carriage and ran like a boy into the house. In the hall a nurse was waiting for him. She looked frightened. "Any change?" he asked.

"Yes. She is conscious."

"Since when?" There was a catch in his voice. This, after all, was the real test, and thank God he was ready to meet it.

"Since morning."

"And—her mind?"

"The doctor will tell you. Here he is." The nurse slipped from the room as the doctor came in. There were tears in her eyes.

"Well?" Stephen said.

"Sit down, Mr. Bond," the doctor said. "Mrs. Bond has regained consciousness—but has lost, I fear, her memory."

Stephen did sit down then, very suddenly, his knees refusing to support him. "What do you mean?"

"It is not nearly so bad as it might have been," the doctor said. "I warned you that we might expect anything. Mrs. Bond seems perfectly rational, but she remembers—nothing. Her accident it is natural that she should forget, but she does not remember the beginning of the automobile ride that ended so disastrously. She had to ask—even who she was. We have not let her talk much."

"She remembers nothing of her past?" Stephen spoke hoarsely, but what the doctor mistook for pain was really the birth-struggle of an overwhelming joy.

"Nothing, so far we know—since her childhood at least. We have not questioned her."

"She remembers nothing," Stephen repeated stupidly. "Does she know—of me?"

"Yes. We had to tell her who she was."

"And she made no comment?"

"None."

"She did not ask for Henry?"

"No. Why should she?"

"She used to call me that. She has forgotten everything." He leaned on the table, and letting his head fall on his arms, sobbed uncontrollably, heavy, racking sobs, that were the bursting forth of his relief. Truly the world was his. "Will her memory ever return?" he added suddenly.

"Probably not," the doctor answered. "We don't know very much about these cases. Another shock might do it."

"That she must never have," Stephen cried, and then he coughed, struggling for breath and clinging to the table for support.

The doctor sprang to his side and held him by the shoulders. When the fit was over he spoke sternly. "Mrs. Bond is out of the woods now. You are the real patient in this house. I believe that you are sicker to-day than she is."

"Nonsense," Stephen gasped. "It's just a cough—nervous. I've had it all my life, more or less. A bit worse now, perhaps, from worry. Make my wife well and I shall give no more trouble."

"That is simply not true," the doctor said, "you are a very sick man. Won't you let Dr. Locke run over from New York and examine you?"

"No," Stephen answered irritably, "I will not. May I see my wife?"

"I suppose I shall have to let you—but I don't want to. Your coughing will be bad for her. What she must have is weeks of quiet, affectionate care, out of which she can slowly recreate a living world. You ought to be the one to give it to her—but you can't, unless you are looked after very soon."

"You mean that I shall die?"

"Undoubtedly—unless you act quickly."

"Good Lord. I had no idea it was as bad as that. Send over your specialist if you want. I can't die, you know. That would be too ridiculous, with life just beginning. Now may I see Helen? I shall not cough."

The doctor led him upstairs. "You will be careful," he said. "She knows you are coming, but we must not excite her more than we can help."

Stephen nodded as he passed into the dimly lighted room.

Helen was in her bed, propped up by pillows so that she seemed to be reclining on a sofa. Her forehead was still bandaged, but her hair, in two heavy, gold-red braids, was brought over her shoulders and lay along her body like the revers of some magnificent coat. For a moment he stood looking at her, tears in his eyes and his lips trembling. If he had loved her when she was unconscious, much more he loved her now. He went softly across the room, and kneeling by the bedside, took her fragile hand in his and kissed it.

"So this is you, Stephen," she said at last. Her voice was low but clear, and Stephen thought he had never heard such music. "My husband—whom I do not know."

He put his head down, leaning his cheek against her hand, but even the touch of her could not keep him so. He raised his head to look at her again, to gaze speechlessly into the beautiful, innocent mystery of her eyes. They were pure, like the eyes of a child who has yet to learn the world's evil, and its good. They were ready to love, but did not know what love meant.

She lifted her hand and brushed back the hair

from his forehead. The caress, the first she had ever given him, made him tremble as though in a fever. "You have been very good to me all these weeks," she said gently.

He found his words at last. "It is not goodness to fulfil one's own greatest happiness, and that, my darling, is to be with you."

"That is sweet of you to say, but I was not here. I was away somewhere, dreaming, I don't know what."

"But you were always near. I felt that. Your spirit was resting, growing as it rested into new strength to take up the problems of life again."

"Perhaps," she answered. "And yet I am very ignorant. It hurts me when I try to remember. I have so much to learn—everything."

"But I am here to teach you. To think that I can recreate you, show you the world again and all the beautiful things in it. Oh, it will be too wonderful."

"Poor Stephen," she said, patting his hand. "I shall try to be a good pupil."

The nurse came quietly into the room. Neither noticed her. They were looking longingly and questioningly into each others' eyes. "I am sorry to disturb you," she said in a low voice, "but the doctor

is going, Mr. Bond, and wants to speak to you. Mrs. Bond must sleep now, too. You may see her longer in the morning."

"Very well," Stephen answered. "Tell him I am coming." Then to Helen, "Rest now, sweetheart. To-morrow will be the first of long and beautiful to-morrows."

She held his hand tightly and kissed him when he leaned down to her. "I am very happy," she said shyly, "because I think you are the kind of man I should have chosen for a husband if I could have chosen. I must be just what I was long ago when I did choose—you."

Stephen rushed from the room, his eyes blinded with tears that came from his fierce joy. But with the joy there was an almost fiercer pain. Until now he had found deception so easy, but this was very different, this matter of deceiving Helen. Almost he wished that she had wakened with memory intact. Then he could have argued and convinced her that he was right—for her happiness and in fulfilment of his own need. Now she was his without a struggle. She trusted his honour, and for the moment he felt himself stripped naked of honour. But she was his—her future was his with all its possibilities. He held fast to that, made it the paramount consideration in

his mind, strained his will to keep his thoughts fixed there, and there only. Perhaps later he would tell her—then in full mutual understanding they could publicly face the world, its common scorn and its rare comprehension—but not now. Neither had the strength to bear it now. "It is best as it is—best as it is," he kept repeating to himself, but when he reached the room where the doctor was waiting for him he cried involuntarily, "Don't tell me anything more. I can't bear anything more now."

The doctor led him to a chair. "I'm sorry if I frightened you too much about yourself. Perhaps Dr. Locke——"

"I'm not thinking of myself," Stephen interrupted. "I don't care what your specialist says."

"Oh, well, then; it was something about your wife I wanted to tell you."

"There is a chance that she may regain her memory?"

"None, I fear, at present. It is something pleasant, something that I should have told you before, but put off from week to week until I was sure it would be good news, not bad."

"Must you tell me now?" Even in the stress of his emotion Stephen was conscious that news of Helen, as it seemed good to others, might not be

equally good for him. Perhaps, for instance, he might suggest some shock to restore her memory that it would be almost impossible to avoid taking.

"It is not imperative to tell you now, but I must soon. You must tell her."

Stephen took hold of the arms of his chair. "You might as well tell me now. I don't want to live in dread of anything."

"That is wise, since my news must please you. Soon after you came here I believed that Mrs. Bond was going to have a child. I did not tell you then because I was afraid the accident might have injured the child and that we should not be able to save it. The escape is almost miraculous, but is, I believe, definite. Everything seems to be normal, and you should be a happy father next February or March—— Mr. Bond—what is it?"

Stephen had leaned down, his head between his hands, when the doctor started to speak, and at the end toppled forward, slid from the chair, and lay, face downward, on the floor.

When he regained consciousness he found himself in bed. A nurse was sitting at his side, and across the room he saw the doctor, reading. The lamp was deeply shaded, but he closed his eyes. Even the dim light irritated him. He felt utterly exhausted,

knowing only where he was, and that Helen was near him. He was too weak to think.

The nurse took hold of his wrist, but he made no sign. "The pulse is a little stronger," he heard her say. "It will take some days, however. He lost a lot of blood." Blood? Why should he have lost blood, he thought vaguely.

Then the doctor answered: "It is quite wonderful how his strength has kept up during the last weeks. He looked bad and was living on his nerves. Dr. Lock' will be here soon, thank God. He needs a lung specialist, and quickly."

"Wasn't it strange, his having that hemorrhage so suddenly?" So that was it—the loss of blood—a hemorrhage. Well, he had known many people who had them and recovered.

"It was," the doctor answered. "I should have let him alone, I suppose, but I wanted to cheer him up. It must be rather dreary having to get acquainted all over again with your own wife. But it seemed to have the opposite effect. He toppled right over when I told him about the baby."

"Baby"—the word echoed dully in Stephen's mind. He always liked children. Whose baby were they talking about? He was interested in no particular baby. Then the whole appalling story came

crashing back into his mind. He did not think; he simply felt, and as he came to full emotional realisation shudders ran along his body. He heard the nurse call to the doctor, knew that they were wrapping him in blankets and putting hot cloths against his feet and his back. It was like treating a foot to cure a toothache, he knew, but they could not guess the agony of his mind. The picture came to him, the vision of the afternoon, of the radiant future, of the endless chain of days, each like a golden bead, perfect in itself and made more beautiful by its fellows, all strung on the invisible thread of their common life. Was this possible now? He and Helen alone—there was infinitude of happiness in the dream. He and Helen, and Henry's child—the dream was shattered. He had prayed that the past might not too violently obtrude its shadow, and praying, he had trained to do battle with the shadow. But as against the unbelievable reality his training was in vain. One could not fight with a child. The past had projected a living fragment of itself into the future, and as the future grew so the past would grow with it.

CHAPTER XIV

A FEW days later Stephen sat in an armchair on the piazza. One end was screened, and there he slept. The day was warm, with a softness in the air like that of a day in spring. The harlequin reds and yellows of the trees seemed crudely out of place. It was as though the year had made a mistake. The soft blue sky, flecked with wisps of white, should have looked down through trees all feathered with soft pinks and greens like the colours in a Hokusai print. To be in keeping with the autumn leaves the sky should have been of that harder, colder blue that shone with an almost metallic lustre through the bold foliage of a picture by Hiroshige.

Stephen thought naturally in terms of Japanese prints. Years earlier, on a trip around the world, he had been captivated by their charm, had realised almost instinctively the artist's point of view, and had delighted in their singleness of purpose, their consistent striving for perfection as they understood it. With this exception—for he studied his prints with scientific minuteness as well as with appreciation—he had always been a dilettante in art matters. He

went to the Art Museum, groaned, like all Bostonians of his own set, over the uninspired plaster casts and the inadequate paintings but unlike most, he went further, to study the really glorious Chinese and Japanese collections. Like all good Bostonians, too, he went to the Symphony concerts, understood them, a little, by dint of diligent reading of the programmes, and thoroughly enjoyed them in his own unexpressive way. But for his prints, over which he spent hours of loving study, he had a trained, appreciative knowledge.

Naturally, therefore, after two torturing days in his bed, when he had been at last allowed to sit on the piazza, he had asked that the few prints in the house be put on a table beside him. The conscious calm of them soothed him, the exquisite harmony of their lines and colours, unrelieved by shadows or high lights, brought at least momentary harmony into his tangled and twisted outlook. Helen had recognised it in the print she had seen in his house in Boston. They would love them together. As he sat now, thinking of Helen and looking at a print by Kiyonaga that lay in his lap, he was able to think more sanely because of its unconscious influence. It was an example of the highest work of the artist—the Shakspeare of wood engravers, Stephen loved to

call him, because he most nearly approximated the real and the ideal. The women of the print were real women, standing out from the discreetly suggested landscape background, not the attenuated fancies of Kiyonaga's latest style. In their almost unearthly grace of motion, in the flowing lines of their harmoniously coloured draperies, in the spiritual calm of their expressions, they brought reality into communion with the eternal ideal. They were two women, a mother and a nurse-maid, and at their feet a child.

It was the child which had made him choose this print among them all to study. He was not thinking of the technique—in Kiyonaga this is unnecessary except in recognition of its mastery. He was rather thinking of the relation portrayed, the wonderful relation between a mother and her child, that transcends all others of human life and yet conflicts with none. In the apparent detachment of the mother in the picture he tried to see Helen, filling, as she would, the mother's part, yet ready for all the world had to offer beyond. The father? He wondered whether the women were thinking of him, whether, perhaps, in giving her the child, he had not fulfilled his mission and passed onward into the inscrutable mystery of death. Then some other would take up his re-

sponsibilities toward the child and the child's mother, would be a new father, as Stephen felt that he could be, would perhaps more completely fill the woman's soul than the first could have done—the first, who had lost his opportunity, through death. This was, after all, normal, when one died, that another should take up the burden of his joys and sorrows. And if the woman died, as Helen had died, might not she gather up the threads of life anew, had she not the right to choose for herself once more, as she would have, had her husband died? He forced aside the ever-recurrent question, that his inherited love of fair sport pressed to the foreground. "You say she has the right to choose, but is she shown that right?" "Later," he always answered, "she is not able now. Later, when she has learned to see, I will give it to her."

So, during the long days and nights of mental and moral torture he had come into possession of a kind of compromise peace with his conscience. The only moral question that troubled him was that of his deceit toward Helen. The question of Henry's rights had ceased to have any meaning for him. It was a twisted reflection of the beliefs of his own remote ancestors who had torn England with civil strife and beheaded King Charles because they had set up Right,

the will of God, as in eternal but always victorious conflict with rights, the privileges of the individual or of society. Like them, he declared society wrong in its sweeping definition of the rights of a husband. In a particular case, like his, God's will must be decisive. Perhaps he would not have phrased it so, but the fact was there. Like the Puritans in so many instances, he mistook his own will for that of God.

He put the print reluctantly on the table beside him, looking once more at the calm, mysterious face of the mother. Passionless, the mark of the worldwide enigma of woman's nature, it seemed to him the keynote of the harmony of life as well as the focal point of its dissension. It seemed to him also capable of infinite understanding, forgiveness, and love. With this thought he went to Helen.

"Stephen, dear," she said, as he sat in a chair beside her sofa, "I have been thinking much, since I could think. And perhaps there may be something uncommonly clear in the thoughts of one who is able only to hold in mind the present and the future."

"In any case, dear, what you think is of greatest importance to me. What has it all been about?"

"Largely about you. I am well now, and as soon as my silly legs will hold me up I want to go away,

with you—somewhere where I can care for you as you have for me and bring back your health as you have mine.”

“I suppose it will be necessary—for a time,” he said gloomily. “But I had made such wonderful plans while you were sick—such long, splendid trips over the whole round world to show you the places I have already seen and to see with you the places I have never seen.”

“It would be wonderful—but not now. We must go West, to Arizona or Colorado, the nurse tells me, where you will get well again. It will be best for me, too, she says.”

“But the loneliness of it for you, dear.”

“Why for me, more than for you?”

“For me it would be heaven—away from the world, from every one but you. It would be glorious.”

“And yet you doubt the same pleasure for me.” She smiled at him, affectionately. “But seriously, Stephen, it would be a blessing. I am afraid of people. I should be in fear continually of meeting those I used to know—and not knowing them. It would mean explaining, explaining—revealing my shallow soul to people who have no right to know. I want to be forgotten as I have forgotten. I want, when

I meet people again, to meet them as a woman, not as a child."

"Yes, I know, dearest," he said, "and yet there is a peace in your reconquered innocence that is worth more than years of knowledge and of tears. If I could only teach you the beautiful things and none of the ugly!"

"But you cannot, Stephen. It is just as though I were newly born. I must see the world as it is, or not at all."

"You are right," he said. "Do you know, Helen, that is what I said to you often in the past, that time that you don't remember. Many things I thank God that you have forgotten."

"No. You must not say that. It will make me think that you did not love me—then. Before we come back from the West you must tell me everything. I trust you, dear—everything. I cannot face the world of men and women remembering only the happy parts of my life. I must know the sad ones, the troubled ones. You must make again the scars that they have made. I cannot have the clean soul of a child with the scarred body of a woman." She put her hand to her forehead, where a long, white scar drew its sharp curve across her left temple.

"Will not the purity of your soul," he said gently, "be the best inheritance of your child?"

"My child?" It was only a startled question, but as she looked at him her eyes grew dark and large. As Stephen gazed into them he was frightened at the things he did not understand, startled to see dawning there the mystery of motherhood. Had the print lied to him? Was it, after all, a passion, all consuming? Was the child to close for him the doors of Heaven? He would have given the world to have the words unsaid, yet said they must be.

"Yes," he said, still very gently, though his voice trembled. "Next February, the doctor says. It will be a little Arizona baby." He held her hand tightly clasped in his and leaned over her, laying his head on the pillow beside hers.

Her eyes closed. Slowly the blood drained away from her face, and tears, forcing themselves between her eyelids, trickled down her cheeks. But for that, and the convulsive hold on his hand, he would have thought she had fainted. He waited, silent, wiping away the tears as they fell. He knew that she must realise it, and he had nothing to say. Her senses were too acute for him to risk any expression he did not feel. He was cold and his heart beat furiously.

At last she opened her eyes and looked at him pite-

ously. He could not long answer her gaze, because it was brimming with mute, despairing questions that he could not solve. It seemed to him that he looked away because he could not answer truth with truth. He did not know, what it takes the best of men years of married life to learn, that to the deepest, most soul-stirring questions a woman does not need from the man she loves naked truth, but infinite compassion. It is not that she is by nature less truthful, but that the texture of her soul, as of her body, is more sensitive than his, and that the truth which inspires him may crush her. So he did not know that the appeal in Helen's eyes was not for explanation, but for sympathy. He knew that she was brave, that she would always do the right thing, the strong, unselfish thing—much more, that she would see the right, which is braver than to do it. Probably, although he did not know it, his silence was wise.

In a broken voice she spoke, at last, and her first word was a question, "Can a child be a mother?"

He answered her quietly, his words full of emotion, however, "If more mothers in this world were children at heart, the world would be a sweeter place to live in. It is the worldliness, the damnable knowledge of the mothers, their forth-putting, their interest in everything on earth except their families, that

leaves their poor children to grow up as best they may—and the best is usually the worst. No, Helen. Thank Heaven that your child will be free from the taint of its mother's worldliness."

Her eyes, fixed on him still, were as full of questions as ever. Not yet could he fearlessly return her gaze. "But, Stephen," she went on, "you are speaking generalities, and I believe you, though I cannot understand. There may be such mothers, but I should not have been one. All the experience I had gathered in the past would have been his, the child's, for his use, as my life would have been his—and his father's. And, Stephen—I do not know his father."

He drew away from her sharply. "Now it is you," he cried hoarsely, "you, who are speaking in a language I cannot understand."

"Yet you must, dear," she pleaded. "I must make you understand. I have been dead and now I am alive again, but still my past is dead. You are here—yes, you and the house and this body of mine. I accept them because I must—and gratefully, dear Stephen—do not misunderstand again. I told you that you were a proof to me that I must have been much as I am. But now, in addition to all this, I must train myself to accept a child, a little baby, the incarnation of the past, of the joy of the past, sud-

denly becoming real—like you and all the rest—but more than you, demanding explanations. I can't tell you coherently, dear, because it is all so new. The words and the thoughts come together and both are confused. But it seems to me that a baby has no meaning unless he emerges, like a ray of sunlight, from the glory of his father's and his mother's love. And that, dear Stephen—all that is blank to me."

He bowed his head. "You must give me time, dear," she continued brokenly; "I shall come, at last, to accept this, as I have the other things—but it is so different. You have told me the facts of the last years, some of them. You must tell me all as time goes on. But you cannot tell me the emotions. They must be felt, and the memory of them is the renewal of the feeling, not of the fact. Only as new emotions come I may be able through imagination to relive the old ones. Then, perhaps, the baby will grow to have a meaning. Can you understand—a little——"

He saw that her terror for herself had changed to pity for him, and realised bitterly what her words meant, as applied to him. They were the unconscious ratification of the truth he had fought against, that the child, in whom he had no part, must always stand

between them. Perhaps, as the months and years went by, he and Helen might grow into the complete accord that he longed for; but, if this were so, the child must stand aside, unloved and uncared for, except as duty demanded. Either thought was agony. He could not give up the dream of Helen that had sustained him through the dark months of her unconsciousness, the dream of their unclouded life together where she should have every opportunity to grow into the full inheritance of "the other woman" whom he knew to be her true self, and where he should learn for the first time what might be the meaning of happiness, which is never lonely satisfaction. And at the same time he could not think of the child as neglected or unloved. What had at first seemed a cruel assertion of unwarranted personal claims on Henry Murphy's part, claims made vital in the person of the child, had gradually come to mean an opportunity. Those claims, never quite dead in the background of his conscience, could be fully, generously satisfied by giving to Henry's child the best there was to give, materially, and in loving care. And now it seemed to him that his reasoning had led him into a lane that had no outlet. Could he possibly reconcile the child's right to happiness with his? His old nature reasserted itself. He must risk his own

happiness to fulfil his obligations to the letter, since they were obligations that he recognised.

He could look at Helen, now, with no thought of faithlessness. There had been a long silence, disturbed only by his own hoarse breathing. "Have you nothing to say to me?" she asked.

"No," he answered—"that is, I had nothing. But I have been thinking. You will love your baby."

"Yes, I shall love him. He will be so helpless and alone."

"And the love you have for him—perhaps that, more than anything, will carry you back into the years that are dark now." He said it firmly, but his voice was charged with the pain of a great renunciation. "You must try to love him, my dearest. You must make him first of all. It will be best for you and for him."

He had spoke. His eyes closed, and started as she put her hand over his. "And for you?" she asked.

"And for me," he answered, shaking his head as though to toss away the fumes of thought. "What is for your good must be for mine. Have you talked with the doctor about when you can leave here?"

She was quick to follow his lead. "In a month,

at the latest, he says. For both of us, the sooner we go the better. Have you decided where it is to be?"

"To Arizona. I fell in love with the desert years ago, and you will, when you see it. There is nothing dreary—or if there is it is a kind of dreariness so objective that it increases your joy in life. We shall go to Tucson. There perhaps we can find a house. And now I must write my friends, telling of our departure. I shall have to go to Boston once more—on business—and then, dear, away with you to the uttermost ends of the earth."

But to him those words that once would have meant so much were tinged with bitterness.

CHAPTER XV

THE five years that had made Helen again a strong woman had not gone so well with Stephen. At first the keen, dry air of Arizona had built him up, almost driven away the cough; but a month spent during the winter in New Orleans had brought the trouble back, showing him that there was safety only at home—they had easily come to call Tucson home. But even Tucson had this time proved itself inadequate. Stephen was courageous, hoping that Helen would not see; but both knew in their hearts that he was going down hill, very gradually and peacefully, to be sure, but still losing ground day by day.

The doctor was just leaving one afternoon in late January. Stephen lay in a hammock on the veranda. Helen was riding, and the boy was off, somewhere, with his nurse. "Should you give me a year?" Stephen asked abruptly.

"My dear man, many years," the doctor answered, buttoning his heavy linen coat across his fat stomach. He was a short man, very round, with a permanent smile and a bald head that seemed to catch a reflection wherever he was. Almost his only

duty was to make happy the last stages of the hundreds who flocked to Arizona too late, with lungs too far gone to be cured. Those who came in time laughed at him—the others with him. "You've got to take things easy, but if you do it life will take you easy."

"Yes," Stephen said, "or death."

"Fiddlesticks! Death is a personage not worth talking about. We all have to meet him sooner or later, and the less we talk about him beforehand the better."

"Yes, I know," Stephen interrupted; "I am not seeking his acquaintance, but I want to be forewarned. I am not in the least afraid, you know, but I want to be ready. I have my will to make, for example."

"Make it, make it, make it," the doctor cried, sitting down on the top step. "The man who doesn't make his will when he's well is a fool. Some folks think it's a g'omy business—will making. It isn't. It's just planning safe future investments on a dependable market. I made mine twenty-two years ago, when I married Bessie. I knew she was a safe investment, and I was right. If you don't know the same of your wonderful little wife your business sense is lacking—that's all I've got to say, except that I'd

take a few shares at par any pleasant day. You have a really fine view up here," he added, looking across the plains, "almost as good as mine, but not quite."

"I am not mistrusting my investment. To prove it, send up a lawyer from the town to-morrow and I'll make my will."

"To-morrow: good Lord, there's no such hurry as that—except, as my good grandmother used to say to us boys, 'It's always wise to take time by the fetlock.'"

