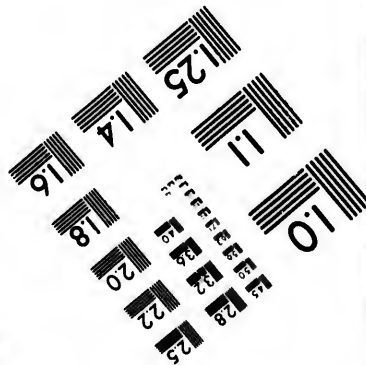
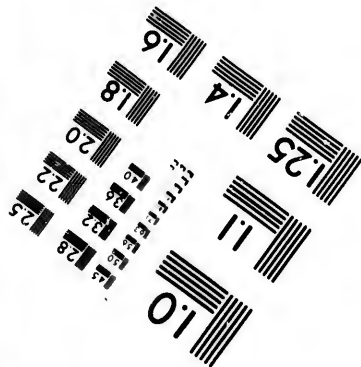
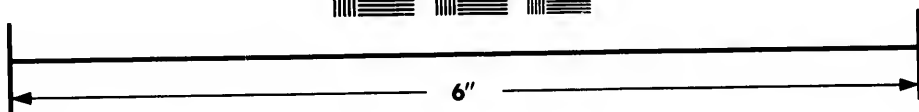
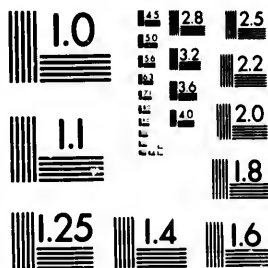


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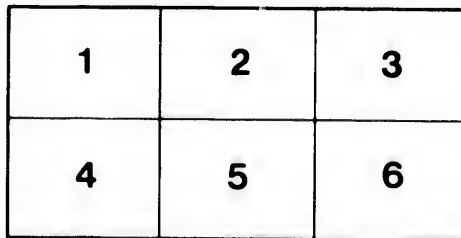
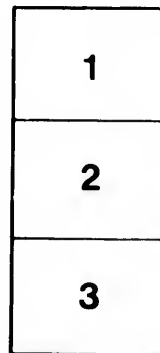
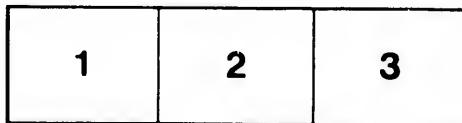
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THE YOUNG LADY WHO STOOD WAITING FOR MR. TULLY WAS STRIKINGLY HANDSOME.

A BAD MAN'S SWEETHEART.

. . . Take her hand. Her heart has long been yours.
True love in trouble all the more endures!
She'll cling the closer for the risk she braved
And cherish all the more the life she saved.
There's nought a loving woman will not do.
When once she feels her lover's heart is true.

—Orinda.

BY

EDMUND E. SHEPPARD,

*Author of "Dolly," "Farm Sketches," "Widower Jones," "The Dance at
Deadman's Crossing," etc., etc.*

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A BAD MAN'S SWEETHEART.

CHAPTER I.

THE LATE JOHN KING.

The closed shutters and the long folds of crape pendant from the door-knob intimated to the passer-by that someone was dead at No. 25 Mowburn Street. The someone was John King. In the handsome drawing-room, amid the trappings and millinery of death, as provided by a fashionable undertaker, John King lay in state in the most expensive coffin his weeping widow could procure. John King had left his widow and ten-year-old son with fortune enough to keep them in comfort, but when his eyes closed in death there was no agony in their gray depths except the fear that his wife was unable to take care of herself and her boy. With his last effort he had turned and grasped his little boy's hand and faintly whispered, "Be good to her, Jack." The little fellow sprang from the slender girl who held him, and with his freckled hands clasping his father's face, kissed passionately the stiffening lips. The weeping girl bent over the dying man to remove the child, and heard—"and you, Dell—good to her." His eyes again sought his wife's face, God lifted the cloud of fear and John King died with a happy look on his stern face that death could not chill from the firm lips and sunken jaw, over which swept the long, reddish-blonde moustache which in life had scarcely ever wreathed a smile.