Stephen laughed in spite of himself. "I marvel," he said, "that such an inconsequential person as you, Dr. Seward, knows whether it is better to make a sick man well or a well man sick."

"Both methods would bring in business. I have to cure them all, and if I could make a large enough part of the district sick it would mean a fortune."

"So it would. No one who knows you would have any other doctor. But that does not alter my statement that you are inconsequential. You shout 'make it, make it' when I suggest a will, and then you tell me there is no hurry. Will you answer my question as to how long I have? I really want to know—seriously."

"And I really don't know—seriously. If you take things calmly, avoid excitement and all that, you may,

as I said, live years. On the other hand, you may catch some other trouble and go off in a week. It's a chance we all run, but it's a worse risk for you, because you haven't any lungs to speak of and so you can't get in the fresh air that drives things out. Keep cheerful and keep calm—the two go together—and you're good for a long time to come."

"So you can't tell me. I believe you. And as to your prescription, that is easy. Every morning I am sure that I am better. I believe it and Helen tells me so. It is only when I stop to think about it, as now, that I know every day I am just a bit, a tiny bit, weaker. I used to ride with her every day—and then one day last week I didn't feel up to the mark and stayed at home. But I have not been since. This hammock is wonderfully comfortable. Will you send the lawyer to-morrow, Dr. Seward?"

"Sure will I—but on one condition, and that is, that you see him merely as a fool lawyer, not as a preliminary undertaker."

"Of course. I am not going to create bogies for myself just because I neglected to do what I ought to have done long ago."

"Right-o. With that spirit you'll live a good decade longer than I do." He got up and pulled his coat straight. "And, by the way, I hear you're

seeing a good bit of Father Ignatius over at the Mission. A good man, that, I have no doubt, but more interested in souls than bodies. Now, what you need to think about is your body. Of course I don't want to interfere, but I believe that if a man keeps his body reasonably clean his soul will make a pretty good shift for itself. And, as a matter of fact, the two are pretty closely joined, down here anyway, and it's bad policy discussing the time when they won't be—that is, I mean, dwelling on the separation too much. It really is a fine view from here. As I said before, almost as good as mine."

Stephen smiled indulgently. "Just now," he said, "Father Ignatius and I are not discussing the soul at all. This morning, in fact, we talked almost entirely about the Arizona orange crop. He believes one can raise oranges here that taste as well as the Florida oranges and that look as well as the Californias."

"He is perfectly right," Dr. Seward interrupted joyfully. "That's what I've always said. I didn't know he was such a sensible man. Indeed, between ourselves, I invested two thousand in the Phenix Improved Orange Company only last month. I wonder whether the friars have put any of their vast wealth into the company."

"I doubt it," Stephen answered, "because I am afraid that vast wealth of theirs is a myth. They spend all they have, and more, in their work among the Indians. In fact, that is what Father Ignatius usually comes to talk about—their finances, and, because I ask him, their religion."

"I guess he doesn't need any urging about the last," the doctor said. "I never saw a monk yet that didn't try to proselyte."

"Oh! As to that—it's hardly a campaign, you know. I am perfectly willing to be a Catholic if I think the Catholics are right. Father Ignatius knows that. And when I ask him questions he really has to answer. The trouble is that I know, theoretically, as much as he. But the things I don't know he cannot explain—faith, for example—I suppose he was born with it. There is a lot that is fine in his religion. Historically there seems to be no other, and it is the only one that rises above denominational lines because it claims to be final."

The doctor bridled. "I don't see that that signifies. If you claimed to be a father that wouldn't make you one if you weren't. And as to being undenominational—how about the Episcopal Church?"

"Yes," Stephen said seriously. "You have me there. The Episcopal Church is not denominational

because it is fashionable. My wife tells me that in the town half the congregation are Jews. Their presence seems to make both assertions definite. They wouldn't be there if it *were* denominational nor if it were *not* fashionable."

"We're getting them out," the doctor said irritably. "They want to sing in the choir to show their clothes and we've made a rule that only those can sing in the choir who are communicants. Even you can see, I suppose, that if they're communicants they can't possibly be Jews. Why don't you come down with Mrs. Bond some Sunday and try it. It's a much safer doctrine than the Roman."

"Better for me, I suppose. Less talk of the soul."

"I don't know about that; but at least they don't bury a man before he is dead. If you want religion, give it a try—and next time don't keep me here talking like this. My other patients may die for lack of a chance to tell me funny stories. Good-bye. Send for me if you feel down."

"Surely—and don't forget the lawyer—and don't kill yourself with reckless driving."

Dr. Seward grinned as he climbed into his buggy. His horse, known the country round as Old Faithful, had been standing motionless for an hour, apparently gazing mournfully across the brown plains. People

said the doctor needed Old Faithful to give him a serious point of view. He cracked his whip lustily, more to prove to himself that he knew how than as any suggestion to the horse, and started slowly between the lines of date palms to the gate.

Stephen got up reluctantly from his hammock and walked across the veranda. From the other end he could look out on the flower garden, brilliant even in January with hibiscus, and gladioli, and poppies. There, as he hoped, was the child, sitting on the concrete edge of the little fountain and poking at the goldfish with a long, pliable reed. "Harry," he called. "Come and take care of me while Miss Gordon goes for your supper."

"I want to play with the fishes," the boy called back. "But I'm coming. Will you tell me a story?"

"Yes, or talk with you." The child laid his reed carefully on the concrete. "Don't lose it," Stephen heard him say, "I want it on to-morrow. We are going to feed the fishes then—I and mother. I like to feed the fishes with mother." Then he trudged around the flower beds until he came to the gladioli.

"Can I pick a red one for my mother?" he asked.

"Yes," said Stephen, "you may—not can, you know. Carefully now—not to break them."

The little boy very gravely and conscientiously

picked out a perfect flower, and holding the stem with one chubby hand, pulled it off. "It is the best of all," he said, "for my best mother. When is she coming home?"

"Very soon, I hope. She is riding." Stephen came down the steps and took the child's hand.

"I like her to ride where I can see her. She is such a pretty mother." They sat down in the hammock together.

"You must always love your mother very dearly, my boy. If I ever have to go away you must take care of her."

"Yes, I will," the child answered earnestly. "She says I'm a brave boy, and I love her more than you—but I love you some, too, and my nurse."

"That's right. You must always love your mother best."

"Yes. Because she loves me best—more than she does you or my nurse."

Stephen winced, but drew the boy more closely to him. For a half minute neither said anything, but Harry was never long silent. Living almost entirely with older people, he expressed himself more clearly than did the average child of his age.

"Why is the blue sky yellow?" he asked suddenly.

"Because the sun is setting. That means that your mother will be back soon."

"Does the sun like a yellow sky when it sets? It sleeps all night in those hills, doesn't it, and then in the morning men and oxen carry it way round the other side?"

"No, dear boy. When it is all dark here the sun is still shining somewhere else."

"I should think it would get very tired. I do, and I have to sleep. If the sun didn't go into the hills, would I have to sleep in the day?"

"I suppose you would. Sleep makes you strong."

"Is that why you sleep in the swing all day—to get strong? Do you sit up all night? Oh!" he cried delightedly, sliding from the hammock. "Here's mother. You may tell me a story on to-morrow instead. Hi! Mother!"

He stood at the top of the steps, jumping up and down like a bouncing ball.

Helen leaped from her horse without waiting for the groom, and darted up the steps. At the top she sat down and threw her arms around the little red-coated figure. "Mother's darling," she cried joyously. "Has he been a good boy and taken good care of his father?"

"Yes," he said, wriggling from her arms—"very good boy. We talked about you—father and me."

"Did you, you nice people. Isn't it a wonderful afternoon, Stephen?" she said, looking at him for the first time.

"Like all afternoons, brighter when you get back."

She smiled at him and caught the child in her arms again. "Tell mother what you and father have been saying about me."

"I told him you love me best."

"Oh, but you mustn't say that, my darling. I love you both, but differently, you know."

"But I love you more," he persisted.

"No, dear, you mustn't say that, either. You love us both just the same."

"Father told me to love you most, and I do." He said it in a tone of finality, as though the subject were closed.

"That seems to be settled, Helen," Stephen broke in. "We must not worry the child by making him decide in a conflict of parental authority."

"All right, dear. But I wish you would not encourage him in such ideas."

"I want a pony," the boy said suddenly, "to ride with you."

“Next year, Harry, when you’re a big boy. Then you and father and I can all ride together.”

Stephen, in his hammock, sighed as he looked and listened. He could think of nothing happier than long rides across the desert with Helen and this child, who had grown into his heart even while he knew that he must divide her love—more than divide it, with the boy. He felt it to be right, this victory of mother love. He did not struggle against it. Rather he felt it to be reparation, in some sort, for all that his long sickness had denied her. So he sat, half listening while she told Harry how she had killed a rattlesnake in the desert with her whip; half sadly dreaming, as he so often did, of their life. His conscience, lately, was troubling him again. In the Boston papers, and once or twice in letters, he had read of Henry Murphy’s success, of his growing importance in Boston political and financial fields, and very recently of his being at dinners with people who had been lifelong friends of the Bonds. He was building his granite tower, and the people who had never had to build were holding out their hands to him.

So far as Henry was concerned Stephen felt no regrets. It was only for Helen’s sake that he was unhappy. When she came to life in her new world

he had appropriated the rights of the other man who had proved himself unworthy because unable to give her the privileges and the opportunities that were hers by right. And now this other man, Henry Murphy, the father of the child, had grown into the power that could fulfil all her ambitions, while he, Stephen Bond, had faded from the world's ken, was good only to sit in a hammock and watch her play with her child on the edge of the limitless desert. He had wanted to save her from the sordid things—but was anything more sordid than disease. He had wanted to show her the fascination of the world, to give her, in Europe, a great social position that stupid prejudice would have denied her in Boston. He had kept her in Tucson, isolated from her equals, the social queen of the Mrs. Jenningses of Arizona, who were hardly better than their progenitors in South Boston. That she was happy, in a mild, unemotional way, he knew. It was all that kept up his courage. She was happy because she knew nothing better—like a child with a battered rag doll—and because she was doing what she believed to be her duty. He had long since come to the bitter realisation of the fact that for him she had little more real affection, except in a motherly, pitying way, than she had had years ago in Boston. It had been for him a lesson learned

slowly, bit by bit, one suggestion after another, each almost meaningless, but falling into its prescribed place in the final picture. The boy, not he, was the light in these dark places that kept her face fixed toward the sky.

But as he watched them, it was their future that loomed menacing before him—their life after he was dead. Somehow that had not occurred to him at first. He had not even thought of death then, and not until the last month or two had it come over him what might happen to Helen. Sorrow—not at his death, which must be a release, sad, but without the poignancy of tragedy—sorrow at the knowledge that must follow. There was the true tragedy—the revelation of himself when he could not explain—the revelation of herself to her whose past had been mystery and whose future would be the cruel lifting of the veil. That was why he had sent for Father Ignatius as for one whose mission had been for centuries to give consolation. There had been nothing of reasoning in this. It had been only a vague craving for props to replace the material supports that were gradually crumbling away. As Dr. Seward had suggested, there was much discussion of the soul and of death. There was also much self-revelation, not of deed, but of motive, and the very speaking out

was comfort. The healing power of the priest was becoming greater than that of the doctor.

Stephen came suddenly to full realisation of the moment, when Helen and the boy stood up. They were both laughing, her sweet, mellow voice mingling musically with the flute-like treble of the boy's. She leaned down, and taking the curly head between her hands, asked, "Tell me, you funny little boy, where you got that happy face."

"I know," he cried. "When I came to you from Heaven I went through a cloud—like that one, over there—and the cloud smiled at me."

"Isn't that cunning, Stephen?" she said. "Who told you that, my boy?"

"Nobody told me. I dreamed it, and it is true."

"Then you must go, now, and dream more beautiful dreams. Here is Miss Gordon with your supper." The child clasped his chubby arms around her neck and hugged her. Then he kissed Stephen's cheek and trotted into the house.

Helen sat down in the hammock beside Stephen. "It was really wonderful out in the desert," she said, "almost the most perfect of all our perfect days. I rode for miles—all alone. I missed you, dear. Didn't the doctor advise you to begin riding again soon?"

"No. We really said nothing about it. He seemed to take for granted that my riding days were over." Helen put her hand quickly in his. "But there is always joy in living—while you are with me, my dearest. Without you—well, the flame burns low and you are the air that gives it being."

"You mustn't talk like that, Stephen. You are better than you were a week ago. And then about my leaving you—it hurts when you suggest such things. What would life mean for me without you—and Harry?"

"I can't imagine—without Harry. Oh, no, dear, I am not jealous. The little fellow—with all his charm and life and good spirits—ought to be the one to keep the world bright for you. I can't do that, much as I should like to. It is quite wonderful, the satisfaction you must have, and that, please God, you will always have, in knowing that just because of you the days of my sickness were the best of all my life. And one other thing, Helen. If the time comes that you think of me as bad, if your thoughts are bitter against me—try, dear, to be charitable. Try to learn that a great love is blind, that even as it grows in strength it grows in selfishness, in utter disregard of all other rights but its own. Even the loved one is merged in its violence—her best being

no longer best unless it contributes to the satisfaction of love's demands. Oh, my darling—you see me now, weak and groping and trembling. Do not remember me so. Remember me as mad with love—mad, mad, mad—and then perhaps you will forgive.”

She had drawn away as he talked and sat staring at him, white, frightened. She hardly noticed that he lay back in the hammock, his handkerchief to his mouth, his eyes closed. Suddenly she spoke. “The horror—the terror—of that awful void in my life. I cannot understand—and then there come flashes of lightning—like what you said now—and the clouds roll in the void—and I almost see. Oh, Stephen, Stephen, if you would only tell me—give me a right to love you as you love me, through knowledge of your suffering, and mine. I hold out my arms to a shadow and it eludes me. There must be a something to make the shadow, and my heart cries out for it. But out of the shadow you come—and you are not the substance of the shadow. And yet perhaps you are, if you would only tell. Have I not the right to know?”

“You have,” he answered slowly, “because my love has risked your immortal soul. Some day I will tell you.”

“Why not now?”

“Because to-day I am not ripe for death—and when you leave me, because I love you more than man has a right to love, I shall die. I am not ready. There is much to do—for you, and for the child. Helen—can you not find happiness here a little longer? Is there not still joy in the desert?”

“There is joy—and terror. Have I ever told you? When the sun is shining at midday and the cacti throw their sharp, black blotches on the yellow sand, I do not go out. I do not dare. I feel the terror of one possessed—and in the dream you are the pursuer—and the shadow that I cry to for help draws away; and once Harry came and stood between the cacti. I ran toward him, and he, thinking I was playing, fled. And I was blind with terror, because he seemed to be the shadow and I knew him for my child. That to me, Stephen, is the terror of the desert. When the sun is high I sit in the house—and read.”

“Strange,” he muttered, “strange. Father Ignatius said that the present existed like sunshine, checkered with shadows of the past.” He looked at Helen. Her pale face was glowing in the light of the setting sun. “But let us forget the shadows, now, my dearest,” he said, rising slowly. “Your

face reflects the brightness of the sky. Please God, some little of it may shine through into your heart."

She smiled at him. "At least I know that you love me," she said, and kissed him.

CHAPTER XVI

"I AM thankful that you have come, Father," Stephen said. I meant to send for you this morning. I have been very sick again."

"Yes, my son, I have heard," Father Ignatius answered, laying his flat black hat on Stephen's desk. "I have prayed for you, to the Blessed Virgin and to St. Stephen, Martyr, he who appears to me your spiritual ancestor. But alas, my son, it is not for the faith you would die, but for the pleasures and the lusts of this evil world." He sat in a deep chair and leaned toward Stephen, his elbows resting on the arms, his fingers tip to tip. His white hair stood out stiffly around the shaven spot on his head. He sat absolutely without motion, the lines of his body relaxed. Only his large black eyes, young eyes in an ancient face, seemed alive with the flame of his earnestness. He spoke slowly and very precisely, careful of each word that passed between his lips, as though using an instrument with which he had long been familiar but seldom used.

"The pleasures and lusts, Father? Does life in the desert seem to you to cater to these?"

"There are pleasures and lusts of the mind as of the physical body. There is the—shall I say inverted pleasure?—of moral cowardice. You may say to me that for a man to make confession is weak. I say that to make confession is strong. It is the acceptance of the greater pain over the lesser. True—it brings in its train peace, but a peace that is hypothetically to be reached through the acuteness of suffering that attends confession, is one that only a strong man seeks to reach."

"Why do you say these things to me?"

"Because you have a great sin that weighs you down, that cries to be told."

"Why do you think this of me?"

"I do not think this thing. I know. You are without peace. When your beautiful wife comes to you the love in your eyes is love that has no calm. When your child comes to your knee you look at him not as a father should look at his child, but with eyes that beseech his pure sight not to pry deeply into your nature. It is as though he were another's child."

Stephen started, but the priest was gazing out over the plains, beyond the white town to the brown and blue hills beyond. "Can you see what others cannot see?" Stephen asked hoarsely.

"I know not what others see. I only know that

with the eyes of compassion I see many things. Has my life not been the giving of balm to the sorrowful, and shall I not see sorrow where it exists?"

"And can your religion relieve such sorrow as mine—such sorrow as you conceive me to have?"

"The compassion of God is past understanding. It can relieve the burden of sin, and the burden of sin is sorrow."

Stephen struggled with himself. The impulse to tell was strong, but the self-repression of the Puritan died hard. It was not of himself he thought, but of Helen. Of what use to her future would there be in a personal confession to this man? "Tell me," he said, groping for an opening that would not be a revelation. "Is a marriage between Protestants valid?"

"It is a binding contract," the priest answered. "There is no sacrament."

"Then is the breaking of such a marriage as much a sin as would be the breaking of a Catholic marriage?"

"A Catholic marriage could never be dissolved. Unfaithfulness to marriage vows would be desecration of a sacrament and would be therefore a capital sin. But, my son, it is idle to weigh sins in the

balance with each other. Weigh them rather in the balance with repentance."

"God knows I have repented bitterly enough!" Stephen cried involuntarily.

"Enough to make restitution?" the priest asked sternly. "Repentance without fruits is the vanity of vanities."

"Restitution?" Stephen whispered. "Can God be so cruel? Even the civil law is more merciful. The thief who steals my money is punished, but if the money is gone he does not have to make it good."

"He must pay to the extent of his possessions, and if punishment bring repentance he works until he has gained more possessions wherewith to pay."

Stephen shrank back into the corner of the hammock. His face was grey. "I should not ask that of him," he said, "I should be ashamed to strip him."

"God asks full payment. When payment is made he clothes the sinner in white garments and makes him rich with riches he has never known."

Stephen laughed bitterly. "This is aphorism. But no truth stands without its exception. What if restitution be death?"

"Then the reward is everlasting life in the glory of Heaven."

“ And even that reward may be mean in comparison with the sacrifice. You cannot conceive it, for your eyes are fixed on Heaven. To me the glories that are bright in your eyes pale before the sunshine of this earth.” He stopped abruptly, and then went on: “ But you will not think only evil of me, Father. I am groping in my darkness and I need your hand—I, a Unitarian and one who calls himself a philosopher. Let me still do my little good while I may. Perhaps it will turn the balance in my favour, and perhaps—though I do not think it—as the sun of this life grows dimmer—my time is short now—I may be able to see your light. I shall never shut my eyes against it.”

“ And I shall pray without ceasing,” the priest said simply. “ Shall I go now? ”

“ No, not yet. Helen is riding, and I like to hear you talk. Tell me more about the Mission. Has the old Indian woman heard from her son? ”

They sat talking for an hour, Father Ignatius telling him of the work among the Indians and with it calling up many of the old customs and legends of the people. He treated them all with quaint tolerance and often illuminating humour. These people were all his children of a tricky flock that he struggled to keep in the straight

to the gates of Heaven. He never blamed them too sorely. If one got drunk and beat his mother, Father Ignatius would seek excuses. "They always treated serpents as holy, you know," he would say. "It is inheritance, the trace of which must slowly be eradicated." Even in telling an amusing story his words were the words of books.

"And now," he said, when the western hills threw their shadows to the edge of the town where the buildings of the University of Arizona dominated the desert, "now I must go. It is a long walk to the Mission where my children always wait for me. And for you, my son, I shall pray, and when the time is fulfilled you will speak, reaching out your hands for the gifts of Holy Church." He held out his hands and blessed Stephen; then, lifting his skirts, he pulled them through his cincture to give his legs free play and turned away through the garden.

Stephen watched the black-robed figure as it passed rapidly down the path between the fan-palms. He felt a peculiar, shrinking fondness for the old priest, whose vision of life and death was so untainted with earthy passion. The eye of Faith! Its vision had the intensity of concentration and its undisturbed joy. Stephen longed for it and yet drew away. Could the glory that streamed through the wicket gate, flooding

the straight and narrow way, compensate for the pleasant, troubling visions of sun-washed fields that his broader outlook caught beyond the walls? He smiled at the thought that he was interpreting Catholic faith in terms of the "Pilgrim's Progress," that he was setting Father Ignatius on the path that led through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where the wornout giant, Pope, sat grinning and doddering at the mouth of his cave. Suddenly he remembered his scornful comments on the Church years before, when he had called it illogical. He was wrong, but, as Moncrieff had said, it was not the logic that appealed so keenly; it was the continual compassion, the stupendous promises that drew him.

Moncrieff had been wise in all he said—Stephen saw it now—a kind of devilish, worldly wisdom, that understood man's lower cravings as Father Ignatius understood the higher. It had been the wisdom of the serpent—too general, Stephen had often reminded him, to be intense—but it had been more than that because Moncrieff knew men with a vividness that made it possible for him to balance, mentally, the ratio between temptation and character; that had made him able to prophesy with appalling accuracy. Stephen felt that he hated him, and yet found himself longing for him, for his acrid com-

ment on men and women, for a touch once more of masculine companionship. He could not think of the doctor and the priest as men.

Then Helen came out to him, letters in her hand, and a package. "Here are the prints, I think, dear," she said. "They came in a box from Boston. I had Pedro open it."

"Hurrah!" he cried. "Let's open them immediately. The letters can wait. Come, we will look at them together. It is terrible to think how long they have been lying in the house on Beacon Hill. I should have sent for them years ago."

She pulled up a light table and cut the string around the package, then sat beside him to look at the prints. He was as thrilled as a child on Christmas morning. There was the joy of discovery, made keener by the new finding of old friends. For Helen, too, it was a delight, since under his tutelage she had learned to share his enthusiasm for the delicate, Oriental refinement of these lovely pictures. Yet these particular prints could never have for her, she thought, the intimate charm of those they had found together. These represented Stephen's old life, in which she had no part. Her only hope was that through them she might be able to live back into that life, thus perhaps gathering another of the many threads that

went to make up the unknown pattern of her own past.

He turned over the pictures one by one, commenting or asking her opinion. "See this one—a real Moronobu. I found it in Kioto just after I left college. I don't believe there is a better in America. If you had only been with me, how much more faithfully we should have searched—and what treasures we should have found. But you were a cunning little girl then—all pink ribbons and pigtails."

"Not many pink ribbons, I am afraid."

"You poor child. But look. Here are the Harunobus. How I loved him and how I love him still. This one— isn't it lovely? Look at the curves—he sometimes attained to the perfect line, I think. And then—oh, Helen—this one! For years I kept it always beside me, on my table in Boston. The young daughter of the house has just finished her morning duties and is looking at a pet mouse her brother is holding, and she says—it's not my translation—

' I've dusted as our mother bade
And yet have left one stain ;
How could I brush the pine-tree shade
From off the window-pane ?'

It is miserable verse—not half so poetic as the print. Look at the shadow of the pine across the pale, paper

screen. And the perfect union of sentiment and execution—simplicity, domestic charm—— Helen, my darling, what is it?"

She was lying back in her chair, her eyes closed, the smooth lines of her face twisted with pain. "Helen, dear!" He sought vainly for anything he might have said to hurt her. "Helen!" His voice betrayed his terror. Slowly her eyes opened and she gazed at him with the same piteous questioning of years ago when he had told her she was to have a child.

She leaned across the table, covering the print with her arms. "Stephen," she whispered at last. "I have seen that print before—in the dead days."