Light enough, that late summer afternoon, crept through the shutters to show the rugged but intellectual beauty of the dead man's face, with its smiles of peaceful content. Leaning with his elbow on the mantelpiece, an animate man stood gazing calmly at the dead. "The old fellow looks happy, doesn't he?" he said, thinking in half audible communion with himself; "really more so than when he was alive. He evidently prefers being dead to practising law in the day-time and teaching mission-school at night. Never had any leisure or pleasure. Poor old chap, he's having a rest now

that will last him! Wonder if in the other jurisdiction he'll find a chance to make up for the fun he missed here? Duty! Duty! Duty! Always 'Duty'; no time to sing a song or take a drink, or join the rest of us in some sport! Poor fellow, a sense of duty and lung disease spoiled a brilliant career!" The speaker yawned, as if wearied by the idea, stroked his moustache, straightened himself up and with his hands in his pockets strolled towards the window, stopping for a moment to look more closely at the white face in the coffin.

"Can't be much consolation to the widow to see John looking so happy to get away from her, can it? They seemed happy enough and she's a deuced fine-looking woman too! Don't suppose he ever noticed her looks; too busy hunting for some fad." These thoughts followed him to the window where he turned the sash in the blind and looked out on the quiet street. "'King & Tully, Barristers!' Yes, I must have that changed into 'Stephen Tully, Barrister, Solicitor, etc.'! Big thing for me coming into the whole practice!—if I can hold it." This last thought troubled him for a moment—"I'll have to go slow if I want to keep that church crowd's business; they swore by King,"—after a pause—"if they swore at all, and I suppose everybody swears either aloud or to themselves."

"Who are you?" demanded a sharp voice behind him.

The lawyer turned slowly from the window—Stephen Tully never moved rapidly or without dignity—and surveyed the owner of the voice. "Ah, Master John, I didn't hear you come in. Come over and shake hands with me."

"I won't," Master John responded fiercely. "I don't like you. My papa is dead. Go away, and never come here again."

A boy of ten is never very dangerous except as a tell-tale, but this boy, with freckled, tear-stained face, swollen lips and eyes red with weeping, impressed Mr. Tully as very absurd. The little fellow clenched his hands and advanced threateningly, and this made Mr. Tully laugh.

"How dare you laugh when my papa is dead! You bad man! I struck Jane this morning because she laughed, and I'll strike you," he added, after a choking sob and the comprehension of his own weakness, "with a rock if you laugh when I'll never see my papa again."

Stephen Tully was decidedly a handsome man and of imposing appearance. His voice was pleasant, and his face, expressionless in repose, was bright and captivating when animated. He comprehended the boy, and determined to comfort and win him. "You startled me, my little friend, and the surprise made me smile, but do not think I was laughing at your grief. I, too,

have reason to weep for him—he was my best friend." Mr. Tully's voice sank to a choking whisper, and as he turned towards the coffin he put his handkerchief to his eyes, as if in tears.

"Then what made you laugh?" demanded the boy, with sullen obstinacy of unbelief.

The door opened and a slender figure robed in black entered the room and laid a gentle hand on the irate boy. "Oh, Auntie Dell," he sobbed against the arm which had been thrown about him, "that nasty man laughed at me and said I was a little fool!"

"I beg your pardon, but I did nothing of the kind, Miss Browning. I smiled in surprise at his fierce demand that I should instantly quit the premises, but I did not call him a 'little fool' or speak unkindly to him," Mr. Tully explained with the nearest approach to embarrassment Miss Browning had ever seen him betray.

"He laughed, Auntie Dell," persisted the boy, "and his eyes said—said the nasty words."

"Aha! my little man; you go too fast, and might have made Miss Browning think me rude and unfeeling to the son of my old friend and partner. But you wouldn't have believed it of me, would you, Miss Dell?"

"Of course I would have believed it if Jack had said so," she answered softly, while she stroked the boy's soft red-brown hair.

"What makes you let him call you that," demanded Jack, sharply pushing her hand from his head.

"Call me what, Jack?"

"Why 'Miss Dell'! You ain't his Auntie Dell—only mine. You don't like him, do you?" (Interrogatory pause.) "Say, do you, Auntie Dell? I hate him!"

Jack threw out the last idea as a suggestion of the answer he desired her to make, but Auntie Dell refused to concur.