"You have seen the reproduction in Fenollosa's book. Because it is familiar you think it carries you back."

She shook her head. "No, no. I have seen that very print." Her eyes dilated and she stared at the blank wall as though seeing a vision. She spoke rapidly, in monotone, the words forced from her, charged with an under-note of suffering. "I see a big dark room—nothing is clear—but you are there, and the air is alive with passion. Only that print is definite. It shines up through the black shadows on the table. It is the only true thing there. I keep

my eyes fixed on it as though it had the power to save. I shrink from you and then the shadow comes—the shadow of the desert—but more real, standing out from the other shadows. And I shrink from it—shrink and yet long for it. And there is the noise of wind in trees and of voices, and then—— It is gone, all gone—the page that I almost read. Stephen, what does it mean? ”

His eyes fell before her gaze. “I do not know,” he answered.

She stood up quickly and he watched her as she walked firmly to the door. She turned toward him, and he saw that her cheeks were blazing with the first real anger he had seen there. “Never before have you lied to me,” she said, and left him.

He felt as though he was shriveling to nothing in his chair. Was this the end? It was true—he had never lied to her before. But their whole intercourse had been founded on a lie—the lie of death become the lie of life. Not much longer could he play the game. He had no longer any strength, no longer any courage. He took up the print to tear it to bits. And then he suddenly remembered. She had said it was “the only true thing there.” He let it fall from his hands and watched it flutter to the floor, where it lay, shining in the last gleam of sunlight. He

turned to the door where Helen had vanished. It was open, and through the opening he could see the dark, empty room. It seemed to him suddenly to be typical of his own future—the darkness, the emptiness. Through his soul Helen had passed like a flame, and the passing of her, that had been glory, was ending in tragic night. And yet, could it even be dignified with the high name of tragedy? He seized the corners of the table with his withered hands and stared, as she had done, at the blank wall. To him it yielded no visions. He turned toward the desert. It typified the immensity of his desolation, but with a tragic beauty in which he had no part, in which he felt like a shameless, mean intruder. Years ago his sin had seemed to him the fulfilment of the joy of life. To-day it took on the loathsome aspect of a common theft, bolstered up by common lies. And in the desert—there was no hiding-place. That might be found in teeming city streets, never in these plains, pitilessly open to the all-seeing sky—a place where a sinless man might make merry with the eternities, but where the sinner must crouch in bitter communion with his inner agony, until death. To Stephen not even the growing darkness, that was born in the valleys, that welled up over their brink, and that even now, like grey water, was overflowing the plains and

reaching out toward the foothills—not even the darkness offered shelter. When it had enveloped the world the myriad eyes of heaven would open and gaze down mockingly through the long hours of the night, watching his misery. For he would be alone. It seemed to him that all the years of his deceit had culminated in that little, direct lie, and that at last a wall stood between them that neither could ever penetrate.

Unless it were the child! Might not Harry's exquisite innocence prove a door through which might stream from the warmth of Helen's heart a shaft of yellow sunshine to cheer, once more, the cold cells of his? But why the boy? In him Stephen had no part. He was but another aspect of the lie, for him—and for Helen, all in all. He put his arms across the prints and let his head sink down. He was conscious that tears were dropping from his eyes. But he was not a woman. The tears brought no relief. They were the terrible expression of pain too all-absorbing to be longer held in check.

So he sat while night swept up from the valleys. A sudden gust of chill air caught up the neglected letters, scattering them over the grass of the lawn.

And then, at last, Helen came to him again. The touch of her hand on his hair made him tremble in

every nerve. He had thought of her, somehow, as far away, lost to him forever. "I let Harry stay with you because I thought he might comfort you for my cruelty, dear. Sometimes I forget. Have you sent him in?" She spoke gently and the gentleness in her voice caught him before he grasped the meaning of her words. He rubbed his sleeve across his eyes like a little boy and caught her hand in his.

"I am not weak enough to mistake justice for cruelty," he said, and then—"the boy has not been with me."

She drew away from him sharply. "Not been with you? Miss Gordon said he came out here an hour ago." She ran into the house, and he heard her call. "Miss Gordon, Harry is not with his father. Where can he have gone?" He listened dully to the noises in the house, the running of people, the calling, within doors and in the garden. She had forgotten him—at the first hint of danger to her son. His suffering was nothing to her. She came onto the veranda again, a lamp in her hand that brought out all the beauty of her face and the horror in her eyes. She did not even glance at him. She stood at the top of the steps, peering vainly into the darkness, and shivering. After a while the servants came toward her from various parts of the garden. "Madam,

we do not find him," they said, one after another, and the last added, "The little gate to the south that leads to the Mission is open."

"Father Ignatius forgot to close it," she cried bitterly, "the miserable, meddling old man. And you, Stephen," she said, turning toward him, "you sit there impotent and useless when my son, my own little son, has gone out into the desert alone." The very sound of her voice carried in it the terror of the desert, that feeling that is always dormant under the love of those who love the yellow sand, and the grey sage brush, and the wide, painted plains.

It roused Stephen at last. He seized a lantern from the wall, lighted it, and strode across the veranda like a strong man. "I will bring him back to you," he said. Then he turned to the frightened servants. "You men—get lanterns and go to search for him, in all the lands to the south near our compound. "You," pointing to another, "make a bonfire on the hill yonder. And you—ride to the town and get aid at the police station. You, Helen, stay here, and see that everything is done as I have ordered. When the searching party arrives from Tucson, see that they go in the right direction. The bonfire will show them the way back."

"And you, Stephen?" she said, "where are you going?"

"To find the boy." He kissed her and started down the steps.

"But, Stephen—you are not strong enough to walk."

He did not answer her, but pressed forward across the garden and out through the open gate. Before him was the desert, east, west, south, dark, so that all outlines were lost. Only his lantern cast a narrow circle of light. But his mind glowed with the vividness of his thought. Every fibre of him was responding to the call. He was sure of himself as he had not been since the old days before Helen had risen above his horizon. Now he tried to think as the child must have thought when he came out of the gate an hour and a half before. There was a path, a narrow, yellow trail that zigzagged among the hummocks and hollows of the desert. Harry would probably have followed that until some particularly alluring pile of rocks or bit of chapparal enticed him away. So Stephen watched carefully, as far as the rays of the lantern allowed, calling now and then, following each likely lead until it ended in a gully, worn by primeval storms; or again, perhaps, in a clump of impenetrable cacti. Then he returned to the path and proceeded

ever eastward. Once he looked back and saw the quivering signal of the bonfire and specks of dancing light that were the lanterns of the searchers. Once or twice he stumbled. His legs trembled and his breath came in gasps. But he fought off his faintness, for he had a work to do.

Suddenly he heard in the distance ahead of him a man's voice, singing. He stopped to listen. It was unbelievable, a disembodied voice, crooning, as though a lullaby. He stopped to listen with an amazement that was akin to terror. Was he losing his mind? He tried then not to listen, not to believe. There was no light, nothing to guide the footsteps of a man, yet the voice came steadily nearer. At last he could distinguish the words—"Ave Maria, gratia plena." He sat down abruptly on the ground. He could no longer stand. And still the song sounded clearer until the singer came close at hand and Stephen could hear his footsteps crunching on the gravel. Then suddenly it stopped and the vast silence of the desert closed in. But it was only for a moment. The voice called softly in Spanish, "Who is there?"

Stephen tried to answer, but no sound came. "It is I, Father Ignatius," the voice continued. "May the holy Saints bless you and care for you."

"It is I, Stephen Bond," he stammered, at last.

"Ah, my son, is it you?" Father Ignatius strode into the light. "See, I have a present for you. Your little son. He was asleep beside the path. And here is his little whip. He had gone into the desert to kill a rattlesnake, like his beautiful mother. But see, he sleeps still. I was singing to him as a lullaby the only song I know, the hymn of the Blessed Virgin. Ah—how sweet is the sleep of childhood, trusting always in the might of Providence."

Stephen leaned forward, his head against his knees. "I thank God," he said brokenly, "and I pray Him to bless you as you have blessed us. Take the child home to his mother—and then send the men for me. My strength is gone."

"I go," the priest answered, "and I leave you in the care of Heaven. See the stars—the eyes of the angels. They will watch over you."

CHAPTER XVII

"I SHALL never forget it, Stephen—that you almost gave your life for Harry."

"Why not?" he answered gruffly. "Would any man do less for his wife's son. I couldn't let the little beggar starve in the desert. And besides—I didn't find him. Father Ignatius did."

"That matters nothing. You did more than your best when you would have been justified in doing nothing."

"And because I did not continue swinging in my hammock you thought it worth while to nurse me back into my miserable existence again."

"You have all the proverbial harshness of the convalescent," she said, laughing—but there were tears in her eyes.

"You saved my life, Helen. It's yours now—yours to do with as it best pleases you. That is my theory of the reward for saving life."

"It might prove a dangerous theory, dear. A life saved is a gift, a very great gift, to be sure, but no more the property of the giver than is any other present, freely given."

"You think it a gift—like any other? Does it entail, in your mind, no obligations?"

She shook her head. "All obligation, yes, but surely only obligations acknowledged by the receiver. If, after my accident, you had been any other than you were—my husband—you surely do not dream that you would have had any right over my life other than the right to demand eternal gratitude. Death itself no more changes things than sleep. To save from death—why, after all is said and done, my dear, it is little more than instinct."

"But I wish," Stephen insisted, "to give you my life—I acknowledge my obligation. As I took yours and made with it what I would, so you must take mine. In no other way can our account be cleared. Of late the thought has been crushing my soul to hell."

"Stephen," she cried. "What do you mean with all this talk of give and take. We are each other's. Neither would have a thought but for the other's good."

He laughed scornfully. "Not a thought, perhaps—but as to action! There is the difference. A thought may seem all bright and holy—and translated into action it becomes damnable—yet seems right at first, because it is the child of the thought. But an act is never solitary. It sets in train a thousand con-

sequences. Its primal virtue—or what seemed a virtue—is made vicious by subsequent events. I dreamed great dreams—long ago, and the world has turned those dreams to ashes. They have wrecked your life because I did not hold, as I thought I held, the reins of destiny. I worshipped the god of my own reason and the god had feet of clay that have crumbled to dust. I lie on my face at last amid the ruins that I have caused. I crawl to your feet, you, whose life my attempt to bless has cursed, and beg for pity. For pity!" he cried, sitting up in his bed. "For your pity—and you will give it, contemptuously, as I deserve. Your love I have never had. Do not lie, as I have lied to you—everything about me was a lie except my love, and the stupendous truth of that made it false. I leave you soon—but, thank God, with your boy to comfort you in the storms that are to come. He is the child of the shadow and he is true—there is no taint in him."

"Stephen!" she whispered. The tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Now leave me," he said, throwing off the bed-clothes. "Dr. Seward said I might go out to-day. I am going—to the Mission. There is only a short time left. Send Pedro to help me. I must write first. Have the carriage in half an hour."

Helen ran to the bed and tried to hold him back. "You must not go," she cried. "I love you, Stephen. I cannot let you go."

He caught her in his arms and held her close. "You love me?" There was in the few words a note of pleading, almost of hope. "But, no," he said suddenly, pushing her away. "I have done with all that. Shall I waste my little breath vainly trying to blow dead ashes into flame? I am strong because I have work to do. Let me do what I can."

She walked a little unsteadily from the room as Stephen got out of bed. He did not wait for Pedro, but began to dress himself, holding a chair to keep from falling. Before he had finished Pedro came in and helped him to the desk.

"Now, go," Stephen said. "See that the carriage is ready in half an hour. I am going to St. Xavier." He pulled out pen and paper and wrote rapidly. The days in bed had not been wasted. While they thought him sleeping he had in reality been mapping out his course. He had no longer any hesitation. All he prayed for was the strength to continue to the end. His will had been made—craftily worded, he believed, so that no lawyer could misconstrue his meaning. His property was left ultimately to Harry,

although the income was to go to Helen during her life. He did not want to give her the chance to dispose of the principal. But more important by far than any financial arrangements, he knew, was the working out of some plan whereby she might be saved a little of the agony that she must endure when she had to face the truth, alone.

More and more, in these last days, Stephen had come to feel that renunciation was possible, that the last, struggling rays of his life could only fade peacefully into the great darkness if all conflicting passions, all selfish desires, had been swept away. At first the thought of death had been only of the poignant sorrow of parting from Helen; then, as he realised the iron bands with which his broken life bound her, he had unselfishly welcomed it; and then, in these last weeks, had come the maddening realisation that for him death would be release from an unsupportable burden—a burden which would be transferred to her beloved shoulders. To make it as little heavy for her as possible—that was the task that remained, and that must be accomplished, even though it meant that he must die like a dog, alone.

In less than the half-hour Stephen finished his writing, sealed and addressed it, and enclosed it in another envelope on which was the name of Father

Ignatius. Then he took his cane and hobbled, bent like an old man, to the front door.

Helen ran to him and helped him across the veranda. The carriage was waiting at the steps. "Won't you let me go with you, dear?" she pleaded.

"No," he said, but very tenderly. "I have work to do that I can best do alone. I shall soon be at home again, and then I shall have many things to tell you, my dearest. I have brought infinite sorrow into your life. Now I must bring suffering, too, but I pray that it may be a healing pain this time."

She turned away to hide her tears and he bent low to kiss her hand. That was all, except that as the carriage drove away he turned to catch the last glimpse of her white-clad figure on the steps. As he passed the gate Harry saw him, and called out, "Good-bye, papa"—he used the term when he wanted particularly to show his affection—"can I come, too?"

"May, my boy," Stephen called, "not can. No, not to-day. I am very busy. Some other day."

The desert stretched away to the east, before him—the same ground he had traversed in the blackness three weeks before—but to-day it was of all colours, melting into a glorious harmony of saffron and rose and olive. A clump of straight-growing cacti barred

the road with black lines between the squares of sunlight. Among them, in the whirl of orange dust, Stephen imagined, with instinctive shrinking, that he could see Helen's "shadow," that elusive ghost of the past that gave terror to the sun-stained desert. But on—away from dreams into realities! The time was too short for dreams, even here, in the very home of wild imaginings. On then, on toward the grey-white walls of the Mission, so near, seemingly, in the clear, clean air, in reality still so far away.

Stephen turned to the Mexican who was driving and spoke to him in Spanish. "Do you ever dream, Pedro?"

"Dream, señor? Yes, often at night—but more often in the day, when the desert has cast its spell."

"You, too. The desert makes you dream?"

"It does so to every one, señor. There is enchantment in the desert to all who live in it."

"And does it seem to you when you are driving, as now, that you are driving into eternity?"

"Not into it, but rather in it," he answered simply. "Time and space have no meaning here. The bright days follow each other like glittering crystals on an endless chain, and the black nights are beads of jet to set off their sparkle. Distance has no meaning. The rock by the roadside is no clearer than the hill

over yonder under which passes the old trail to Phenix. One is always at the beginning and always at the ending."

"You speak truth," Stephen said slowly. "We are living in eternity. But death—is not that an ending?"

"Or a beginning? I do not know, because I have never died. Not in the desert, I think. Pain is ended, and gladness, perhaps, but not the journey. That has no end. The holy priests tell of Heaven as a place of golden streets and green trees and flowing water that sings sweet songs. To a dweller in the desert such a heaven cannot be. It is too crowded, too noisy. Only in silence is peace, and peace is Heaven. When my wife died, I was very sad, señor. I went out into the desert alone, with water and food. For a week I lived there, until the sun had risen and set seven times. And my sorrow went away from me. It vanished sobbing into the vast cañons to join its sister sorrows. I returned to my home comforted."

"Sorrow—that I understand. But sin, Pedro—can the desert relieve of that burden?"

"No," he answered, "Holy Church does that. But she demands after confession, penitence. The desert gives gladness once more to the penitent."

"I can see that," Stephen mused. "Yes, I can see that. The calm, and utter purity of the desert must give the opportunity for personality to reestablish itself. Among men one cannot grow straight again. There are too many conflicting passions, the past is too obtrusive to give a clear vision of the future. It might be so for me—if I had time."

"I do not understand," Pedro said, as he guided the horses skilfully across an ancient waterway. "But what the señor is pleased to say must be true."

"It is true, Pedro, and is what you would have said yourself in a simpler and better way. One thing I want to tell you that you can understand. Very soon I am going away. I want you to care for the mistress and the little boy."

The man's eyes gleamed. "As though it were necessary to ask!" he cried. "No servant would ever leave the beautiful mistress and the little señor who is learning so well to speak our language. Is the señor going into the East?"

"No, Pedro. Into the desert—on the long trail."

Pedro crossed himself. "God forbid. The master will have many years more with us."

"It will be as God wills," Stephen said. "But now He has left me very little time. Here we are

at the Mission. Stop at the church. Father Ignatius will let me in."

He stood at the door, leaning heavily on his cane while Pedro went for the priest. Around him was the little, straggling Indian settlement, the children, in gaudy rags, playing before the doors of the huts where their mothers sat working over the bead bags and belts that brought them a living. Beyond was the hill where a shrine was to be built and a statue of the Blessed Virgin set up, that in years to come was to rival in miraculous power the wonders done by Our Lady of Lourdes. Stephen smiled thoughtfully. Surely if miracles were to be performed in these modern days, no place could be so appropriate as the desert, open wide to all the influences of Heaven. Our Lady, he thought, would find it easier to reach down from the skies, more a pleasure to bathe her white arms in this limpid air than in the mists of southern France, tainted, as they were, with all the sin and civilisation of the Old World. Once more he smiled at this childish faith, even while he recognised it as being greater in its power than the deepest learning.

Father Ignatius came swinging down the road from his house. He was hatless and the bushy white hair stood up around his head. "My son, welcome," he

said. "It was Heaven's mercy that brought you that night through the desert alive. Saint Stephen assuredly guided you on the path to me. Your strength would not long have continued."

"Much more surely was it Heaven that led you to the child. Helen would have died to lose him."

"No—one does not die of innocent sorrow—not if one has the character of Mrs. Bond. Rather does such sorrow wash clean the soul so that it may grow in holiness. It has been the bereaved mothers who have become spiritual mothers of thousands who would else have been motherless."

"You must know," Stephen said. "But I came to talk of myself, to ask your aid."

The priest's face lighted. "It has come at last," he cried, "the penitence that has the courage to renounce. And you have come to ask my help—the only help I have—the consolation of Holy Church." He put his hands on Stephen's shoulders and looked into his eyes.

"Not just as you think, perhaps," Stephen answered, but his eyes did not waver before the priest's gaze. "Not just as you would have me come—not as a sheep crying to be admitted to the fold. I have not—I can never have, your faith. To pretend to

have it would add one more lie—and I have enough in my record already. Can't you understand, Father? My ancestry, all my inheritance from three hundred years and more, makes that faith remote. But it has taught me much—that penitence is not complete without confession, and resitution. Beyond that I cannot go without a miracle, and there are no longer miracles."

"It is not as I should have ordered it," said Father Ignatius. "But I am an ignorant man and should not presume to teach God. Nor is it for me to try to understand His ways. And yet, my son, I see a miracle to-day—for is not the birth of truth the greatest miracle?"

"It seems to me a normal evolution."

"Ah—so! But is not the power that makes the law of evolution above all miraculous? I care nothing what terms you use so long as the result is consolation. In special ways, my son, how may I aid you?"

"Just," Stephen answered, "by taking charge of this letter. After I die, please send it to the person whose name is written on the inner envelope."

"You are asking me nothing that a priest should not do?"

"It is unlikely, Father, when I am on the verge

of death. The letter may do much toward righting the great wrong I have done to Helen."

"It is the years that are lost from her life?"

"Yes; why?"

"Much may happen in a few days that a lifetime is needed to repair."

"Helen is guilty of nothing—absolutely nothing."

"That I know. Her eyes are bright with innocence."

"It is true—and that divine innocence has never been marred with any love of me. Her service is duty—and pity."

Father Ignatius bowed his head. "I will take the letter. Is there more?"

"Yes—a strange request for me, a Protestant. My confession must be not to you, but to Helen—and before that to God. May I be an hour alone in the church?"

Without a word Father Ignatius stepped to the huge, old, worm-eaten door and, unlocking it with a heavy key that hung from his belt, opened it.

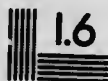
"How long shall you want?"

"An hour," Stephen answered. He crossed the threshold and stood for a moment on the stone floor. Behind him the great door swung to and he heard



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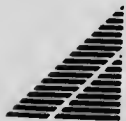
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the key grate in the rusted lock. He moved slowly forward into the nave, breathing deeply of the cool, ancient air, almost imperceptibly tinged with incense and the still more subtle odour of wornout years. A single thin shaft of sunlight fell across the chancel, accentuating the surrounding dimness.

He was not alone. Painted saints and angels, their crude outlines mellowed against the misty gold walls, looked down on him. When he had first seen the church he had laughed, had talked to Helen of the vulgar melodrama of it—all a cheap device to attract the simple Indians. That was just after he had come to Arizona. Now he had become a child of the desert, realising that this church, like the rare desert flower, was an outgrowth of the soil, stained with its violent colours, the hot exaggeration of primal things. At first he had called for a church cold and white and pure, symbolic of the austerity of the Christian faith. Now he knew himself wrong. Christianity should express itself in conformity with its surroundings, clothing itself with infinite variation as man puts on fur in the cold North and linen in the hot South.

So this child of the desert let himself be absorbed into the mood of the old Mission church. And it was a mood of passionate self-abnegation, uplifted like

the daily sacrifice through adoration of the unknown deity. Unknown? No, not to the builders of the church, Stephen thought—rather an intimate friend, understanding them and all their childish devices to please him. So the beautiful, sad-faced angels against the buttresses that upheld the arch of the chancel, bowed in lowly wonder as they held their silk flags, on which was inscribed the "Gloria in Excelsis Deo." So, above the altar, smiling cherubs upheld the platform on which stood St. Francis, dressed in cassock and surplice, his face scarred with the suffering of the world, and yet forgetting self in compassion for others. And in his hand was a worn crucifix.

Stephen moved slowly up the nave, into the chancel, to the very steps of the altar, and there, not reasoning but feeling, he knelt, leaned forward until his forehead touched the cold stone, and at last sank prostrate before the crucifix. There he lay, and slowly, as his uncertainty drained away, peace welled up in its place. It was not happiness, but the dawn of happiness that rises out of understanding. He saw himself, at last, as he was. "Give me time," he murmured. "Give me time. I have the courage. Just one untroubled day, undisturbed with echoes from beyond the desert. Here, in this eternal peace of a

dead world, help me to find my peace—and hers.”
It was the first true prayer he had breathed in years,
and as he turned toward the door he felt that the
saints on the walls looked down with pity and with
joy.

CHAPTER XVIII

STEPHEN walked slowly down the aisle, looking back again and again at the dim chancel, cut by that one misty shaft of sunlight. He hesitated to go, fearing to leave the peace of the church, yet sure that outside he would find the equal peace of the desert, with only Father Ignatius waiting for him, and Pedro, with the horses. They were a part of the desert. His other friends, those of long ago, whom he dreaded now, were far away. And he had work that called him.

He knocked on the door and then waited while the key turned. At first the sunshine blinded him. He put his hand on the priest's arm to steady himself.

"A friend is here to see you," Father Ignatius said. "Perhaps he comes as Heaven's answer to your prayers."

Stephen drew away. "A friend? A stranger to you? I am expecting no one. I want no one. Where is he?"

"He is buying photographs from the Sisters. I could not grant admission to the church while you were there. He is coming now."

Stephen turned, leaning heavily on his cane. It

was only a short distance from the convent door to the church. He looked in terror at the man, and, as he recognised Moncrieff, turned once more abruptly to the priest, muttering brokenly, but fiercely, "Is this the answer your saints make to my prayer for peace?"

Father Ignatius crossed himself and bowed his head.

"Hello, Steve, old man," Moncrieff cried joyously. "It's awfully jolly to see you again—but, my Lord, you are looking seedy. It's about time I turned up—to save you from a lot of old women." He glanced at the priest. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

"No."

Moncrieff drew back. "By Jove—but that is a cordial welcome! And after a man has come three thousand miles just to cheer you up."

"I need no cheering. I need to be left alone. Will you return in your own team, or shall I take you?"

"I shall go with you, of course. I have not come this far to go away without seeing you."

"Get in, then. We can talk while I drive you to the hotel. There is no train until to-morrow. Good-bye, Father. I trust you to carry out my commission. We are ready, Pedro."

"This is idiotic, Steve," Moncrieff said angrily as the horses started. "Have you not yet forgotten our last meeting? We were a couple of fools—and at any rate the woman in question is dead. I am not going to the hotel. You can put me up. I left my bag with your wife——"

"With my wife?"

"I supposed she was your wife."

"And you did not recognise her? Has she changed so much? It has been the sorrow, the misunderstanding, the misery of a lie." He was speaking to himself.

"She did not look unhappy—as you do, Steve."

"Unhappy?" He laughed bitterly—then, turning fiercely on Moncrieff: "It does not matter about me. I am dead—or almost. But, Helen!" He pulled himself together, and continued with a cold, ringing calm: "I could kill you easily, Phil—here, right now. You are unarmed; I never am. I have to be prepared for the shadows that haunt the desert—lest they come to life, to shatter Helen's life—to steal her boy. The boy she must have. He is hers. He bears his father's name—that was my gift and it is enough."

"Are you mad?"

"Never more sane. At the end the candle flares up brightly. You want to go home with me. You shall; but you must know—when you penetrate at last the disguise of sorrowful years—that Helen is pure, innocent. She is sinless as a saint."

"And I know this Helen? Is it possible *she* is not dead?"

"She was. I gave her life again. She remembers nothing—never has remembered. When the bridge fell her life was cut in two. The only past she knows is the past she has lived with me."

"And the child?"

"Yes—Murphy's child. She does not know."

"My God!"

The carriage drove on, tossing up clouds of golden dust that swirled through the spiry cacti, settled over the tufted sage.

"Stephen," Moncrieff said suddenly, "you are a cad."

"Perhaps so. Certainly the name adds no degradation to my thought of myself."

"What are you going to do?"

"More pertinent—what are you? I am going to die."

"Nonsense—you mean to kill yourself after all these years?"

Stephen laughed wearily. "Oh, no. Nothing so heroic as that—just die, because the end has come."

"And leave her to discover the truth——"

"Not that. I may be a cad, but I am no coward now. I had planned to tell her to-night—unless your coming makes it impossible."

"I am going to the hotel, and West to-morrow. Oh, Steve, how could you?"

"It was a glorious smashing of dead traditions."

"But since—— Have you never thought of Murphy?"

"Never. Perhaps you will not believe that—almost never since the shock of knowing she was to have a child. I saw him once—after the accident—told him I loved her and that her future was mine. He said that I might have it. He had her past."

"He believing her dead."

"Yes."

"Good God! What a conversation! And because of that you thought yourself justified?"

"No. Not because of that. I thought I was saving her from a life unworthy of her—from the all-pervading commonness that surrounded her. Nothing is more finally damnable than the constant irritation of unimportant, vulgar things from which we cannot escape."

"And you thought crime more worthy of her—less damnable?"

"I saw it not as crime but as conquest—vindication of the right of the individual to choose. It was all so sudden. I lost my head, as you said I should.

"The right to choose—did you give her that right?"

"No. You are probing the cancer of my soul, Phil, but I think I want you to understand. I put it off until she should have the strength to decide—really, I know now, until she should be so bound to me that she could only decide in my way. She was happy—in a way, and I thought she might come to love me. She never has, but I fought for my dream."

"And yet now you give up?"

"At last my punishment has made me see. It was punishment, Phil. There is none worse than fighting for the love of a woman who can never love in return. Gradually the agony has grown—the knowledge that instead of blessing I have cursed her. And I love her still. You never understood her—or me. In these months when I have seen death coming—oh, I have not whined about it—my one terror has been that when I told her she would leave me. I did not dare to die alone, and that bound my tongue. Now—at last—I dare even that. The only thing I

fear is the lie, my life and hers. That she must understand and she must learn it from me. Perhaps, if she will let me do one good deed, I can help her plan her future. That is my only hope."

Again there was silence except for the padding of the horses' hoofs on the soft road. Suddenly Moncrieff put his arm across Stephen's shoulders. "Let me help, old man," he said brokenly. "I can understand a little—I who have only played about the skirts of love and burned my fingers through my clumsiness. I have dared some things for a surface love. I have no right to judge of the love I am not man enough to feel."

"Perhaps you will stay with me, Phil. It will be for only a few days and I shall not trouble you with complaints. I know now that whatever comes is right."

"Of course I will stay—but—I do not think she will leave you."

"Perhaps not. I do not know. Whatever happens, you will be kind to her, Phil?"

"Of course. I could not blame her if she left. I should worship her if she stayed. This is your place, isn't it? An awfully jolly little house and a location fit for the gods."

"Yes. There is the boy, playing in the fountain."

"And his mother with him?" Moncrieff asked.

"No; that's Miss Gordon, his nurse."

"She was the person I saw. No wonder I did not recognise her."

Stephen did not notice. "There is Helen—on the steps, waiting for me, as she always waits, God bless her."

Moncrieff saw her through the palms as the carriage passed along the white driveway. "A lady!" he muttered, "but I should have known her."

Stephen turned toward him scornfully. "I am glad you realise at last. You were dense enough in Boston."

The carriage stopped with Pedro's usual flourish of the whip and pretence of difficulty with the horses. Helen came halfway down the steps and stopped, looking at Moncrieff with startled eyes.

"This is my friend, Philip Moncrieff, Helen, from London and Boston. He has come to see how we live in Arizona."

Moncrieff jumped from the carriage. "You are not the one I saw an hour ago," he said. "If you had been perhaps I should not have gone on."

Helen smiled. "Oh, yes, you would. We had not been introduced, you know."

"No," he assented. "Of course. We had not been introduced. But an old friend of Steve's as I am—we must have many common memories."

She grew pale and her lips trembled. Then she ran down the steps to take Stephen's arm as Pedro helped him from the carriage. Together they supported him to his hammock. Helen turned once more to Moncrieff. "Thank you for coming," she said gently. "Stephen needs cheering, poor boy. He has lived too long with women. He will grow strong again if he has a man beside him."

"I have always had the reputation of being a cheerful person," Moncrieff said, smiling—"but my wit, what I have, is not the vain simplicity of bubbling, childish merriment. My model is Pope. I have knocked about among people too much to appreciate any other humour than satire. Everything is rotten, you know, really, and my mission is to toss about the mud artistically."

"Yet you are not a good satirist, Phil," Stephen said. "True satire plays with truth. Your generalisations ignore the truth."

"Yes, just now, Mr. Moncrieff," Helen broke in. "There is very little that is rotten here, in the heart of the desert."

Moncrieff laughed scornfully. "I could find it.

No fallacy is more absurd than the idea that social degeneration is confined to the cities. There is moral tonic even in association with bad men. Only in solitude can the poison spread until it chokes all independent judgment. Right here, for example——”

“Stop!” Stephen cried. “Why make Helen think you are what you are not, a pessimist? It is always the old trouble, generalising without sufficient examples to justify you and refusing to see exceptions to your rule, even when they stare you in the face.”

“That’s unfair, Steve. I have recognised to-day two errors of judgment, one as to you, and the other as to—this lady.”

Stephen closed his eyes wearily. He was too tired, too dead tired to stop this futile chatter. If Moncrieff was determined to blurt out the truth he must do it. The end would only come a little sooner.

“Yes, in you,” Moncrieff went on, “I mistook the woman whom I saw here two hours ago for you. I thought she was Steve’s wife and she was not—any more than—well, than you are—my wife.”

Stephen watched him closely. He knew his hatred of sham, his quick changes of mood, saw that the unwilling but none the less true sympathy of an hour

ago had given place to a more normal spirit of malicious raillery. And yet in the essential things he trusted him. Moncrieff might unconsciously make Helen unhappy by his innuendoes. He would never make her miserable by any brutal betrayal of trust. Furthermore, the day was drawing to a close. Already the shadows were again swimming up from the valleys, and when it was quite dark, when the desert was asleep, Stephen would tell her everything. After that? At least Moncrieff would have no power over her.

Miss Gordon and Harry came in from the garden. She left the boy with his mother.

"Go to Mr. Moncrieff, dear, and tell him that you are glad to see him here."

The little boy went gravely across the veranda and held up his face to be kissed. Moncrieff drew back. "I'll shake hands, young man," he said. "Girls are made for kissing, not boys. Haven't you found that out?"

"I am glad you came," he remarked, apparently unheeding, then added, "I know girls are better to kiss than men. I like to kiss my mother better than my father. Don't you?"

"Do you know, my boy, I can't answer that. I never kissed either. He looks extraordinarily like

his father." Moncrieff addressed Helen, careful never to use a name.

The child's mouth quivered. "I want to look like my mother," he protested.

"You don't know what a fine fellow your father is or you would want to be like him. He has never lost his nerve—you don't know what that means, but write it down on the tablets of your memory to understand later."

The little boy looked bewildered. "I can't write that," he stammered, "but I can write cat, c-a-t—cat."

Stephen was listening, but as though in a dream. It was too impossible to be real—this frank talk, veiled though it was for Helen, of a man whose name, like his memory, had been a shadow in that house. Moncrieff was being consciously brutal, but Stephen's vitality was at too low an ebb for him to feel the force of the blows. Only when he caught Helen's glance of affectionate appreciation did he really feel sharp pain. Her love was dead, he knew—what love there had ever been—but this supposed praise from an old friend was stirring to life the sparks in the ashes of what might have been. His mind roamed back over the years, tentatively, vaguely. The pictures had no definite outlines, except one, the early

morning of a grey Boston day when he had gone into Stuyvesant's office and had found the new secretary sorting the letters. She had looked up at him quickly, shyly. He had noticed the glint of the desk light on her bronze hair, the pure curve of her cheek and neck, the ladylike simplicity of her dress, her utter lack of the frightened self-assurance so often characteristic of her class. He had retreated, more nearly embarrassed than he had ever been in the presence of a woman. It was the incongruity of the girl and her surroundings that had impressed him. When Stuyvesant came to him, chuckling over "his find," he had answered curtly, asking no questions. Then he had dismissed her from his mind, because she was earning her living—at least he had tried to, and thought himself successful until she had married Murphy. He did not know why it was this picture that shut out the reality of the desert and the sunset sky. Perhaps because it was true, the prologue of a drama that was not to be, unstained by the tragedy that was.

He found it difficult to keep his mind clear, to answer rationally the questions that Moncrieff put occasionally. His voice seemed to come from far away. Their conversation was banal enough now, discussions that Arizonans can never avoid, never,

in fact, wish to avoid, of the untold wealth of the land, once they have water. Helen was as enthusiastic as a native, and Stephen heard the talk flow on, of oranges, and mines, and ostriches. He watched the last saffron tint fade from the Tucson mountains, and wondered, with a sudden twinge of agony, with whom he should watch the sunset another night. He put out his hand gropingly. Helen was sitting, as usual, beside his hammock.

"Stephen, dear," she cried when he touched her, "how cold your hand is. Do you need another rug?"

Moncrieff got up rather noisily. "I think I'll go and dress for dinner," he said. "Can I find my room?"

"Lucia will show you," Helen answered. "She is just inside the door. Can you speak Spanish? She understands almost no English."

"Enough to make myself understood," he said gruffly. "I am not used to seeing Stephen in the rôle of lover and feel out of place." He went quickly into the house.

"I don't think I like him," Helen whispered. "I always feel that he means more than he says."

"Perhaps he does. But his heart is right. I want you to like him, Helen."

"Will he stay long?"

"I do not know. Where is the boy?"

"Why, Stephen, he went to bed an hour ago. He kissed you good-night. Don't you remember?" Her voice showed that she was hurt.

"No, dear. I have been dreaming. And I am very sorry. I wanted to kiss him once more—wanted it particularly to-night."

"Let me go up to his nursery. Perhaps he is not asleep and I can bring him down."

"No, dear. Don't trouble. Perhaps you will let me kiss him to-morrow." He tried to say it lightly, but there was a note of pleading that she did not understand. "Will you go now and dress for dinner? I shall not dress to-night, but I shall come in soon. Send Pedro to help me—in fifteen minutes, perhaps. I feel quite absurdly weak."

"Do you think you can come to the table?" she asked anxiously, as she stood up.

"If not I can lie on the sofa in the dining-room," he said. "Now kiss me, dear, please." She leaned over him and he took her face between his hands. "You will never forget how much I loved you," he murmured. "Never? never? that love is my justification. This evening I shall tell you many things, but you must not forget. You must never forget. Will you promise?"

"I promise," she said earnestly, and as she rose he felt a tear drop on his cheek.

Stephen lay quietly after she had left him. He was not thinking acutely, but seemed to be floating in an endless sea of placid, sorrowful resignation. Pain and joy were very distant. He heard the faint night wind as it whispered through the palms and began to long for the absolute silence of the desert. Slowly he reached for his cane and succeeded in pulling himself up from the hammock. He tottered across the veranda and felt his way down the steps. He had no purpose except to escape, for the time, from every one, to let himself drift into the profound and eternal peace of the desert where even the wings of the wind pass silently. He opened the little gate through which Harry had gone, long, long ago, and took once more the old trail to the Mission. He felt stronger and moved almost easily. In a few minutes, which had seemed hours, he turned from the path and let himself sink to the ground. He lay on his back, gazing up at the stars. Again he asked himself the puzzle of his boyhood. Were the stars the eyes of angels or were they the light shining through chinks in the walls of Heaven. It was a puzzle he was too tired to solve. He only knew they were there, protecting him, and Helen, and her child.

"Oh, God," he whispered, "enfold her in Thy boundless mercy and hold her hand that she may never fail." Then as the breath of the cold night wind brushed his cheeks, he closed his eyes.

Hours later, Father Ignatius found him, as he had found the boy, but this time there was no need to go for help. He peered silently into Stephen's face, that shone like silver in the moonlight, and in the face he found a peace that was beyond the world's peace. He knelt and crossed the stiffening arms over the quiet breast. "On the breath of the wind," he murmured—"on the wind that was the fanning of angels' wings, God took his soul, and gave him peace."



BOOK III
..
HENRY



CHAPTER XIX

THE station at Houston, Texas, was filled with its daily crowd of loafers waiting to see the west-bound Sunset Limited. Negroes, who apparently had not a care in the world, were waiting to earn a dime here and there by carrying bags that did not look heavy. A few poor whites, derelicts stranded for a space in this thriving young city, which was too active and progressive to hold them long, rubbed shoulders with the blacks, who despised them. Most niggers, in the African code of ethics, were born shiftless—white men became so. And that is a very different matter. You cannot despise a man for being what God made him. You must despise him for falling, through sheer laziness, from his rightful estate. So, too, these very white men, who cringed with uncontrollable physical aversion at the touch of black hands, felt at the same time their own inferiority.

All this showed in their faces, and Henry Murphy saw it as he looked from the car window. He could not endure the weak, covetous, impotent staring of this human wreckage, and with a shudder of disgust seized his hat and hurried from the car for a breath

of fresh air. On the platform he was immediately surrounded by crowds of porters, hotel-keepers, cab-drivers, and creatures who called themselves "guides." But crying that he wanted nothing, that he was going straight on, he shouldered his way through them, and proceeding to the further, less crowded end of the station, walked rapidly back and forth until the conductor called "All aboard!"

Back in the car Henry noticed with some irritation that the section opposite, which had been vacant from New Orleans, was occupied by a man and his wife, old people apparently, who were arranging their multitudinous bags with much fuss on the man's part and precision on the woman's. He sighed as he threw himself into his seat, and turning his back on them, looked gloomily through the window. Since his wedding trip with Helen, years ago, he had taken no long railroad journey. Then he had been eager to "make friends" with all the passengers, to "swap stories," to tell all about himself, his struggles and ambitions. Now he not only made no advances, but drew back when others made advances to him. He had become more reticent after the loss of his wife, devoting himself during the day to business, and at night to reading. He was determined to be what she would have had him were she still alive. He

tried now, as he watched the last outposts of the city melt into the wide grazing lands, to imagine himself as he had been. That noisy self-assertion of the past seemed unreal, vulgar—and so it must have seemed to Helen, he thought. He knew that it had sprung from an eager good-will to his fellow-men, but recognised it now as shallow, closely allied to ostentation, similar to charity that advertises itself in the papers. But through the years, as he had grown more reticent, his sympathy had enlarged and deepened. He did not hesitate to smile or say a kind word where it was needed, but he had learned to respect the privacy, even of fellow-travellers. And at the same time he had begun to cherish his own. He could not be rude to obtrusive train companions, because he remembered his own astonished hurt when in the past he had been curtly repelled, but he held back as long as possible. He liked to think. As the endless plains unrolled themselves he thought sadly now, as he often did, of Helen. How different this trip would have been with her by his side. And yet—would he have made it if she had lived? He understood perfectly that Stuyvesant and Bond would never have taken into partnership the crude, blatant Henry Murphy of five years earlier, and if Helen had lived would he have ever changed? He had been

too absurdly happy in the fulfilment of all his desires to think of change. Even her refinement had seemed to him as only an element in her charm, not as anything that he, a man, might emulate. And so his happiness, that had made him selfish, had made her suffer.

Gradually he became conscious that the man and woman in the opposite section were talking in those penetratingly low tones always adopted by inexperienced travellers who have not learned the art of speaking softly, and at the same time distinctly, in the roar of the train. He could not help catching words, and they seemed to apply to him. "I'm certain," he heard the woman say. "Well, wait till he turns around," the man answered. "'Tain't as though we hadn't all day." "He might get off at the next station." "Guess that's maybe a thousand miles further on."

There was something vaguely familiar in the voices, and Henry turned. "Well, well, well," he cried, jumping up. "Whoever would have expected to meet Mr. and Mrs. Jennings in the heart of Texas!"

"And you, Henry, my boy," Mr. Jennings cried while his wife was still recovering from her surprise at having recognised his back. "You don't belong

here much more than us. Travelling for your health?"

"Don't be absurd, Abraham," Mrs. Jennings interrupted. "Can't you see by looking at Mr. Murphy that he's just the portrait of health?"

"Looks is often only skin deep, my dear."

"But I am well," Henry said. "I am going to Arizona on business and had to stop in New Orleans on the way—which accounts for my being here. And it *is* pleasant to see you again, Mrs. Jennings. I heard Mr. Jennings had broken down, and then, before I had a chance to see him, heard he had gone South. I was much ashamed."

"You hadn't any call to be ashamed," Mrs. Jennings responded. "You are a busy man now and a member of high society. Oh, yes, we often see your name in the Sunday paper—and if you still have a good word for your old South Boston friends once and a while, why then you're kinder than most that gets up in the world."

"Nonsense, my dear Mrs. Jennings. I am not the kind to forget old friends. And it's not a matter of conscience, either. If I like people it is for always. And I was really worried about Mr. Jennings. A man who works night and day for the public good is sure to break down sooner or later, and in this

case it is the breaking down of a heroic fighter. We need him soon again."

"Whist, whist!" cried Mr. Jennings. "Ye can't r ke a pheasant out of an English sparrow—not by using all the words in the dictionary, my boy. So there's no use trying. You wouldn't condemn me to a life of idle luxury, I suppose."

"By no means; but I am thankful that you are resting down here so that you can go back to work again."

"Resting!" Mrs. Jennings snorted scornfully. "Much resting he's done. I visibly believe that the only time he's stayed quiet since we left home has been when he got to the city hall in various places and stopped to talk politics with the janitors while I did the sights."

Mr. Jennings' eyes twinkled. "And then, when I came home as chipper as a squirrel, you draggled in all fagged out. Don't you remember any such times as that, Amanda?"

"Pooh," she said. "It wouldn't hurt your body to get tired. It's your brain that needs a rest."

"Oh, well—talking with janitors ain't such very strenuous mental exercise. But they haven't all been janitors, by a long shot, Henry. These Southerners is mighty hospitable—even if shiftless. And ideas,

too—they have some good ones. Now down in Galveston—this idea of city government by commission ain't at all bad—the way it works out there, anyhow."

"Yes," his wife interrupted. "We traipsed way down there, where there's nothing at all to see excepting the Gulf of Mexico, just to look into a new idea in bossing towns. It was just stupid there."

"I know, my love. It must have been. Why, the town was so clean you didn't even have the fun of brushing your skirts and scolding about it when you came in. Of course I don't know how it would work in Boston," he added, turning to Henry.

"Work in Boston! Well, I'd like to see any set of men that would keep the streets in Boston clean," Mrs. Jennings said scornfully. "What we need there is woman's suffrage. That would clean things up in short order—streets and saloons, too."

"Has the Club taken up that subject?" Henry asked, smiling.

"No," Mrs. Jennings answered apologetically. "I am ashamed to say it doesn't dare. For the honour of my sex I'm ashamed. It's the regular thing for ladies' clubs to disbar politics and religion. They can't discuss 'em like men can. They just get mad."

"And yet you think women ought to vote?"

"Yes, I do. Argument ain't necessary to vote. I never yet saw a man—to say nothing of a lady—that had his opinion changed by argument. It's only use is to make folks more set on what they already thought."

"I remember that Helen often used to speak of that—the fact that women, when they got together, usually talked about things that were hardly worth discussing. I believe that in England it is not the case. English women are as interested in questions of the day as the men are."

"She never was like the rest of us," Mrs. Jennings responded. "I might have learned a whole lot from her, Mr. Murphy, if I hadn't been so chuck full of mean suspicions. Oh, I just hounded that poor innocent girl, and if she'd killed herself instead of being took by God's mercy I'd have just never had another minute's peaceful sleep—not a minute's."

"No, none of us understood her," Henry said quietly. "She was too good for us—I can say it now, without offence, can't I? It seems to me that she was one of those who were born to be of real influence. And when she could not be, alive, she died, and then her goodness had its effect. She certainly has had power enough over me, at least."

Mrs. Jennings opened her bag to find her handkerchief. "You do say things beautifully, Mr. Murphy," she sniffed. "Just like our minister at a funeral. And if it was anybody else than Helen I'd be surprised you hadn't married again."

"That's what he ought to do," her husband broke in. "He's too young to spend his life thinking about influences. I never heard of a family raised on influences, what? And every young fellow ought to fulfil his mission in life by getting married."

"Why, Abe Jennings, how you talk!" she gasped. "And after he's said things so beautifully."

"That's all right," Henry said. "Mr. Jennings is a practical man. He might easily think that I spend my time dreaming over what can't be helped. And I have no more use than he has for dreamers who do nothing in this world. I am not that kind. It was just the meeting with old friends—friends who knew her and who pulled me through those days when there seemed to be nothing to live for—yes, you helped me then more than any one else—that made me talk. It's not like me to do it. And as to marrying again—well, if I can find another woman as fine as Helen, as really fine, then I'll marry her—if she'll have me."

"Huh!" Mr. Jennings sputtered. "A pretty life

she'll lead—being always compared, weighed in the balance, as my dear wife would say.”

Henry laughed. “Perhaps it would be decent in me to warn her, then,” he said.

“I guess,” Mrs. Jennings put in, “that the kind of society lady you'd be apt to marry now would be such as could take care of herself without any warning. And I guess, too, that you know pretty well yourself who she's to be, don't you? I don't take a glance at the Sunday paper without remembering old friends, and it *has* appeared to me that about every time Miss Katherine Bland is mentioned Mr. Henry Murphy comes in pretty close to her.”

Henry was startled and irritated. He knew that Stuyvesant and his friends talked of his intimacy with Katherine, but that the rumour had penetrated as far as South Boston was amazing. He had seen her often during the last year—but he did not love her. She was his guide among the devious windings of Boston society, had pointed out to him the intense in-breeding among the old families which made it clear that caustic comment was always dangerous—since the listener was sure to be some kind of a cousin. She had made him feel at home before her fire and had given him the feminine companionship that he needed to complete his education. She had come to

be a very real part of his life—so real that the idea of marriage, when it occurred to him, was something that could be contemplated without a shudder. And yet he did not love her. He had only to think of Helen to realise that. He was one of those men who might marry honourably, twice, but who could never love more than once. And because to Mrs. Jennings marriage meant, at its beginning, a kind of sentimental crisis, he could not hear it suggested without dismay.

“Miss Bland has been a very good friend,” he said at last, “more kind, perhaps, than even I realise; but I have never made love to her, Mrs. Jennings, and I never expect to. Are you going far West?”

She understood, for once, that she had said too much, and dropped the subject.

“To Los Angeles, perhaps San Francisco. We’re going up through Phenix to stop at the Grand Cañon where, thank my stars, there ain’t any municipal government nor even any city hall. And then we’re coming back by this same route, so’s to get a longer trip—no more expensive than a short one, excepting food, which we have to have anyhow—and so to Florida, where we’re going to rest, and bathe in the sea.”

"It's more famous, of course, but I don't calculate to find the ocean in Floridy any better run than it is in Boston," Mr. Jennings remarked. "Still, I admit it'll be a pleasure not to have to wait till summer for a swim. How fur are you travelling?"

"Only to Tucson, Arizona. It's pronounced Tooson and spelled Tucson."

"Spanish foolishness, I suppose," Mrs. Jennings commented. "I can't see why we don't call American towns by good old American names. It isn't as though we hadn't any. Now, why shouldn't they christen it over again Whittier—he's a lovely poet that we discussed in the Club—or Dewey, after Manila, though I don't think he was so much, after all."

"Perhaps that's what Murphy's going out for, Amanda, to negotiate a new name for the place." Mr. Jennings grinned.

"Are you?" she asked.

"No," Henry answered. "I might as well tell you. Stuyvesant and Bond are going to take me into partnership, and I'm going to Tucson with the papers for Mr. Bond to sign. He lives there, you know, because he has consumption."

"Well, well, Henry, my boy, that is good news. One of the best houses, and you a partner at thirty-

five. I guess you *have* been doing something besides dream."

"What's their business," Mrs. Jennings asked, "wholesale or retail? I suppose, anyhow, you'll be in the office, being a partner, and won't have to sell things."

"Yes. I'll be in the office, Mrs. Jennings," Henry laughed. "It's a stock and bond business."

"Speculating?" she cried.

"Nonsense, Amanda. It's one of the most respectable houses in Boston—has all the old families on its books."

"I don't know as that signifies much. And I only hope, Henry Murphy, that you won't lose what little you've saved by any foolishness. Is this Mr. Bond that you're going to see the one that—that one that you used to know?"

"Yes—the same one. He's been sick ever since, poor fellow, and I don't believe has very long to live."

"Is he married?"

"Yes, a wife and one child—a boy, I think."

"Was she a Boston girl?"

"I think not. He married her in New York. I have never seen her. He married her soon after Helen was killed."

Mrs. Jennings looked at him, then turned to the window. "I do wish I could see a hill," she said. "It's only right to look at the scenery when you're travelling, but it's pretty tiresome always to see the same thing. There seems to be cows and horses, even, always feeding in the same places. If it wasn't for the telegraph poles I'd think we were standing still. It's like some play where the writer didn't have ideas enough to change the scenery between the acts. Not as I entirely approve of plays, anyhow; but if you do go to the theatre you want to see a good one."

"And yet there is something inspiring in the very endlessness of it all, I think," Henry said. "Don't you want to come and have a smoke, Mr. Jennings?"

"Yes, do," his wife urged. "Only don't let him talk politics, Mr. Murphy."

"At least I shall not dispute with him. We agree on the essential points."

Monotonously, interminably, the great plains of Texas rolled back over the edge of the world, only to be replaced by others like them. The train might almost have been standing still, as Mrs. Jennings had said, so like was the outlook from the car windows as the hours slipped away. Mrs. Jennings became

gradually almost frantic in her denunciation of this "stupid country," where she was sure that in time "even the cows and the pigs and the darkies would flatten out and turn green like the rest of the landscape." Henry unwillingly spent most of his time in the smoking car, because her complaining jarred. He felt a strange sympathy with the boundless land that stretched away and away like his own aspirations over the horizon that was itself not a limit, but a suggestion of endless space beyond. The sun went down. It seemed to Henry as though they were rushing onward toward some unimagined wonder. He could not keep his mind from Helen. How she would have loved it—this freedom, this immensity of sky and plain, this titanic painted sky; she who had pined for air and life, between four dull red walls, made purple by the light; she, who had leaned in ecstasy from her little window to watch the pale, smoke-soiled colours of the sunset brightness on the Dorchester hills because she loved the colour. He had not thought of her with such passionate longing for years. He was almost afraid.

In the evening at San Antonio he sat in his section talking somewhat listlessly with Mr. and Mrs. Jennings. A boy dashed through the car calling, "Telegram for Mr. Henry Murphy." He stopped him

and took the paper. "It's annoying," he said. "One cannot escape business, even here."

"Business! My gracious!" Mrs. Jennings said. "I'm glad you haven't a wife. I'd think it was from her saying she was dead, or at least dying. Telegrams are dreadful things, I think. They make a body as nervous as a cat."

Henry smiled as he tore open the envelope. "I haven't a relative in the world, except an old uncle in Chicago." Then, as he read the telegram, his face grew very grave.

"For mercy sakes, what is it?" she asked sharply. "I do hope it ain't as bad as your face looks."

"It is rather bad," he answered. "It's from Stuyvesant, in Boston. He says that Bond died two or three days ago."

"Gee, but that's hard on you, my boy," Mr. Jennings said. "All this way for nothing. Are you going on?"

"Yes, Stuyvesant says I ought to. The widow may need help and some one from his own office should be there to look out for things."

"Will you get there for the funeral?" Mrs. Jennings asked. "That's always so consoling."

"Hardly, I should think," Henry answered.

"They probably don't know I'm coming—and they wouldn't wait, anyway."

"When *do* we get to Tucson?" Mrs. Jennings asked after a time.

"Not until day after to-morrow. In the early morning, I think. To-morrow we shall still be in Texas."

"So we'll have you with us a day more. That's good news. You keep Abe cheerful. Is the widow young? It may come out right in the end, you know."

Henry looked at her sharply. "I know nothing about her," he said, rather gruffly. "I never saw her. Isn't it about time to go to bed? I think I'll have a smoke while the porter makes up the sections."

CHAPTER XX

HENRY thought he must be almost the only person awake in Arizona when he left the train at Tucson. The conductor came up, somewhat sleepily, to say, "Good-bye to you, sir. You'll find it a pretty dead place, sir."

"Not with business to keep me awake," Henry answered. "Good luck."

He felt a little lonesome as he drove up the deserted streets to the Santa Anna. He would have a bath, breakfast, read the paper—if there was one—and then see the town. It would not be decent to arrive at the Bond house before ten o'clock. He might be able to get away the next morning, or at the latest after forty-eight hours. There could hardly be very much business beyond seeing Bond's lawyer.

The time passed slowly, but he was at last in his carriage and driving away from the town. "You knew Mr. Bond was dead, I reckon," the driver said.

"Yes," Henry answered; "I had a telegram at San Antonio."

"He was a good man," the driver went on. "In

a little place like this we know all the folks that's here any time, and he'd been here going on five years—him and his wife and the kid, that was born here. He had a grand funeral. Folks even come down from up Pherix way—old college mates, I heard tell. They buried him out in the desert—near where he died.”

“He died in the desert?”

“Yes. All alone—at night. Wandered off somehow. Must 'a' been a shock to his wife, but she's not the kind to take on. Say, do you know Mrs. Bond?”

“No.”

“Well, then, you've got something to live for. She certain is a wonder. Mr. Bond was a fine feller, but he wasn't in the same class with his wife. She's pretty and she's good. I don't reckon there's another girl in the territory can hold a candle to her on either count. If you're looking at her you just think about how pretty she is, an' if you're thinking about her you always remember how good she is.”

Henry laughed. “She must be a remarkable woman to make people so enthusiastic.”

“Well, I guess! I ain't the only one, by a long shot, that thinks so. I just naturally was took with her because we both came from the North, and she's

been in my home town in Vermont; but even the Mexicans are crazy about her. You'll be just like the rest, mister, when you see her. Why she ever took Bond I don't see, when she could 'a' had her pick—and that's not saying nothing against him."

"Whip up your horse," Henry said. "I am eager to see her."

The driver chuckled as he prodded his frowsy steed. "There's the Bond layout—over on yonder hill."

Henry looked at it curiously, the long, low, white house with its red-tiled roof, the garden, lying like a flower in the brown bosom of the desert. He could not imagine Stephen there. He belonged on Beacon Hill, where, through the windows of his house, one saw the ancient elms of the Common, looked on an almost rural picture, and yet heard from all sides the rumble of a great city. He had not been, Henry thought, a man who could live contentedly in the desert away from his fellows. And yet Stuyvesant had told him that Bond seemed happier here than he had ever been in Boston, more contented with his life, even sick and broken as he was. Henry had found it hard to understand then. He found it still harder to understand now, when the bleak solitude of the desert was before him. Such

solitude would only be tolerable with the best of companions. Perhaps she, this wife who was forcing herself into the foreground of his consciousness—perhaps she had been compensation for all the amenities of civilised life.

The carriage turned in at the gate, passed between the palms, and stopped. As Henry stepped out a man on the piazza came forward, looked at him, and threw up his hands in amazement.

“In the name of all that’s holy,” Moncrieff cried, “how did you get here so soon?”

“So soon? I was on my way here to see Bond on business when the telegram came. Stuyvesant told me to keep on, as I might be able to help the widow.”

“So you know nothing! Good heavens!” Moncrieff looked nervously toward the door.

“What were to know?”

“What’s there! Lord! You don’t even suspect?”

“Nothing! Look here, Moncrieff. I’m not a fool. Tell me what’s up or let me see Mrs. Bond. Perhaps she has some sense. Or isn’t Bond dead, after all?”

“Oh, he’s dead, right enough—poor chap. But I can’t tell you what’s up. I’d make the mess worse. What’s more—I don’t dare.” And then, “Lucia,”

he called, going to the door, "tell your mistress there's a gentleman here to see her—a gentleman from Boston. I'm off, Murphy. The desert for me." He started for the steps, then turned suddenly. "Don't make an ass of yourself. Remember that she's *good*. Hold fast to that—good, good. And faithful, too. Don't forget that, either." He was off at top speed toward the little gate through which the boy had strayed and through which, so recently, Stephen had stumbled to the blessed death that waited for him.

Henry paced angrily back and forth on the veranda. He was thoroughly disgusted with the turn events had taken; with this mystery that seemed so unnecessary; with Moncrieff, in the first place for being there at all, in the second for running away. At the end of the veranda he stopped to look down into the garden. There were beds of blazing red gladioli—"strange, at this time of year," he said to himself. And at the end of the path, by the edge of the fountain, a little boy sat on the ground, arranging pebbles in squares and circles. Henry felt a catch in his throat. "To leave the boy—not to be able to see him grow—that must have been bitterly hard." He took a long breath and turned away. As he turned Helen came through the door.

"You are Mr. Murphy, I suppose?" she said quietly.

Henry stood motionless, only reaching out his hands to seize the back of a chair. He simply looked at her. She meant nothing to him—at least he thought not. Yet she looked like—but no—Helen had no white scar across her forehead. He closed his eyes, shaking his head to clear his vision. He remembered what Moncrieff had said. "She is good." The driver had said the same thing. He wondered whether they all knew, all the world except himself. Knew what? Had the desert driven him crazy?

And then she spoke again, hurriedly, in a frightened voice: "What is it, Mr. Murphy? Are you sick?"

He looked at her once more. "No—no—I'm not sick." He laughed harshly. "I'm just a fool."

He watched her closely, her motion while she walked, as though she were frightened, to a chair. "Won't you sit down?" she asked tremblingly.

"No," he answered, still staring at her brutally. "Who are you?"

Helen started and passed her hand wearily across her eyes. "Oh—the shadows. Why do they come back now?" she murmured, so low that he hardly

caught the words. Then she leaned forward, her elbow resting on the arm of her chair, her chin in her hand, and gazed out across the desert that wavered, yellow in the sunlight. She seemed to have forgotten him.

Still Henry watched her, the lines of his face, growing harder, the light in his eyes more bitter. Gradually, very gradually, he was realising the truth, and as his mind accepted that truth all the sacredness of life, all the sweet memories that had been transmuted through the years into aspiration, crumbled away. He had worshipped a star, the brightest in the pure fields of heaven—and the star—was it only a lamp in the house of prostitution? He clenched his fists—in sorrow, and in speechless agony of spirit. And yet all the while in the back of his brain the words kept throbbing, "She is good, good, good."

"The veil was lifting," he heard her say, "and it has fallen again."

"Who are you?" he cried again, and the agony of the appeal rang in his voice.

Slowly she turned toward him. Her eyes looked far beyond, and it seemed to him that all the mystery and beauty of the desert were reflected there, but none of its cruelty.

"I am Helen," she said dreamily.

He drew back, throwing up his arms with a gesture of despair. Still she seemed unconscious of him, and yet he felt that she ought to stand up and fight for her good name, or throw herself at his feet. "But your eyes are pure!" he said suddenly, he did not know why.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "they have seen much, but they have forgotten more. In the shadows they look for reality—and they have never found it." Very sadly she spoke, as though she were alone, communing with herself. But her voice had in it the old, golden melody that had haunted him through the years, and he could not bear it.

"You have forgotten!" he echoed. "Has God made nothing unforgettable? Is it possible to forget everything—happiness and sorrow—and love? For there was love, Helen. Only death could end that—if even death. And I thought it was death. My heart died, too, it seemed, and then, in the eternal life of memory it beat again to make me more worthy of that memory. And now!" He stopped despairingly.

"Go on," she whispered.

He looked at her. He saw fear, and wonder, and longing in her eyes, and the longing he mistook for

some inhuman curiosity to see fully the ruin she had accomplished. One part of him could have killed her as she sat there, so beautiful—oh, God, so beautiful with the light red-gold in her hair—and so cold. But the better part of him, the manlier, more sensitive part, was still unconvinced, still under the sway of that irrepressible refrain of “good, good, good.” His years of striving to make himself finer, more as the Helen of his dreams would have had him, had overlaid his character with a gentleness that even this misery could not break through. But he could not repress one outcry. “No, that is all—except a word. Then I will go. Thank Heaven that Stephen Bond is dead. I would have had no mercy for him. If ever there was a devil it was in that man.” Suddenly he remembered their conversation of years ago when he had said, “Her future? Yes, that you can have. I have her past.” And now there was no past. He shuddered and put his hands over his face.

She was on her feet at last. “I wanted you to go on,” she said bitterly. “I wanted you to talk of the long-distant past. But of the present you shall not speak. You shall not curse my husband.”

“Your husband?”

“Yes—my husband. I never loved him, but he was good to me—and he is dead. That last night—

before he went away into the desert, he told me to remember, whatever happened, that he had loved me—too much, perhaps. He was going to tell me—all about the past—that night—when he died. And you—I was silent at first because I wanted to know—however terrible, I wanted to know. And then you broke the thread. Who am I?"

"You said you were Helen." His voice trembled still, but with a strange, new hope.

"Did I?" she said, passing her hand across her eyes again. "Why did I say that—to you? Did you know me, long ago, in the days that I have forgotten?"

"Did I know you?" he cried. "Don't you know me, now?"

"I suppose you are Mr. Murphy," she answered simply. "They told me you were coming."

"I don't understand," he cried, and sat down in a chair before her. "What is it that you can't remember? Tell me—the truth. I can't stand much more."

"I remember nothing," she said. "There was an accident; and I was hurt; and I woke up after months in a house in New Jersey. Stephen was there, my husband, and nurses. They were very good to me. He was sick, and we came out here for him."

"And before that you remember nothing?" he whispered.

"Oh, yes, many things. I remember my childhood in Cambridge, and my mother, who was always sick. And I think we were very poor. But after that—nothing—until I awoke in New Jersey and Stephen was beside me."

He leaned forward, his head between his hands. "And he told you nothing?"

"Much. I thought once that he had told me everything. But I was never sure. Lately I knew he had not. He was very strange. He said he knew I did not love him and that he had ruined my life. At first I thought he meant because of his sickness, poor boy, and our living here away from people. But at last I came to know that he meant more than that. Do you know what it was, Mr. Murphy?"

Henry did not answer. He could not. "She is good. She is good." The words kept ringing in his ears and the wild mockery of them began to melt into a kind of joyous hymn. The desert people, who did not love her, had seen it. Moncrieff, the cynical, had been conquered by it. Only he, who loved her—he had never dreamed how much—only he had missed it, and missing it, how nearly he had brought the world crashing down upon them both. And he

had almost cursed her! He sat up suddenly. He was surprised to find his face wet with tears, but he was not ashamed. "Can you ever forgive me?" he said brokenly.

She looked away from him, not to see a sorrow she could not understand, but he knew that behind the tears she must see the joy in his eyes. She only bowed her head.

"I did not understand it—all that you said," she answered. "I was dreaming."

"As you used to do, long ago," he cried involuntarily.

"Then you knew me—in those dead days? That was one of the things I most dreaded in meeting people," she added, "the having to explain. Somehow I do not mind with you because I feel that you can understand."

"Yes—I knew you," he answered, and stopped.

"Well?" she questioned. "Won't you tell me about it?"

He gazed at her, longingly. Her black dress brought out the pallor of her face. She looked tired, worn beyond her strength. He realised that he must not tell her now, so suddenly—and yet he must answer, and he dared not trust himself to speak. He got up and walked again to the end of the veranda.

The boy was still playing with his pebbles. The boy! He had forgotten him. For an instant the thought stabbed him. Must there be anything between them now? But the feeling was gone as soon as it had come. Helen loved the child. Nothing else must count. And then it all came over him with a rush—never, never must he let her know. He must win her again. The second courtship would be sweeter than the first, because that had been the crude man reaching out to his mate. This would be more. Her death had raised him to a plane where he could at last appreciate her as he never had before.

“Can’t you answer me?” she said, behind him.

He turned instantly. “I must have been dreaming, too,” he said. “Something of the past, and more of the present. Yes, I knew you in those dead years, as you call them. Knew you and was very fond of you. And then you disappeared and I lost you. Some time I shall tell you all about it. And now may I see the boy?”

“Of course,” she said, and tried to smile; “the best little fellow that ever lived.” She went quickly to the railing. “Hoo, hoo!”—two musical notes that made Henry’s heart beat at the love that was in them. “Come, darling. I want you to come and see Mr. Murphy.”

"Yes, mother; one moment."

"He always says 'one moment,'" she said, turning to Henry. "It's because his nurse, Miss Gordon, says it."

"Is he like you?"

"Not in the last, though he pretends he wants to be, the little flatterer."

"I don't blame him. Here he is."

"Come, my child," Helen said, taking his hand; "this is Mr. Murphy, my friend and your father's." Henry winced, but her eyes were on the boy. "You must tell him all about yourself and take care of him while I go in to see about luncheon. He's a friendly young man, Mr. Murphy. You will stay to luncheon, of course."

"If I may." He watched her go into the house and then turned to the boy. He would rather have been alone since he could not be with Helen. "Do you want to sit on my lap?" he asked, sitting down.

"Yes, please; I'm tired. Did you know my father died? They took him away, away where the sun goes at night."

"Yes, I knew about it. But you have your mother."

"Yes, and I love her more than my father, but I want my father, too. He told me stories." His

eyes filled with tears, but he choked them back. "Can you tell stories?"

"Well, I really don't know. I never tried. I'll think about it and see whether I can remember any. But you haven't told me about yourself. Why, I don't even know your name."

"Don't you? And I know yours—only I can't remember it. Guess what mine is."

"Stephen, like your father's?"

"No. A nicer name—Harry."

"Harry? But, my boy, are you sure? Who named you Harry?"

"It's a nice name," he answered, pouting, "nicer than Stephen. And my beautiful mother likes it better because she likes me better."

"How old are you?"

"Almost six. I'm a big boy now. I can take care of mother. Why do you shake like that?"

"Was I shaking? Stand up and let me look at you. Do you know when your birthday is?"

"Of course I do. When I'm seven I'm going to have a pony."

"When is that?"

"A year from next February, on the nineteenth."

Henry slid from the chair onto his knees in front of the child. Then he caught him in his arms and

kissed him. "Oh, you wonderful, blessed child," he cried. "And I've missed almost six years out of your precious life."

Harry backed away indignantly. "Boys aren't good to kiss," he said. "Mr. Moncrieff told me. Why—you're crying, mister—I don't know your name."

"Am I?" Henry said, wiping his eyes. "Isn't that silly? You won't tell your mother about it, will you?"

The child looked dubiously at him. Then his face brightened. "No, I won't tell. Miss Gordon says men must not cry, and she doesn't tell my mother sometimes when I forget. Are you very sorry about something?"

"Yes, dear," he said, taking the boy's hand as he got up. "A little sorry, and very glad. Sometimes people cry because they're glad, you know."

"Yes, I know. Mother cried when they brought me back from the desert."

"But I'm not going to cry any more," Henry said, falling insensibly into the childish vernacular. "I'm just going to be very glad all the time—and tell you lots of stories—and perhaps—don't you think your beautiful mother would let me give you a pony when you are *six*?"

"A real pony?"

"Yes, a real one—but don't ask her now. We'll have a secret."

The boy's eyes sparkled. "I won't tell. Sh!—she's coming."

Henry went to meet her. It seemed to him that the black years of sorrow had been wiped away, that the whole world was radiant.

"You may stay," she said, laughing. "There will be enough to eat."

"It really wouldn't much matter," Henry said. "Oh, we have been having a wonderful time, Harry and I. He's my little namesake, you know."

"And he's going to give——"

"No, no, no," Henry interrupted. "That's a secret, you know." The boy crowded close against his leg and he laid one hand on the curly head. He was so near Helen that he felt he must touch her. "He's not like you in looks," he said, "except here." He brushed his hand across her hair. "The same beautiful gold, like a bit of the sunset, strayed into the day."

CHAPTER XXI

AN hour later Henry sat alone on the veranda, gazing across the great, glowing desert wastes. He was smoking, as a man must smoke to reestablish his calm after the stress of soul-tearing excitement. He knew but little—that “she was good,” that he had found a son. He was trying to piece together the bits of knowledge that he had. That old story of the ship which had picked up a man and woman after the explosion, the newspaper report which he had substantiated in New York, but which had ended there—the sailors could give him no descriptions—all this must be the solution of Helen’s disappearance. There had been nothing in it to suggest Stephen. And with the thought of Stephen came a shudder of loathing. He could find no excuse there. Stephen must have known what he was doing all along. Perhaps the papers that Helen was even now sorting might reveal something. He almost hoped not. After all, Stephen was dead, and the only really important thing was that he had found Helen and her boy—and his. He was thankful that he had

known nothing of the coming baby when she died. He lay back in his chair infinitely content as he watched the desert through the pale-blue rings of smoke from his cigar.

"Hello, old man. Making yourself at home?" Moncrieff said suddenly, popping over the railing. "I walked all over the desert, afraid to come back. Then I reconnoitred and at last discovered that you were alone."

"Little thanks to you that there was not a disaster. You might have warned me," Henry answered sternly. "How in the devil do you happen to be here, anyway?"

"I don't expect thanks and I did expect that question. I ran out here to cheer up poor old Steve—thought he'd probably endured the society of women and priests and doctors about long enough. Then he died, and I couldn't with decency run off and leave the—the widow all alone."

"Don't," Henry said sharply. "It isn't funny."

"You don't think so? I wager you'd do *your* best to find humour, even the most distorted humour, if you'd spent the week I have in this damned desert. When you came it was the last straw. I ran. I'm sorry, but I knew you'd see it right somehow, and that means I knew you to be a man in a thousand.

Steve never could have told her decently. How'd she take it?"

"I haven't told her."

"You don't mean to——"

"No," Henry interrupted. "I don't mean to do any of the hundred brutal or idiotic things you may think me capable of." A plan was shaping itself in his mind as he talked. "She is my wife—as much as she ever was and as dear as she ever was. But she has been through a lot lately. She can't bear much more, and she's altogether too fine to be pleased to have a stranger announce himself suddenly as her husband. At first I thought she must never know the past on the child's account——"

"But——"

"Yes. He told me himself, God bless him. That alters the situation. Some time she must know, but not now—not when she's grieving for a man—she thought was her husband. She has all the years of her life to hate him. Let her have peace now."

"But she won't hate him," Moncrieff said earnestly. "She is too fine for that, too—and then—well, she's a woman, and women like incense."

"She will hate him. The adoration of a brute is no flattery."

"Wait, I'm serious now. The Lord knows I've

been serious enough during the last week to last a lifetime. Listen—you've got to hear sooner or later. It won't make you love him, but—well, you're a fair man. I found Stephen at the old Mission church. He was dying, and he knew it. What was life for him? He told me his story, and there was nothing in it but tragedy. Even his love, at the very first, was tragedy, because it came too late. He was going away—for always. Perhaps he went to South Boston to tell her so. He was in the car with her when the bridge was wrecked. In the water he thought she was dead, and when they took him and her on the ship and he found she was alive, the restraint of his whole life and of his whole inheritance gave way. Nothing else counted but that one woman—honour, position—all were nothing. During the months that she was unconscious he found reasons for believing he was right. He even talked with you, I think. But he expected her to die—or to wake up an idiot. In that case he was going to give up his life to her—and the queer part is that he would have done it. She was not an idiot, but she did not remember. Fate played into his hands. The thought of the child nearly killed him—but still he could not give her up. It was he who named the boy Harry. She never knew why. And then, out here, his whole

life was punishment. She was good to him, but she did not love him—and he knew it. Imagine that if you can—the agony of it. So at last he made up his mind to tell her—everything—the very day I came. But he died before he had a chance.”

Henry seemed hardly to be listening. “He was no more punished than he deserved,” he said at last.

“I don’t say he was, but his repentance was complete. He thought she would leave him and he was not afraid to die alone. He found peace at last.”

“What do you mean?”

“He went into the desert, alone, at night—to find words, I suppose, to tell her. And there he died. Father Ignatius discovered him and took me to him. Such peace after the torture of the day! My God, Murphy, if you could have seen him as I saw him there, lying asleep in the moonlight. His face positively shone. It was really as if an angel had come to wash away his sin——” Moncrieff’s voice broke.

Henry was silent.

“All this sounds melodramatic,” Moncrieff went on. Then he laughed suddenly. “Now do you wonder that I try to find humour in everything? It’s the only way I can forget his face—when I’m laughing. He left a letter for you. Father Ignatius had it that night.”

"Who is Father Ignatius?"

"The priest at San Xavier. He must have mailed the letter before this."

"It can wait until I get back to Boston. I'm glad you told me about him, Moncrieff—although what you said does not make me forgive. It only makes me glad that he suffered."

"Remember that what he did was to love too much."

"Perhaps. But there's nothing fine in a love that's selfish like his. It isn't love, really. It's a kind of wrecking passion."

"Something I could never feel, nor you either, Murphy."

"You feel it? No—I don't believe you go deep enough. Nor could I—for another man's wife."

"That's what takes the courage."

Henry shrugged his shoulders. "There is more courage in restraint, Moncrieff——"

"And more things in this world than you dream of, Horatio. Here comes the lady."

"You won't tell her."

"Not I. With all my motley, I'm true at heart. A little chaffing, an inborn love of skating on thin ice, a little innuendo which no one can understand—

that's my manner. And my morals—get all the pleasure I can from life without being a bounder."

"What was that you were saying?" Helen asked. "Nonsense, I suppose, as usual."

"No, dear lady, just my theory of life—and I believe I was saying—was I not, Murphy?—that the call of the further West was on me and that I must pack myself off."

"And leave us so soon, Mr. Moncrieff? I know you came for Stephen, and—I am sure he would be happier if he could know that you stayed a little for Harry and me."

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for a lady—except give up smoking—but I'm not leaving you alone. Murphy is a capable person."

"But the call of the East is on me," Henry said, looking at Helen. "And that is the imperative call of business."

"I shall not try to keep you, Mr. Murphy. I know that if you could, you would stay—for the sake of old times."

"Nor can you keep me," said Moncrieff, "even if you want to. I'm really off for the West, madame. The Arizona air is too keen, too exciting for my temperament. May I telephone for reservations?"

"He's a curious fellow," Henry said, when Mon-

crieff had gone in. "I don't like him, but oddly enough I trust him."

"He has been really good to me," Helen responded, "thoughtful and efficient. He did everything after Stephen died—he and Father Ignatius. I don't know what I should have done without them."

"Poor child," Henry said. "It must all have been very hard for you."

"It was hard," she answered, "because it was so sudden. And I am afraid my disappointment made it harder. How could I think of myself when he had always been so good to me—always, always." Tears were in her eyes.

"Tell me, if you want to. Sometimes talking makes things easier." He was ready to listen and strained every nerve not to show his own emotion, his instinctive shrinking when she spoke of Stephen.

"I don't know why I should talk to you. It is the knowledge, perhaps, that you were my friend long ago. You were?"

"Yes—oh, yes! Go on."

"I had known for months that Stephen could not live long. I could not want life for him. He suffered so—not from pain, but from some past sorrow, something that made him think he had been unfair to me. At first it was not so bad. I caught a look

in his eyes sometimes that frightened me. But lately—oh, it has been terrible. He wanted to speak and could not. He wanted to give his life to me, he said, to do with as I would. That was after I had brought him back from the brink when he nearly lost his life for Harry."

"He did that? Risked his life for Harry?"

"Yes. But still he could not speak. He was going to, that night that he died. He promised, and I never knew Stephen to break a promise. Then he went out into the desert—and that was all." There was a sob in her voice. "I wanted so much to know."

"And you had a right to know."

"But not a right to think of my own disappointment at such a time. The remembrance of his goodness should have been all that remained. My curiosity could have waited. No—what was bitter was my forgetting. If I could forget then, perhaps I may have forgotten when he was alive. His suffering, his belief that I did not love him. Did he think that because I was unkind? Was it my neglect that made him suffer? I put Harry first—always—but I thought Stephen did not see. And the little boy—I loved him so much, and he seemed so alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes. I don't know why. Perhaps"—she

smiled—"perhaps because he seemed so terribly little in the desert. Stephen loved him, but not as I did. And he seemed to have no part in him—no real part. That was because the past was blank to me and because Stephen was sick, I suppose. But his sickness became so natural to me that I did not always think of it. You see, I had only known him sick."

"You were always kind to him, I know."

"Kind? Oh, I suppose I was kind. I'm sure I always meant to be. But he loved me so much that he did not want kindness. Should you be satisfied with that?"

Henry got up and turned his back to Helen. The temptation to speak, to tell everything, was almost too strong to be resisted. Everything about her was full of a mute appeal. The past called to him across the years and cried out that it could no longer be severed from the future, which was but itself grown more comely. Anywhere else he would have spoken. Here, in the face of the everlasting hills, in the heart of the changeless desert, he could be steadfast. A little longer—only a little longer as length of days is measured in eternity.

"Sometimes a husband demands more than he has a right to ask," he said, still looking away. "Love is deaf and blind. In fulfilling its own hap-

piness its eyes are closed with the brightness, its ears with the music. I was cruel, without knowing it—and my wife died. I was cruel in the little things.”

“As I was in the big things,” Helen said.

“Perhaps,” he responded. “I cannot imagine you as cruel. No,” he added, almost fiercely. “You gave six years, the best six years, of your life to Bond. He could not ask for more than that. Have you the papers for me to look at?”

“Yes—here,” she said, holding them out. And then, a little tremulously, “I did not know that you had been married.”

“It was years ago.”

“Before you knew me?”

“Before? Yes—I had met you. I did not know you.”

“Could you tell me—a little, of that past?”

He looked at her a long minute without speaking. There was a longing in her face that he could not deny. “Yes,” he said, “a little. You remember your childhood?”

“Yes—with my mother. We were very poor.”

“After that—you went to a business college. You had to earn a living, poor child. You were Mr. Stuyvesant’s secretary.”

“Oh!” she cried sharply. “Then Stephen was

glad to keep me away from Boston because of that. People would have been unkind."

"Nonsense," he said gruffly. "You were of gentle birth. In the end they would have remembered that."

She shook her head. "Stephen never told them who I was. That was why Mr. Moncrieff was surprised, and you. How did it happen that you knew me?"

"I?" he laughed. "I was not much better off—a struggling young lawyer, with no position. It is I who have changed, not you. Mr. Stuyvesant introduced you one day. I had never met a lady—hardly, it seems to me. You were kind. I can't understand it now—why you were, I mean."

"It was your strength."

He looked at her quickly, but she was lost, apparently, in her own thoughts.

"And then?"

"There was not much more. You were wonderfully kind. You went with me to lunch sometimes—hurried business lunches, for we were working people. But we didn't care for that." He checked himself suddenly. "Then one day you were gone."

Together they sat in silence while the wind whispered in the palms and the far desert quivered in the

sunlight. At last she spoke, very softly, so that Henry hardly caught the words. "I understand—a little, still only a little." Then she turned to him. "Thank you for telling me—and, oh—remember this. It is I who have changed—I must have changed—not you. Shall we look over the papers?"

CHAPTER XXII

A WEEK only Henry lingered in Arizona. He could not go sooner and dared not stay longer. Helen had barely mentioned Stephen again, except when they talked on business, but he knew that every morning before breakfast she stole out alone to put fresh flowers on his grave. They took long rides across the desert, and once, when she was busy, Henry went alone to the Mission.

He found Father Ignatius in the church. "I am Henry Murphy," he said, "the one to whom you sent Mr. Bond's letter."

"Your voice is good," the Father answered. "Come into the light that I may see your face." He led Henry down the dim nave to the open space before the chancel where fell the single shaft of sunlight. He looked at him, then leaned toward him, catching him fiercely by the shoulders. "You!" he cried. "You!"

Henry was startled. "Have you seen me before?"

The priest hesitated. "Are you, perhaps, a brother of—the lady."

"No."

"Nor of Mr. Bond?—but that could not be."

"I am not. Why do you ask?"

The old priest took his arm, and led him to one of the rude pews. "Sit down." Then he went to the altar and knelt for a moment, silently.

"Your face is good," he said, when he returned. "But the face of the lady is like an angel's. How may this be possible if you are the father of the boy?"

Henry grew very pale. He could not speak at first.

"I have a right to know the mystery, for my right to believe in human nature as God reveals it in the faces of men and women is sacred. Speak."

"It is true, Father," Henry said at last. "The boy is mine. I should not have told you, but you knew. The lady was and is, thank God, my wife."

"I do not understand."

"There was a terrible accident. She was injured. She forgot the past—such things are possible."

"But Stephen knew."

"Yes. Stephen knew."

"Then his suffering was deserved. Ah! but he wanted to confess, my friend. Here, on the last day he came here, and was alone with God. He was

about to make reparation—as he could. And then death took him—but the Blessed Virgin is pitiful. She saw that he had suffered and in death she made his repentance complete. I wish you might have seen his face. It would have made your heart less hard.”

“Moncrieff said the same thing. But it is better as it is.”

“Perhaps. Anger, even righteous anger, is cruel. Yet even when there can be no forgiveness there may be charity. Read his letter, my son. It was the confession of a dying man—and try to read it with charity. The lady? Does she know?”

“Not yet. I am going away to-morrow. When I return there will be time enough to tell her.”

The priest's eyes sparkled. “You are wise, my son, as well as good. But some time she must know, that she, too, may repent.”

Henry rode back, oppressed and yet glad. He feared that others, less discreet, might guess his secret, but was happy that he could share it with some one who understood, as Moncrieff could not understand.

Before leaving, too, he discussed with Helen her plans for the future. She was to stay in Arizona for the winter and for the summer go West. He had feared that she might insist on going to Boston, but

instead she agreed willingly to all his suggestions. She knew, he felt, that he had only told her a small part of the past and that she was in his hands. He had said nothing of his return and yet knew that she expected him. Only to Harry he had made a promise. "Before you are seven years old, my boy, I shall come back to see how well you have learned to ride the pony." And Harry had kissed him good-bye and clung to him, the little arms tight around his neck until Miss Gordon had come to carry him off.

So it was over—this new chapter and most wonderful in his life. Henry lived back through the days as he sat in the car, watching the first sun-rays touch the white cupolas of the Mission St. Xavier. And most of all, his mind and his heart rested on this very morning. He had said his farewells to Helen the night before—formal, they had been, devoid of any deeper meaning. But in the early morning, when the stars were paling, he had gone to the veranda and found her waiting.

"I could not let you go like one who goes without gratitude and love," she had said.

They had stood there together, in silence, through long minutes, while the pure grey light slowly flowed over the surface of the desert and the hills loomed out of the shadows. He had not spoken, even when

they heard the wheels of his carriage crunching on the gravel. He had hardly looked at her for fear that a breath of emotion might shatter the sacredness of that overwhelming peace. It was enough to feel her beside him. Only when Pedro had swung his bag into the carriage he leaned toward her, and seizing her hand, kissed it.

And now the train was sweeping him away from her—away from his little son. All that day and the next he sat almost motionless at his window while he watched the deserts of Arizona merge into those of New Mexico, and so the deserts of New Mexico melt into the endless farms of Kansas. It seemed to him then that he had dreamed, a wonderful dream that was the most splendid reality of his life. But now the great peace of the wilderness was left behind, and in the wilderness the dream, and the reality. Among men once more, the habit of years took hold of him again. He was himself, the keen, practical man of affairs, self-reliant, eager to learn, his eyes always open to opportunity. But he was no longer mechanical. People who saw him looked at him again, for behind the honest eyes there was a flame of happiness; across the practical mouth flickered the smile of one whose vision had come true.

Before reaching St. Louis he was planning eagerly

for the future. He remembered Mr. and Mrs. Jennings, and after a moment of hesitation decided to write them. After all, he had few more loyal friends. It was not easy, but he told them the whole story. "And now," he added, "will you add one more to your many kindnesses? Will you stop in Tucson on your way back, to see Helen? In no other way can you understand. Tell her as much of me as you will, except, of course, the one great fact of my life. That she must learn from me—how, I do now know, but if it can be through her own awakening it must be. You are rejoicing with me. I shall think of you—happy with her. And, by the way, Tucson is quite worth visiting, if only to see the Mission St. Xavier. Father Ignatius there is a friend of mine and of hers. Don't misjudge him because he wears a cassock. And kiss the child for me—over and over again. You will not be able to help it, anyway."

Then he wrote to Helen. It was not the first time. There seemed so much to say of the deserts and of the people standing in the crude stations, and of her, and of the boy. He told her of his letter to Mrs. Jennings. "She is a common woman with a kind heart and a noble husband. You will seldom see her when the time comes for you to return to Boston. And for that reason you may think it strange

that I want you to know her. But I do, and much more I want her to know you. Will you trust me to see for you this time?" Then he told her about Mr. and Mrs. Jennings, their peculiarities and the fine qualities that he feared she might miss under the superficial vulgarity; and about the Club. There was no difficulty in writing. The only trouble was to come to an end.

In St. Louis he found letters from Boston waiting. In the heavy envelope from Stuyvesant and Bond's office was the letter from Tucson, and next it a square, lavender note mailed only two days before in Boston. More on account of these two envelopes than any real desire for solitude he changed from his section into the stateroom.

But the train was well on its way before he broke the seals. Toward both, the letter forwarded by Father Ignatius and the scented missive from Katherine Bland, he felt a curious repugnance. One must inevitably tear open old wounds—he wanted only to forget Stephen. The other brought back into his life a woman who, for her sake, if not for his, he thought, should never have been there.

He opened Stephen's letter first and read it mercilessly, his teeth clenched. Then he folded it precisely and put it into his pocketbook. There was

nothing he had not known, nothing he could forgive. But as he sat staring out over the snow-dotted fields, he felt in spite of himself a kind of savage pity for this weakling, this creature whom generations of virtue had made vicious. Stephen's "strength," his belief that he was "reconquering the freedom of his primeval ancestors," all this seemed to him the boasting of a madman who was afraid frankly to admit himself a sinner. And yet, at the end, Stephen had confessed his sin, admitted it with profound sorrow. It had brought him, in the final count, no joy. He did not ask forgiveness. He only begged for Helen, and that was what seemed to Henry so bitter, so unendurable. What right had this man to ask favours for her? How did he dare to suggest that she needed an advocate? Should a sinner plead for a saint? But Henry was too honest with himself to ignore the pathos of the letter. One sentence kept ringing in his mind. "I had everything—except Helen. And without Helen everything was nothing." That was true, true. Had he not realised it all these years while all the good things of life came to him, tasteless, meaningless, because she was not there to share them? Nor did he read any sophistry into the letter. It was too clearly a death-cry to sound any note but that of passionate truth. Stephen

asked no forgiveness for himself, only for Helen, who needed none; for himself, he evidently knew, no mortal forgiveness was possible. Never once did he ask it, and the only plea—that not uttered, but only implicit, was that she should not be made to think more hardly of him than she must. Henry shrugged his shoulders wearily. Helen was infinitely kind, but she would not let excess of love, selfish, cruel love, blind her to the truth. Katherine Bland might do that—Katherine, who had longed for love and had never found it, who had dreamed of passion and had been offered marriage because she was rich and had social position.

He tore open her note somewhat angrily. He had no interest in her, now, and the interest of a month ago seemed in retrospect perfunctory and casual. But the delicate perfume of the paper recalled her vividly. It was not really a perfume that could be defined as such—rather was it cessation of other smells, as though a breath of mountain air, pungent with the intangible odour of open pastures, had cut suddenly across a city street. Henry sighed and read.

“DEAR HENRY: I have missed you sadly—not because you were gone but because people are such tiresome creatures. They ask me what I hear from you—and I have not heard. Of course they don't

believe it, all of which bores me. Mr. Stuyvesant made love to me at dinner last night—he is perennially young—and told me that you would be back on Wednesday. Come to see me that evening. I need a bit of desert air, much as I should hate it in large doses. Sincerely,

KATHERINE.

“P. S.—It was very sad about Stephen, I suppose. Somehow it didn't touch me—much. He had drifted away so far from everything that concerns us. But I do want to hear about his wife. She was always mysterious, and I suppose that with the mystery gone she will prove as banal as all the rest. Still, I want to know about her. One more illusion gone won't matter. I wish some one would do something really exciting to think about. K.”

That was all. There was nothing of the slightest importance in the ultimate scheme of things, and the train was racing across the thickly populated state of Illinois. Yet here was the picture of a woman for whom life held no dreams—sad, the saddest thing in the whole circle of existence. She was holding out her hands to Henry in one last pitiful request that she might have a little of the truly vital happiness of the world. And the very fulness of his own joy made the request impossible to grant.

He turned resolutely to his batch of business papers. In the days when there had been no hope for

him work had saved him. But now it was not his sorrow he was fighting. It was rather that his happiness might not make him blind. Katherine's face kept appearing. He could not shut it out. Her problems were heavy on him as well as his own, and Helen's, which were but another aspect of his own.

So the hours dragged, night was torture, and it seemed months before the golden dome of the Boston State House glowed at last through the afternoon mist.

Henry went directly to the office, where he found Stuyvesant. "Good to see you, old man. I was beginning to find sole tenure irksome. Beastly sad about Steve, wasn't it. Hard he couldn't even live to see you."

"He wouldn't have wanted to. Life had nothing for him. Death, I imagine, was the most welcome change that he could have had."

"Good Lord! I knew he was sick—suffering, most likely. But he had his wife and his kid. Or were they an impossible pair?"

"He had neither wife nor child."

"Had no—— Good Lord, Murphy, are you drunk or haven't you been in Arizona all these days?"

"I can only repeat what I said."

"Well, you needn't," Stuyvesant said angrily, "un-

less you will tell me what in the devil you are talking about."

Henry took out Stephen's letter. "I don't feel up to it," he said. "I'm tired, and want a bath. This will explain. I sha'n't show it to any one else, but you have a right to see it. I shall be in my rooms at eleven o'clock to-night if you want to see me. I don't need to ask you to say nothing of the letter or its contents."

"All this mystery seems moderately silly. But have your own way. "Only," he called, as Henry opened the door, "I can't go to your rooms. I'm booked for the opera."

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN Katherine Bland reached the age of twenty-five, and her mother, whose health had broken under the strain of a quarter century of almost uninterrupted social gaiety, refused any longer to keep house and took an apartment on Commonwealth Avenue, Katherine had rebelled against being "cooped up," as she expressed it, "with querulous parents," and had compromised by taking her own apartment just below them. She was thus "under the shadow of the parental wing," but was still able to lead her own independent life. And independent it certainly had become during the last four years. From an unsophisticated girl she had developed into a sophisticated and consciously unconventional woman. As a girl she had lived in a world of romance, and as a woman she was a brutal realist. Because her dreams had not come true she almost believed that all dreams were lies.

On this Wednesday evening she lay back in her chair, actually dreaming again, and the old habit brought some of the glow back into her pale cheeks.

Her dinner gown was of delicate lavender, trimmed with silver lace, and the chair in which she sat was upholstered in old, black, stamped leather. The contrast was startling, but supremely effective, and Katherine never missed effects. She watched the hands of the clock as they approached nine. Henry would come almost before the quiver of the stroke had died away. That was one of the surprises of the man, the fact that he was always punctual. A year ago, when she had met him, it had irritated her. It seemed one of the many indications of lack of imagination on his part, a stain of the past that still clung to him. But she had soon learned to distinguish between traits of his character and of his training, and, as she knew him better, had come to reverence the former—even his faults—as she set herself to eradicate the latter. Only a few days previously Stuyvesant had complimented her on having “created a gentleman.” “But no,” she had protested with a sincerity that had startled her partner—“But no, I have not created a gentleman. I have only pulled off some of the awkward garments that hid him from undiscerning eyes.” She had been keenly interested in her experiment, and then Henry had gone away, and she had suddenly become aware of herself through her own loneliness. All these years

she had waited for a fairy prince to come to her from the skies, to hang ropes of pearls around her neck, and to carry her off in his golden chariot. And instead had come a plain man of the people for her to educate, and she wanted no better chariot than a common cab—so long as he carried her off.

"Mr. Henry Murphy, Miss Bland," the maid said.

Katherine looked at the clock. It had just struck the hour and she had not heard. She did not rise as Henry came in, merely held out her hand and smiled at him. "The West has not made you unpunctual. Will you smoke?"

"Thank you." He took a cigar from the box on her table. "Shall I light your cigarette?"

"No. I have been smoking. Besides, you don't like women who smoke."

"That is not fair. I like women I am fond of not to smoke."

"Do you want me to stop?"

"I think you do it too much for your health."

"Do you want me to stop?"

"It seems to me purely a matter of health," he said, smiling. "And it does not suit the outdoor freshness of your rooms. I noticed the perfume when I opened your letter on the train. It is curi-

ously unlike you. I think of you rather with the odour of violets and hothouse flowers."

"It is a relic of my youth," she said. "It makes people forget that I am growing old. When I am alone—well, then I fill the room with gardenias and burn a thin stream of incense. It really suits me better, as you say, and when all my hope is gone, when I am willing that people should take me for an old maid, then I shall have gardenias always. The perfume of youth will give way to the cloying sweetness of middle life that must fascinate, like a chorus girl, by means of the externals. Then, my friend, you may find gardenias here. But not till then. Are you glad to be at home?"

"Yes, because I have work to do and yet no—because there is a freedom in the deserts that I have always longed for."

She looked at him closely. "It was sad about Stephen."

"Why? You said it did not touch you—his death."

"I said not *much*. I wanted to marry him at one time. Indeed, I think I always wanted to marry him after we were children. We spent the night once in the woods together and watched the sun rise. He was thirteen and I was ten. Before we had

breakfast, I remember, he went off through the woods and had a swim. I can feel the touch of his wet hair on my cheek as he kissed me, now. Then I sprained my ankle and he carried me home."

"But you did not marry him."

"No. He loved me—a little. But my mother laid her trap for him too openly. Stephen was never one to be caught."

"Not unless he loved greatly."

"What do you mean? Or perhaps I know. Let me tell you another incident that I remember. It was the last time I saw him. I had been dining alone with Sally Fisher and was crossing the Common on my way home. I met Stephen, who was wild-eyed and strange. He had been dining with a woman somewhere—I remember I was startled to find he was that kind. It was the breaking of one of my most cherished illusions. He talked incoherently, but I gathered that he was asking me to solve some great social problem—whether the man who started at the bottom of the ladder could ever build for himself a social position that could place him on an equal footing with those of us who were gently born. I told him that it was not possible. I was young then, and had not thought. The next day he went away."

"So you, too! You, too, had your part in it all."

"In what? You are breaking your cigar, Henry."

He tossed it into the fire. "Bond had been dining with my wife."

"Oh, I am so sorry."

"You need not be—not in that way. I knew all about it, insisted on it, in fact."

"He must have married immediately afterward."

"No. He was a man who could love once only. He loved my wife."

"And after she was killed he could not come back. Poor Stephen! But I thought he was married. I have heard he had a wife and child—Oh!" she cried, looking at Henry. "It could not have been——"

"Yes," he answered, "my wife and my child were with him when he died."

"How terrible!"

"No, I will tell you about it." She sat listening, losing not an expression on his face as he told his story. She felt herself in the grip of a growing terror, but could not give up hope.

"I feel still that it is horrible for you," she said at last, tremblingly.

"Why?"

"Oh—the shock of it all—the publicity. You will get a divorce, of course."

“Why? Has she done anything to deserve such treatment?”

“No, of course not. But surely you are free. You have outgrown her. You can't go back in life—tie yourself to a common woman—fall again into the position of six years ago.” Henry got up from his chair and walked across the room. “It is quixotic. I know your chivalry, how good you are, but you must think of yourself. What would Mr. Stuyvesant think—his secretary!”

Henry stood in front of her. “What reason can you give?” she added, her words almost inaudible.

“The one real, great, eternal reason,” he said sternly. “Because I love her. Because I have always loved her and always shall—her and no one else.”

Katherine bowed her head into her hands, seemed to crumple in her chair, and Henry, standing over her, looked down on her black hair, where a single diamond ornament, trembling, gave focus to his vision. “I love her,” he continued sternly, “because when I was struggling she helped me to rise and blessed me with her love. She was born a lady and her troubles never roughened the surface. When I married her she suffered because I did not understand her point of view, because I was too crude to see her

as she really was. Now I can make her happy—thanks to what I have learned, and thanks, most of all, to you.” He saw her shiver. “You were right—what you said to Stephen—that the man who starts at the bottom can never reach the position of those who are gently born, your place and Helen’s. But his children can—in this country, thank God. I can only worship her and work for Harry.”

Katherine raised her head. Her face was paper-white except for two burning spots on her cheeks. Her eyes looked like ashes under which the fire still glowed. “Can you forgive me?” she whispered.

He leaned down and took her hands in his and kissed them.

Then she went on. “I have no shame, Henry. All my life I have longed for a fairy-prince and I thought I had found him. He belonged to another woman. What colour is her hair, Henry?”

“Red-gold.”

“I thought so—and mine is black. My dreams are over now—but I love you, dear, and because of that I will help you. Only tell me what to do. It cannot be too hard. And then, perhaps, by-and-by, I shall marry Moncrieff,” she laughed. “Two such cynics as we—well, we should save each other

from making others unhappy. Kiss me, now, please—Helen would not mind—and then go. I am very tired.”

Henry drew her up from her chair and kissed her. He could hardly see her. Then he dashed from the room, but as he reached the door he heard her say, “God bless you.”

He walked rapidly down Commonwealth Avenue, taking long breaths of the cold night air. He could not know that she was lying face-downward on her sofa, sobbing as though her heart would break. He did know that even in her suffering she would be his friend, and for that was glad he had told her.

In his rooms he found Stuyvesant waiting for him. “I thought you were at the opera.”

“Opera be hanged! I went to my dinner because nothing short of death should break a dinner engagement. But, my heavens, man, when a fellow has just read a dying confession that proves his best friend a scoundrel, he can’t sit through three acts of idiocy set to a more or less tuneful accompaniment. Do you mean to tell me that until she saw you, your wife that was didn’t know that she had been breaking all the laws?”

“She doesn’t know it now.”

“But, good Lord, she’s got to know it some time.

I say, old man, it must have been something of a shock to you."

"It was. The luck was that I didn't quite make a fool of myself and spoil everything at once."

"Spoil everything? It's pretty thoroughly spoiled now, I should think. How are you going to dispose of her?"

"Dispose of her? What do you mean? One doesn't dispose of one's wife."

"You don't mean to say you are going to take up with her again?"

"What else could I mean? She is as innocent as I am—and, what's more, I happen to love her."

Stuyvesant whistled. "Of all the—you'll have to tell Katherine Bland."

"I have told her."

"You don't waste time, do you? Poor Katherine—if I weren't such a confirmed bachelor I'd marry her myself."

"She wouldn't have you."

"Possibly. She's a queer one—but pathetic just now. Always has been, I think, and this must have hit hard all around. Did you know she used to be in love with Steve? Damn him. Why couldn't he let a respectable family name rest clean as it always had been? He was the very last one, too. They're

all dead now—the Bonds. Died out like so many of our old New England families. It will save a beastly contest over the will. I suppose he left everything to her.”

“Yes. That’s the hardest thing to swallow. You are trustee. The will was probated in Arizona. By the way, I have a letter to you from him. I forgot it this afternoon.” He went to his bedroom and returned immediately.

Stuyvesant tore open the envelope. “You know,” he said, “I’ve never been what they call a saint. But this—the whole thing so cold-blooded—I mean as time went on. It makes me crawl to touch his writing even. This is probably meant for you as much as for me.” He read aloud. “‘Yesterday I made my will, leaving everything to my wife and child. I have no wife, no child, but if ever the will should be contested I wish this statement to be conclusive as to its meaning. By my wife I mean Helen Smith Murphy, who has lived with me as my wife for five years, not knowing that she had a husband. By my son I mean her son, Harry Murphy, who has been my great consolation in these days of sickness. I pray God to make her life, which I have done my best to ruin, as noble in its later years as it has been in its earlier, and that my fortune may bring her what happiness it may.

I trust you, as my friend and the executor of my will, to see that its provisions are carried out as I meant them.' By gad, he's had it witnessed. He has done his best, poor fellow. Your wife is one of the richest women in Boston, Murphy."

"Yes. The income she can give away. The principal must go eventually to Harry. I shall not mind that so much. Now as to the future. What am I to do?"

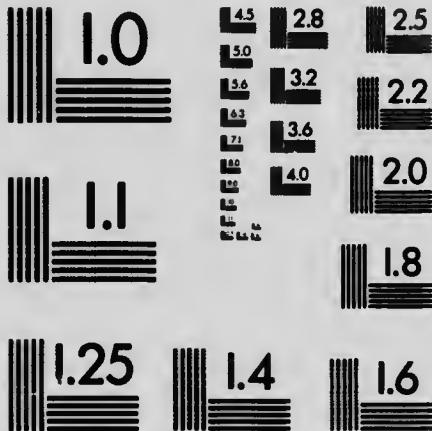
Stuyvesant looked at him and a queer smile played over his face. "I think that that you'll have to settle yourself, old man. I'm neither a divorce court nor a matrimonial agency. Katherine might help you. The quickest cure for her would be just that probing of the wound. She's queer, but her heart is in the right place—if she has any left. If not, her wit will pretty well supply the deficiency. Think it over. I am going to the Club to drink at least ten long Bourbon highballs and curse the world for upsetting itself. It had no right—at its age and mine. Some day you must tell me about what happened in Arizona. Not now—I should just swear. And if Katherine is obstreperous let me know."

Henry threw off his coat and waistcoat, and, lighting a pipe, sat down before the fire. "Poor Katherine!" he thought, and the world seemed very



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strange, a topsy-turvy universe where it was hard to believe that "all things work together for good." Helen, cursed by too much love, Katherine by lack of it. And why? God knew. Both were good to look upon, both had intellect, both had that strange fascination that is sometimes the dower even of ugly women—charm. Katherine had them all in greater measure, even, than Helen—and yet—he did not love her; Stephen, also, had not loved her; no man had ever loved her as two had loved Helen. She would not marry Moncrieff, he was sure. That binding of a restless mind to a restless body could only bring disaster. No, she would live her lonely life, a factor in the world's eager search for diversion, herself diverting, but never amused. He saw the dead years stretching before her, and the years were like the desert, and Katherine a gay, sad flower lying there, tossed by the winds, shrinking from the soil that would give her life, and drooping, drooping very slowly, and bravely, and beautifully until the winds carried her away, into the dark cañons where the souls of the sorrowful weep together. And nothing would be left but a perfume—the treasured memory of the wild freshness of her youth.

He was dreaming. Never had it happened before—this seeing visions in the night. And he knew

that the sad dream of another woman came, through space, from Helen. For she was in the desert, and she drew her life from the elemental soil from which Katheine shrank daintily away. Was this an answer to his question?

CHAPTER XXIV

TUCSON, ARIZONA, Feb. 25.

MY DEAR MR. MURPHY:—Here Mr. Jennings and I are with your beautiful wife. If ever there was a hard-used angel it is surely her. Since receipt of your letter I have not had time to write, what with the powerful excitement and the job of getting Mr. Jennings to leave Los Angeles *at once*. What is corrupt city government to me, says I, in collusion with a lady in distress. Nothing, I answered myself, we leave Los Angeles to-day, and if you can't get a berth I can, if we have to go in two uppers. Mr. Jennings went to the depo and came back with nothing. Then I went and I was real cross with that poor young man behind the wicket, although it was not his fault that we had to waste a whole day. Then I tried to write you, but my pen kept getting broke so with anger about *that man* that I even forgot my spelling and had to give it up. As president of a Literary Society I could not send a miss-spelled letter. Well on the next day we left without Mr. J reforming Los Angeles. They say that means the Angels, but I guess the folks that made out the hotel-prices were no very close relations to the founders. My, but that train was slow. We were due to arrive in Tucson (I wish they would spell it the way

they say it) at six a. m. I was up and dressed by five and we did not arrive until 10 a. m. and I would not have breakfast because I was afraid we might not have time to finish and we had spent enough money at that hotel not to want to waste any more. Will you believe it Helen was at the station to meet us in a cunning carriage with two black horses. I told her it was mortal cruel to cut their tails, but she said she did not do it. Sometimes she doesn't answer questions as I would like but I wouldn't let that prejudice me to one that's been through what she has and more to come. About the boy I have nothing to say but good. The little lamb! His cunning face and bright eyes and looking just like his daddy all just made me want to cry and I kissed him so hard that his cheek hurt so he had to have his mother kiss it again. I ain't going to say anything about Mr. Bond. I only wish he'd been the man I said those things to in the park instead of that Englishman. He was just a snake that God forgot to take the legs off of, I guess. Helen showed us his grave and I most screamed I wanted so to do something degraded to it. It has a white cross on it that seems to me not right even if that Father at the Mission says it is, being a sign of suffering. If *that man* suffered I'm glad of it and I would not say that about a porcupine. I won't say a word about the country either. There's fresh air aplenty, but so is there in South Boston when the wind's right. And we don't have to look at sand all day. The doctor came to

call yesterday before supper and he just raved about the view. Now what is there in it? says I. Nothing but sand and some places the Creator of us all has raised it up higher than other places. I can see all the sand I want on the beach at home and water to go with it as is proper. He looked kinder surprised but I guess he was only saying it to make himself feel contented with his lot. There's a great deal in being cheerful under adversaries, even sand. But here I've been running on and using up all of Helen's paper and not saying what I set down to say at all. She loves you. I'm sure of it and I don't know what to think about it. In the first place it doesn't seem hardly decent for her to be loving with what she believed was her husband hardly cold yet. And in the second place if she didn't love you I would think her natural instinct was dead in her. Mr. Jennings says its that and I guess he is about right for once. Only it all goes to show she *could not* have loved *that man*. I am telling you this because you will want to marry her again or something as soon as he has been out of the way long enough so folks won't talk and because it's just as bad for her to be living in this pesky place as it is for you to be eating your heart out (I always did think that was a foolish remark) about her in Boston. Mr. J. is fretting to go so I suppose we must in a day or two and I am willing now I have seen her and am in a torment all the time for fear I will say something I oughtnt to. If there was politics in Tucson I suppose we would stay

a month, and I could not hold out all that time. When we get to Boston we will see you right away and you can depend on us. I haven't written to any of my friends about it, only as a queer story I heard.

Yours truly,

AMANDA JENNINGS.

Henry read the letter with some amusement, some trepidation, and profound happiness. It told him nothing that he did not really know, but it was still a relief to be assured that Helen loved him. The scruples of Mrs. Jennings as to her right to love him so soon he could explain to himself by the fact that she had always loved him. Stephen she had cared for, nursed, respected, but, after all was said, he had merely floated on the surface of the deep current of her love.

Much time, since this letter, as measured by days and longing, had passed since he left Arizona. Much more must pass before he could return. Outwardly he had been caught up once more in the stream of his customary existence. He worked hard, dined out, went occasionally to the theatre, and was always in his seat at the Symphony Concert on Saturday evening. The only change that people noticed was that he was no longer to be seen with Katherine

Bland. But in his outward life he only went through the motions, so to speak. Inwardly he lead a life of his own, intense, unrelated to the world about him, feeding emotionally on Helen's letters. They were his delight and his wonder. She wrote much of the boy, of his learning to ride. A letter had come from Harry himself when the pony had arrived in Tucson, a letter wonderfully misspelled and sprawling over two large sheets on which Helen had ruled lines that seemed to serve as verbal clothes-lines, the words clinging to them somehow, but waving in all directions as though a gust had struck the page. There was also a picture of the pony, looking like a cork stood up on toothpicks. Beneath it was the legend, "This is Mister Murphy, my hors, who runs faster than a rattul snak." Now they had gone west, and Harry was learning to swim at Monterey, while his mother wandered about the beautiful grounds of Del Monte, worshipped discreetly by all the men and outwardly by most of the women. This Henry learned from other sources, and it almost sent him flying to California. But Helen's letter reassured him. She was evidently quietly happy, and was waiting. Her past was still a mystery, though he had told her something and written more. She never asked him to tell her now. She was content

to wait, not tremulously, as when Stephen was alive, but confidently.

Just before the summer exodus from Boston, when furniture vans appeared in daily increasing numbers on Commonwealth Avenue and Beacon Street, and wooden shutters made one house after another blind to the world, Katherine Bland sent for him again. He found her as usual, sitting before her fire, although it was warm outdoors and all her windows were open.

"Thank you for coming," she said. "It seems a long time since you were last here."

"It does. You have been well?"

"Well enough," she answered, lighting a cigarette. "I consider it vulgar to be boundingly, explosively well, like the buds of to-day. But I expect to live as long as they do." She smiled faintly and the smile seemed to him to accentuate the pallor of her cheeks. He noticed the tiny wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and thought in contrast of the untouched freshness of Helen, her cheeks warmed by the desert sun.

"Tell me about her," she added. "You are thinking of her. That is what men do, in stories, about the women they love—only usually they are not married. You are a story-book man."

"I am? Surely I should be a very plain and unromantic hero."

"You don't know heroic qualities. They consist in always living up to the reader's expectations."

"How uninteresting."

"On the contrary, how thrilling, in real life, because so unexpected. In that the romantic consists. You were thinking of her."

"Yes. It's a habit I have."

"A good one," she said a little sadly, "a good one—the habit of thinking about the right people. It makes for peace. But it can't be very exciting."

"Peace is better. That's what makes the desert so wonderful. You're just swept up into the calm of it. You become a part of it and forget to worry."

"I shouldn't," she said sharply. "I should be ten thousand times more restless. I should hate it. Does Helen like it?"

"Yes—loves it."

"Because she has no past. The shadows would follow one and torture one who had. Is she there now?"

"No—in California. The Arizona summer is too hot."

"Have you a plan?"

"No. Things must happen as they will."

"You must marry her."

"Mrs. Jennings suggested that. But I am already married."

"All the better. It can't harm you to go through the ceremony again, even if Mrs. Jennings, whoever she is, did suggest it."

"It would be a travesty."

"You are too old and too modern to talk that way. It would be a ceremony to her—to you an expedient. Is not expedience the rule of modern life?"

"The misfortune, I should say, not the rule."

"It's a mere matter of wording, like everything else," she said.

"But afterward—if I do it. What will she think of me?"

"Let the future care for itself. Marry her. Then when she learns the truth, when something has made her remember, you will have her just where you want her, as Moncrieff would quote from his book of American slang."

"It would be taking an unfair advantage, it seems."

"Why? You won't say that after you have thought about it. And unless you do it—well, you will have a hard time to carry your point."

Henry shook his head. "I can't see it. After

she knows me well again--is used to me--and then I tell her. What could be more reasonable?"

"Yes, what, for a man. But mar's reason is woman's folly. She doesn't think like a man. If she did she would be intolerable and you would never love her. No, I'm sure of this, Henry. If you tell her first and then ask her to take up the old life again, she won't do it. She will think you are acting through duty, and nothing would more surely repel a woman than that. Why did she marry you originally? You were very crude."

"I haven't the faintest idea--never have had."

"I know. It was because you were strong. You did things. In spite of yourself you fascinated her. And then you carried her by storm. You appealed to her imagination. You were a knight of the romantic ages. Like him you acted first and gave your reasons afterward. Do it again. It is your only chance of happiness."

"A good deal of all that is in your imagination. But there's just enough truth to make me think. You can look at it from her point of view. I can't."

"Think about it. You business men, especially you old, conservative Stuyvesant and Bond people, are never willing to decide anything quickly.—Stephen, for example. I am sure that if you had

asked him whether that bright ball over there were the rising sun, he would have looked at his watch and compared the time with an almanac before answering. And even then he might not have been willing to commit himself. "Where did you live when you were married?"

"On the Park, in South Boston."

"You needn't be ashamed of it. A furniture-maker I know lives there, and I always tell him that his chairs are better because they come from such an attractive place. Do you still own your house?"

"Yes. It's rented. Why?"

"It just occurred to me that you might evict the tenants and take your wife there next spring."

"You seem to be sure that she will be my wife. But why take her back to a place she hated?"

"She did hate it? So much the better. The memories to be roused would be all the stronger. Are you going away this summer?"

"No. I've had my vacation. Boston is not at all bad in summer if you don't think about it. I shall get out of town for Sunday usually. Shall you be near here?"

"I? Oh, no. I am going West next week. I usually go abroad, but it occurred to me that there

might be something worth seeing in my own country. My friends all say it's absurd, and that has determined me. What my friends consider absurd would probably be very amusing."

"You're going West. You'll see Helen?" He said it eagerly.

"Why, yes," she answered. "I suppose I shall. People inevitably do meet in the West, don't they? The distances are so restricted. But it might be simpler if you told me exactly where she is and gave me a card. That is, if you can trust me."

"Trust you, Katherine?" he said impulsively. "I feel as though you were arranging all my happiness for me. I love her and I'm her husband—and I feel as helpless as a child. You are making my life for me."

"I shouldn't advise you to tell Helen that." She got up and went to her desk. Henry sat looking into the fire, thinking. Her plans all seemed so reasonable—and she was going to see Helen. It would be wonderful for both of them. And then he became conscious that the minutes were passing and that the room was very still. He turned in his chair, and saw her, a dim white figure sitting at the desk, her head bowed on her arms.

"Oh what a selfish brute I am!" he cried, jump-

ing up. "I come here and talk about myself, and never think of you."

She shivered a little and then raised her head. Standing beside her, his hand on her arm, he saw the struggle in her face. Then she laughed, a little sharply, and wiped away the tears. "How silly I am," she said in a childish voice. "Just like an unfledged girl who goes to the theatre and cries at the happy ending. I ought to laugh, and instead I cry. But the curtain is down now, finally, and I am going to put on my just ordinary clothes and smile all the rest of my life. Just this time—why, do you know, Henry, the play was so well done that I imagined myself as taking part in it. And my part was as real as the others—and just as happy—although for a moment it did not seem so. Now sit down here and write me a note to Helen.—No, don't kiss me. The play is over, remember, and in real life a wife is not pleased when her husband kisses other women. She is very selfish that way. Now write, please. I am going to get some whiskey and water so that you won't want to go as soon as you have finished."

When he took the note to her she was sitting before the fire again, smoking her cigarette. Once more she was the cool, satirical woman whom the world of Boston knew, and liked, and was a little

afraid of. For an hour she kept him laughing with her gossip, a trifle more malicious than usual, a trifle more worldly, as if her own hidden pain sharpened her tongue. But only Henry knew that, and she went far toward making even him forget it.

"I shan't see you again," she said with a return to her old seriousness when he got up to leave. "You must write me sometimes. My father's agents in San Francisco can always reach me. And I will write of Helen, when I see her. In the meantime think over what I said—about your marriage, and about the house. Good-bye."

"I know your advice is good," he said. "Thank you for that—and everything." He leaned over and kissed her hand. And as he did it he thought of that other night when he had kissed Helen's hand, when the gray light was stealing over the desert, and the keen, pure air filled his lungs. Here the air was heavy, he noticed for the first time, heavy with the perfume of gardenias.

CHAPTER XXV

TIME! It was sleepy with the centuries it had seen, lazily uncoiling its heavy length, until it seemed to Henry that the interminable spirals carried him further from Helen, instead of nearer. And yet the date at the head of the papers each morning showed that the year was passing. The flame of the tulips in the Public Garden had burned itself out; the campanulas and Madonna lilies had carried the summer insensibly to the cool blue of larkspurs that tempered the iron heat of August; the Garden had warmed itself in September with glowing gladioli and in October with the hotter red of chrysanthemums that persisted until quenched by the first snows of November. And then the Christmas spirit had been in the air. Holly wreaths had decked the windows and florists' wagons had carried gorgeous loads of poinsettias and brilliant azaleas that mocked winter with pictures of another spring.

Henry worked as he had never worked before. It was harder to push back the beckoning finger of his joy than it had been to forget the shadow of his sorrow. There was little to do but work. He

could not sit through a performance at the theatre. Even the concert on Saturday night was losing power. Music, that had seemed to him to express all emotion, now seemed to touch only the surface to weave a veil that did not hide, but rather revealed his quivering soul. Helen's letters he lived for day by day, and they were filled with a happiness, a joy that was sometimes almost lyric in its outbursts. For the first time in her life she had found a friend, a woman with eyes which saw as she had always tried to see; a woman, to be sure, somewhat weary of life like Moncrieff inclined to be cynical, but still clinging to her own dreams, and, what was more important, able to appreciate Helen's, and to enrich them. She had met Katherine Bland in Monterey, and they had been together ever since.

"She is wonderful," Helen wrote. "She said she would hate the desert, but I think that perhaps she sees it through my eyes." Henry stopped there for a moment. Yes, Katherine was one who would naturally hate the desert. But she was also wise enough to be able to "see through other eyes" when that other vision was finer and truer. That had been his weakness years ago. He had clung obstinately to his own narrow horizon, never once had tried to look through Helen's eyes. That had

been his weakness. That shrinking from the larger view had cost him dear. Now, thank God, the windows were open—but it had taken the shock of death to open them.

“She is wonderful,” the letter continued. “I say it to myself every morning when I come down to breakfast with Harry, and I say it every evening when we sit on the veranda in the starlight, wrapped up against the keen desert winds, and she carries me back with her vivid descriptions of all the gay, good times in Boston—back, I said, because they all seem so natural, so a part of me, that I must have known them, somehow, in those years that are lost. And forward, too, she takes me, to the good times that are coming—the operas, and the concerts, and the theatres, and the dinners. I am young yet, you know, my friend, and all these joys are ahead. I am the mother of a boy, a splendid, beautiful six-year-old boy, and yet I have the outlook of a girl just going into the world. Is it wrong, do you think? It makes me remember something that Stephen said long ago. “Thank God for your innocence and your simplicity of heart”—or something like that ‘It is the best influence your child can have.’ But sometimes I wonder. I have told Katherine, and she agrees. I think I could keep that innocence, even if I knew every-

thing and it proved very terrible—even worse than I imagine—and knowing, perhaps, I should be a better mother. That is what I live for—to be happy for his sake, to understand for his sake, to give him all that I have missed. This is very real to me, dear friend. You won't despise me for talking so much of myself, will you? I say every day that I am only Harry's mother—and to be that is to be very, very much."

Such letters stirred Henry to the depths of his nature. He was continually amazed at the new knowledge they brought him, the sight of the woman he had never been able to discover—the real woman who underlay the wife he had blindly thought to know and had not known at all. He began to realize something of what she had suffered, released suddenly, as she had been, from the necessity of work that had kept her from thinking, into a freedom where she expected to find happiness, but where, instead, she was hemmed in by conditions that must have been infinitely more galling than were the mere limitations of work. He wanted to tell her that he understood.

Katherine, too, wrote occasionally, and her letters told him sometimes much that he longed to know. "Never," she said, "had I supposed that the world contained a woman with so few unspoiled illusions.

Yet why not, in her case? As a child she had no time, no opportunity to learn the world. And what little she must have learned is gone, like all the rest. Here—well, in the desert one does not find out the perfidy of man: There is something enormously cleansing about the atmosphere—just as you told me. I feel so clean, morally, that I hardly dare to leave. You see, I am not like Helen. She, dear child, will go through the world unspotted because she will never see, never—no, not even when she *knows*—and the only way to keep clean is not to see. All the lying, and the intrigue, and the gossip—all of it stains, if you recognize it. I do, almost before it occurs, and it makes me cynical, like Moncrieff. She never will. And, by the way, I almost accepted Moncrieff in San Francisco. He is coming here, and here he will have no chance unless the desert and Helen affect him as they do me. She is not a woman. She is a child whom I am educating—for you."

The letters carried him far from the bleak east winds of Boston, away in imagination over the endless prairies to Arizona. And a month must pass before he could go. He had enough to keep him busy. On January first the house in South Boston had come into his hands again, and he went there almost daily. Workmen were restoring it as nearly as possible to

its original appearance. The black walnut was newly varnished; on the parlour walls was new paper of the same gory red, with the same purple shadows; new lace curtains were at the windows, the same dead white of years ago.

Henry lighted the gas one evening after the workmen had gone and sat down to look around. The sofa was as unyielding as it had been. It seemed to him as though Helen must come through the door, Helen as she was then, pale and out of place, not as she was now, browned with the desert sun, and free, with the look of great spaces in her eyes. He took out his watch, as though to see how long there might be yet to wait, got up and placed the hideous green vase with its sprawling roses precisely in the middle of the mantel. For a moment he thought of taking it away, but dared not. It was the keynote of the room, and the room was a plot to entrap Helen's wandering memory.

The door-bell rang, amazingly shrill in the oppressive silence of the house. He was glad of the interruption. He went into the hall and opened the door to Mrs. Jennings.

"Mrs. Salsbury, next-door, saw a light and telephoned over. She has a telephone now on account of that rich boarder that took one flight front. Of

course, it's a party-line and don't cost much. So I came over to see if things was all right and thinking I might find you here and have a little needful talk. Are the workmen still here?" she asked, taking off her coat.

"No. They have gone home. I was all alone and am glad to see you."

"Oh! If you're alone"—she said, taking up her coat again. "I don't know as I ought to stay. It mightn't be proper."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Jennings. Surely you and I have reached the age of discretion."

"Just a minute or two couldn't be any harm, I guess. But sakes alive, folks do say such things. Every Sunday it certainly seems to me as if the ears of some of the audience must burn when the minister preaches about talebearing."

"That was what Helen found so hard when we lived here."

"I know—poor innocent. I came over to tell you I had a letter from Helen."

"Did you? When?"

"Only just yesterday it came and I must remark, Henry Murphy, that I didn't like it."

"Didn't like it?"

"Exactly so." Mrs. Jennings compressed her

lips and sat very straight in her chair, her whole attitude radiating self-conscious and condemnatory virtue. "I answered right off, as was my duty."

"What was wrong?"

"That Bland woman."

"Katherine Bland? But, Mrs. Jennings, nothing could be happier for Helen than to have her there."

She tossed her head contemptuously. "I tell you it ain't proper, and the poor child deserved to be warned. She's going to have her chance this time."

"I'm afraid I don't understand of what she must be warned. Certainly she could not be with a more delightful person than Katherine Bland."

"There you are!" Mrs. Jennings ejaculated—"just what I was afraid of all the time! There are snakes and snakes, 'male and female created He them,' as the Good Book says."

"But, Mrs. Jennings——"

"Don't interrupt," she cried. "I made a bad enough mess before with not understanding the poor child. This time I'm going to prevent a mess if I can. Helen's as innocent as a child, and as unselfish as a lamb. Do you suppose that woman, who's nothing but a high-society butterfly, is good for her, filling her head with nonsense and selfishness and stories of card-playing and drinking champagne?"

"Is that what you warned her about?" he asked sarcastically.

"No, it isn't. I told her about how you and Miss Bland was always together last year, about how folks all thought you were going to marry, and that, since you were rich, she probably still wanted you. I just warned her to be on the lookout for her own rights."

"Mrs. Jennings!"

"Yes, I did," she asserted firmly. "And glad I was of the chance to do her a good turn after all the bad feeling I'd had for her before."

"Does it ever occur to you, Mrs. Jennings," he said quietly, walking about the room, "that you know as little of Miss Bland, even less, than you formerly knew of Helen, that you may misjudge her as seriously, and also bring sorrow into Helen's life again by destroying the first real friendship she has ever had—and for no reason whatever?"

Mrs. Jennings tossed her head scornfully. "I guess I know more about women than you do, Henry Murphy. Talk about friendship! Do you think a swell like Miss Bland is going to come over here to South Boston to visit your wife?"

"There is no reason why she should. I have no intention of living here."

"Then why are you fixing up the house again?"

And I must say it's old-fashioned, too. Nobody has lace curtains now. And if you're going to bring her here just at first, why spend the money? You've got sweet things, like that lovely green vase your Uncle John sent you, and those would keep her happy a few days."

Henry glanced involuntarily at the vase. Its ugliness was amazing and yet, because Mrs. Jennings liked it, he realized that it was somehow typical of the people whom he had wanted Helen to have as friends. He himself, six years ago, had not known how bad it was, nor how offensive they were, with all their goodness of heart. "I want it to look as familiar as possible," he said, realising that he must say something.

"I guess she'd just as soon have you save the money for something else," Mrs. Jennings said heavily, and went toward the door. "I must say, Henry Murphy, that I do hope things will come out all right—and I'm glad I wrote Helen—and I'm glad I told you so you'd know I wasn't doing anything behind your back and was really your friend."

Henry could not trust himself to speak, but merely bowed as he opened the door.

After she had gone he found himself trembling. He went to the dining-room and, unlocking the side-

board, took out a bottle of whiskey and poured himself a stiff drink. "I needed just this lesson," he said to himself. "To think that this is the kind of thing Helen endured while I sat by and told her to be friendly. God! And I didn't even defend her! When Bond sent those orchids I sat back—and explained to the woman. To-night I could not explain. Like her—I have grown more like her and am a little more worthy." Again the door-bell jangled in the silence of the house. "Why can't people let me alone?"

"My, but it's good to see you, Henry. I don't often get to town, there being enough to keep me jumping here. But you're looking glum. What's up?"

"Nothing, Mr. Jennings. Your wife has just gone."

"Has she been here? Jumping Jupiter—then I reckon I know what's wrong."

"She wrote Helen—I don't know what exactly. I am sorry—but probably no harm is done."

"I'm sorrier than you. Amanda hasn't anything to do—except look after the rest of the world. I let her get another maid the other day. What inarnation she wants three for I don't know. But it did some good, because she has to spend hours a

day hunting for something for No. 3 to do. But it don't go far enough, what?"

"It really does not matter," Henry said again. "She was so good to me after the accident that she has a right to say what she pleases. It was only my wish for Helen—that nothing should happen to trouble her."

"Right you are, young man. Amanda's a good woman, but she has a tongue that runs away with her. She never does things underhanded, though. She always tells, but, sometimes, after the mischief is done." He shook his head and Henry saw that he looked old and tired. "It's no shucks trying to manage a woman. Don't let your wife get the top hand at the beginning. That just about doubles the work later on. Helen's a good woman—so was Amanda, and is now, bless her. But your wife's a woman, like mine, and just for that she'll try to run you. And it don't pay to let her, my boy. It don't pay in the end. Women need training, and a master, like dogs. If we'd had children—well, it might 'a been different then. I don't know. Something to do—it don't matter much what. They all need it." He blew his nose violently and then held out his hand. "You'll shake? Thank you. Good-night, my boy."

Henry turned wearily to the parlour. Was it

worth the game—all this plotting, all this misunderstanding? Yes, he was sure of that. If anything could bring back her memory no effort was too great. And if not, little harm would be done. Then he must tell her, and the hideous story would be easier to tell in the familiar, hideous surroundings. But the physical ugliness of it all sank out of sight in comparison with the mental and moral sordidness. That he had never known until to-night, and even sin seemed less horrible than this suburban virtue that so stridently triumphed over taste and sense. He realised at last the full depth of what Helen had endured, and his heart cried out over her suffering. He could not protect her from the world—no man can do that for the woman he loves—but he could shield her. He knew where danger lay. "The tongue is a fire." The Bible never spoke a truer word than that.

And then he remembered the letter that Mrs. Jennings had sent. Of what was in it he had no idea, but that it would trouble her he felt almost certain. It was a little cloud thrusting its intimation of storm over the serene horizon of his happiness. And yet it could not be explained by another letter. He walked slowly back and forth, stopped under the light and again took out his watch. "I'll do it," he muttered.

“I’ll telegraph to-night and leave to-morrow. She shall not worry longer than I can help.” Then he turned out the lights. “Helen,” he whispered into the darkness, “a few days longer, my dearest, and the weary waiting will be over. I’m coming, dear, coming at last.”

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CHAPTER XXVI

"DON'T look so distressed, dear man," Katherine cried, laughing, as Henry ran to the carriage back of the station in Tucson. "Helen is all right. You should show that you are glad to see *me*." She laughed and held out her hand. "Get in now. The horses are fast. Pedro will see to the luggage."

Henry climbed to the seat beside her and the horses started. "The boy—is he well?"

"Rather. He doesn't know how to be sick. We shall meet him somewhere beyond the town. He is not allowed to ride actually into the town for fear that Mr. Murphy—the pony, you know—might misbehave. Tell me why you came so suddenly. I was not expecting you for a month."

"I just couldn't wait."

Katherine laughed again. "You really have been a saint, Henry. I expected you long ago."

"I was under orders, you know. You gave me permission to come late in February. This is the last day in January."

"It would be an excellent thing if all lovers behaved as well."

"I'm really a husband, you know."

"And therefore not so eager.—But no. We don't say sarcastic things out here. This air is too clean."

"It is," he assented, breathing deeply. "The air, and the space, and the splendid freedom of it all make life a finer thing than we poor city mortals ever realise. I'm thankful you had a chance to learn it."

"I needed it, you think. But that is foolish. I know I did—needed the tonic of it all. Not for always, though. I grow here only in order to use that growth in Boston. It's curious—loving the desert as I do makes me love the city more. To Helen, Boston will be heaven."

"You think so?"

"I know it. She had never been really happy. She will be now."

"Why didn't she come to the station?" he asked irrelevantly.

Katherine laughed. "You held back that question a long time. And, to be honest, I am not perfectly sure. She planned to come, but her courage failed. At least, it was partly that. She had a letter yesterday that worried her. I don't know what it was."

"I do. It hurried me out here. It was just a meddling letter from a meddling woman—told nothing, I imagine, but would have troubled her. I didn't want that."

"You are not very specific."

"Such stuff does not deserve it."

"Certainly not, unless I can help. Look! Here comes the boy. He's on the desert, where he has no business to be."

In a cloud of dust the pony galloped toward them at full speed. The little boy waved his whip and shouted as he approached. "Hello, Mr. Pony-man. Stop, Mr. Murphy. Whoa!" He tugged at the reins with both hands, and the horse came to a standstill beside the carriage.

Henry was already on the ground and caught the boy from the saddle. "Hello, you blessed little rascal," he cried, holding him high in the air. "My! But I'm glad to see you."

"Thank you for the pony," the child said breathlessly. "Now put me in the saddle, please. My mother says I'm not fit to touch when I'm riding. I get so dusty."

"You won't sit in my lap and let us lead the horse."

"Please, I don't want to," he answered, his lips

quivering as he settled himself into place and thrust his feet into the stirrups. "Mr. Murphy likes better to gallop, and I want to ride fast to my mother and tell her you're coming. Can I?"

"Of course. But are you glad to see me?"

"Yes, if you let me ride. Did you bring me a present?"

"Oh, Harry! You must not ask that," Katherine said.

"I didn't think you would hear, Auntie Kate. Don't tell mother. Good-by, Mr. Pony-man. I can't say Mr. Murphy, you see, 'cause that's the pony's name."

"Isn't he a wonder?" Henry said, as he took his seat beside Katherine. "See how well he rides—and not yet seven years old, the rascal. I wish I could have seen him when he was little." He watched the dust cloud that marked the boy until it vanished around the turn of the road.

The horses traveled fast, and the long, low houses soon came into view. "You are pale, my friend," Katherine said, looking at him. "There is nothing to be afraid of. I have helped your cause—when it needed help."

Henry put his hand for a moment over hers, but she drew away. "No flirting," she said, with a

twisted smile. "I don't allow that with other people's husbands—not here, at least."

Then they saw Helen on the steps. She waved as they came between the palm trees. She was dressed in white, and the sunlight on her hair made her look like a queen, crowned with a golden crown. Henry could not speak. It seemed to him that the moment was the culmination of years of blind seeking for a happiness that was found at last. He leaped from the carriage and took her hand, silently. He saw that the tears were very near her eyes.

"I'll leave you people," he heard Katherine say. "I promised Harry to take him to see the Indian children. Good-by." Still he did not turn as the carriage drove away. He could not take his eyes from Helen's face.

And then, when they were alone, he took her into his arms and kissed her, on the forehead, the cheeks, the mouth. She leaned against him, and slowly her arms went up until they were clinging about his neck. Neither spoke. At last he led her to the hammock and they sat down, his arm holding her close, she nestling against him.

"So it was not true," she whispered.

"Nothing is true, my darling," he answered, "but

this—this only—that I love you more than all the world.”

She looked into his eyes, and each saw the other's soul shine out. There was no need for speech. They listened to the wind in the palm branches, and to the birds that sang of love. They looked out over the wide, sunlighted spaces, and it seemed to them as though the desert smiled.

“And yet I know she loves you,” Helen said.

“And Stephen loved *you*,” he added. “But only this is right.”

“Yes,” she whispered, “only this. For love is not complete until it meets a full response.”

CHAPTER XXVII

"ARE you really my father now"? Harry asked a month later. "Can I call you father?"

"Of course, my son. And we're going to have wonderful times together back in Boston."

"Can I have Mr. Murphy there?"

"Surely. But we might give him another name, perhaps. How would Arizona do? He comes from here, you see."

The little boy drew away, and stood first on one foot, then on the other, looking a little dubiously at Henry.

"I don't believe you are really my father."

"Why?"

"Because — because I said I can two times, and you didn't tell me not to. Fathers always do."

Henry laughed aloud and caught the child up into his lap. "That's because I'm not very much used to being a father yet, you see. I haven't had you for a son very long, and so I haven't learned just what to do."

"I didn't know people had to learn how to be

fathers. My mother didn't have to learn to be a mother. Did I have to learn to be a boy?"

"You had to learn to be a brave boy who could ride a horse."

"I haven't a horse. I have a pony," he said gravely. "Can I have a horse when I'm big?"

"You may, not can, my son." Harry smiled up at him mischievously. "See, here come Miss Bland and Mr. Moncrieff. You run in to Miss Gordon now."

"Alone, Henry?" Moncrieff said. "Where's Mrs. Murphy? Thank the Lord there's something I can decently call her at last."

"She never notices what *you* call her, Philip," Katherine remarked.

"I know she doesn't," he said with simulated irritation. "And no more do you—when Murphy's around. I am beginning to think you're in love with him yourself."

"Beginning to think?" she cried. "I thought you prided yourself on your powers of observation. I've been desperately in love with him for years."

"Then, my dear Henry, I challenge you to a duel. This accounts for her having refused me again today."

"She did, did she?" Henry said, laughing. He

was glad to get away from the subject of himself, because Moncrieff, like all careless speakers, was touching on more dangerous ground than he dreamed. "I'm glad of it. She always will refuse you in the desert, Phil. It's altogether too close to the real thing to bring out the good points of such city products as yourself."

"That's the danger," Katherine put in. "I'm always afraid he may strike me quite differently when I meet him next winter at the Elliots' at dinner."

"So your refusal is not final?"

"Oh, quite—for the time being. I know you will ask me again, unless you happen to marry someone, somewhere. Besides, I always find you amusing, and don't want to cut myself off from seeing you."

"But here and now I'm down and out. All this trip for nothing."

"I thought you came on Helen's account, and mine," Henry remarked.

"What," Moncrieff cried, "to be an imitation witness at an imitation wedding! It was a more interesting experience than weddings usually are, I admit, but the whole situation makes me nervous."

Katherine laughed at him. "Go and pack your

bags, poor nervous invalid," she said. "I want to talk with Henry. He leaves to-night, you know."

"Make her unhappy over what might have been," he said to Henry as he went toward the door. "Then she may, in self-defence, attempt what might be."

"You are wonderfully good, Katherine." Henry walked across the veranda and stood beside her chair. "And now to take the boy East with you. There hasn't been a thing that you did not think of."

"Nonsense. It has all been fun—for me." Her voice broke, but she pretended she was coughing, and Henry did not appear to notice. "But there is one thing," she went on a little hysterically—"one mean thing I've wished all day, even in the Church this morning, and that is, that Harry were not your son, but Steve's. Then you might let me have him."

"Katherine!"

"Yes, I know it was brutal—on your wedding day—but I have learned to love the boy—and he gives me something to do. That is what I need, Henry, just as you have always said. And then, you know, I am really not responsible for what I say to-day—losing Helen, and turning my face toward the city, with all the gossip and the petty jealousies,

and the dead dreams that make up my life. Will you forgive me?"

"I should forgive anything."

"Look," she continued, pointing to the desert. "That is real, and the people here are real. The doctor with 'Old Faithful' and his stories and his great big heart, is real. Father Ignatius, simple, loving, never thinking of himself, has made me understand what a true man may be. And one other thing I want to say, my friend. Stephen was real. He could not have lived here, and yet have been quite untrue to himself. I loved him, Henry, more than I ever loved you, I think. He was my hero, ever since I remember anything. And in these months here I have thought of him, dreamed of him—the kind of true dreams that the desert gives. He was carried away by a love he did not know how to cope with. He thought himself noble in what he did—at first. And then, month by month and year by year, the desert—this great, wonderful, true desert, entered into him and made him, once more, true, as he had been, but finer, because he had found himself." She spoke passionately, and, as she spoke, rose from her chair and put both hands on his shoulders. "I tell you this, Henry, because I do not want Helen to think too hardly of him. She never

loved him, but she ought to pity more than blame him. She can never fully understand, as I can, because the months here have given me back the hero of my childish dreams, and, with him, the dreams themselves. I shall be hard and cynical again—I know that—but it will all be superficial. Underneath, in my soul, the power to dream has been made immortal.”

He leaned toward her and kissed her forehead. He could say nothing—felt there was nothing to say—but smiled, and she knew that he understood.

“Go in now,” she said. “I have said my say, and you have seen deep, deep into me for the last time. In the future you must try to understand Helen—and don’t forget this—you are always, apparently, on the verge—that she is a woman, not an angel, and that women need the lash sometimes. I have no sympathy for other men’s wives, and if ever I find a man I am deluded enough to marry, I shall know how to look out for myself. So it’s not treason to my sex, you see.”

Henry left her standing in the sunlight. For a moment he had almost forgotten his wife. But not quite. It would have been easier to forget himself.

Helen met him at the foot of the stairs. “I have been saying good-by to Harry,” she said, a

little tremulously. "I don't think I could leave him unless I were going with you."

"We shall never have to be separated from him again," he answered. "I don't want to lose a moment of his young life any more than you do, dear. But now we have so much to talk over. We shall both know it was best when we have him again."

"You are so good to me, Henry."

Nearly the whole town of Tucson was at the station to bid them God-speed. Pedro sobbed aloud when he kissed Helen's hand. "Come back to us," he blubbered, "we shall never have such another mistress—and the little master, who has learned so well to speak our language, he, too, must come back to us." Father Ignatius blessed her. "Your husband is a noble man," he said. "Love him always, and obey him when you do not fully comprehend. My children's prayers, the love of the simple Indians, will be always with you." The doctor wiped his eyes vigorously. "Old Faithful will always take the turn to the hill, Mrs. Murphy. And sometime he will turn because you are there. The houses will hem you in and soon you will return, because the desert always calls its friends."

"I shall see you very soon, dear, and bring the boy safely," Katherine said, as she kissed her.

"And when you think there's hope for me," Moncrieff cried as the train started, "cable me in China."

They sat hand in hand as the train sped along the straight track. They saw the low, white house where Helen had lived so long, touched with the pink of sunset; saw the Mission fade into the darkness as the shadows welled up from the valleys; watched until the desert was wrapped in night, and the stars, the lamps of heaven, were kindled one by one. Then Helen leaned to him and put her head on his shoulder. "I have never known any other home than the desert, dear," she whispered, "and yet, with you, I feel that in leaving it I am truly going home."

They reached Boston in the evening, a cold, blustering March night that made Henry think of the ending of that other wedding journey, eight years before. Again she did not know where they were going, but this time she had no feeling of distrust as to his judgment. She loved him, as she had loved him before, but now with no reservations, expressed or subconscious.

"I wish we could go straight home," Henry said, "but, as you know, the house is not ready, and so I shall take you to a house I have in South Boston. I have not lived there for years, you remember, but I have never sold the house."

"It does not matter where we go, dear," she answered, "so long as I can be with you."

Henry was silent during the drive, oppressed with the feeling that he was plotting against her, not treating her fairly; fearful of the effect that returning memory might have on her, and equally dreading the ordeal of telling her the past, should she not remember. He realized that she must know that here in Boston, where she must adjust herself to new conditions, anything less than full knowledge would be fatal to her happiness. Her happiness! It seemed to him, now, so based on the lie of seven years that he wondered whether she could ever reconquer it when that lie was shattered. His fears seemed to him to charge the very atmosphere. He knew that they affected her, that she trembled, not knowing why she was afraid.

As the carriage climbed the short hill to the Park she put her hand in his. "Henry," she said, "now that we are at home, may I not know? It is very terrible, I think—all that I have forgotten. But with you, dear, I can bear it, and until I know there will always be a tiny, tiny cloud throwing its little shadow across my happiness."

He pressed her hand close in his. "And if you

knew, and it was terrible, could you still be happy?"

"I could not be unhappy—with you."

"You shall learn everything, to-night," he said.

"Here we are."

They climbed the steep steps together, and he turned the key in the lock. Then he took her hand and led her, in the darkness, to the parlour. He left her standing while he went to the chandelier, and, as quickly as his trembling fingers would allow, lighted all the gas. He threw the burned match into the fireplace, and then, leaning on the mantelpiece to support himself, turned to look at her.

She stood in the centre of the room, looking from side to side. Her eyes were shining, terrified. He watched her as, mechanically, she put up her hands and unpinned her hat. She let it fall to the floor. Neither spoke. As she looked at him he moved, nervously, and his arm touched the green vase.

"Be careful!" she cried sharply.

The sudden breaking of the silence startled him, and he moved again, convulsively. The vase toppled, and, before he could catch it, crashed to the floor.

Helen screamed. "Henry! What have you done? What will Uncle John say?" She sank

to her knees and began wildly to pick up the pieces, green glaze, and bits of roses, red and yellow.

He watched her, still leaning against the mantel. Tears came to his eyes, and rolled down his cheeks. He watched her, as gradually her hands moved more slowly, until they stopped. Her head bowed, and she knelt there, hardly breathing, it seemed to him.

Then he went to her, and knelt beside her, and put his arms around her. "Uncle John died a year ago," he whispered.

She shivered, and pressed close against him. "Once," she said at last, "I lived here. Since then I have had a dream of the great desert. And I was afraid because you were not there to protect me. Stephen was there, and I was afraid."

He drew her more closely to him. "Was it a true dream, Henry?" she asked.

"Yes, dear. But now it is only a dream—a dream that we shall forget together."

She sighed, a long, shuddering sigh, and he heard her say—"Poor Stephen."

She was quiet a moment. But, suddenly, she drew away and cried in agony of fear, "And Harry—my little boy?"

"We have found him together, dear. Harry is my son as well as yours."

Then, finally, she turned to him, and threw her arms around his neck and looked into his eyes. And he knew, at last, that in this truth she had found a joy that transcended all sorrow, all regret, all pain.

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