"You should not talk so loud or seem so cross, Jack. What would your poor papa say if he could hear you?" She spoke in gentle reproof, but in an instant she saw her mistake. The boy, reminded of his bereavement, sprang from her side and threw himself upon the pulseless breast of his father, with wild protestations of love. "Nobody loves Jack now! Everybody hates him!" he sobbed hysterically.

Mr. Tully looked displeased, even disgusted. Dell Browning tried to comfort the wailing child, but Jack refused to quit his place beside the dead or cease his outcries. At this moment the door again opened, almost concealing Mr. Tully, who stood behind it.

"Oh, Dell, take him out, or he'll scream himself to death. How could you be so thoughtless as to let him come here, when you knew

how excited he is, and I so low that I can hardly walk!" These words gasped out with querulous intonation, as if the speaker were faint and ill-natured, came from Mrs. King, who in dishabille leaned against the door and made Mr. Tully's position untenable. As he stepped out of the shadow Mrs. King started violently, and exclaiming "I had no idea there were others here!" seized Jack and hurriedly left the room. Jack resisted at first, but an appealing look from his friend made him consent, though at the door he asked, "You'll come and read to me before dinner, won't you, Auntie Dell?"

"Yes, dear, very soon," she answered, and the door closed, leaving her alone with Stephen Tully and the dead. For a moment neither spoke, and then with a quiet smile Mr. Tully invited Dell to be seated by him on the cushioned recess of the window. She looked curiously at him as she sat down, and he answered her by gazing in her face for a moment and saying:

"Your repose and restful face are pleasant after the exhibition we've just had of that demented boy and his dishevelled mother. What a fright the widow looked! One could scarce imagine grief to have such a disastrous effect on beauty. But, perhaps it was because she hadn't her hair combed and had forgotten to put on part of her dress!" He spoke banteringly, and Dell watched his face with the same curious look with which she almost always regarded him.

"You forget, Mr. Tully, that both grief and neglect of dress are excusable in Mrs. King under the circumstances."

"No, I don't, Miss Reproof, and when Mrs. King discovered my presence she didn't forget her lack of comeliness any more than I did. But you always look well and cool. I really believe a tired man could stand on one foot for an hour in the hot sun and rest himself and grow cool and comfortable, simply by gazing on you. I do indeed, though you observe me with that 'wonder-if-I-can-believe-him' look."

"Please don't talk so heedlessly!" exclaimed Dell, drawing further away from him. "You frighten me with your lack of regard for what ordinarily restrains people. How can you joke and carry on over the corpse of a man who was your partner and friend—and more, Stephen Tully—your benefactor?"

"My dear Miss Browning, I am not joking, and I am not 'carry-on,' except in the sense of trying to carry on a conversation, which you desire to be conducted on a funeral basis while I am endeavoring, by ordinary good humor, to prevent both of us from bursting into tears. Just one more word from you and my lachrymal fountains will gush forth and you will have as much trouble

comforting me as you had with Master Jack. Are you prepared to take the risk?"

"Yes; I am ready to take the risk of your showing any sign of ordinary sympathy with sorrow or bereavement. Life seems a joke to you, and even death appears to have no terrors to your torpid conscience. Nothing but your good temper, and what some people may think your good looks save you from being a monster."

"I'm glad something saves me from it, my sweet Asphodel," he cried gaily, trying to seize her hand. She sprang up angrily.

"This is no time or place for gallantries, Mr. Tully. I believe I am included in Mr. King's will as one of the executors. I will see you after the funeral to-morrow, when you and Mr. Stryde will be expected to call at, say, four o'clock. Good afternoon."

Mr. Tully showed no signs of being crushed, but took his dismissal with good-humored alacrity, which disarmed further reproof.

CHAPTER II.

TELLS US SOMETHING MORE ABOUT STEPHEN TULLY.

After Stephen Tully left the house on Mowburn Street he glanced at his watch and walked rapidly towards the park. As he fastened his gloves and smoothed out the front of his coat and carefully buttoned it, he asked himself, "How is it that Dell Browning has such influence over me? Here I have been hanging around that house communing with the departed and inhaling the perfume of crepe and funeral flowers for an hour, just to get a glimpse of her, and then am sat upon and sent about my business with a lecture for my pains, What a young fury that Jack is; I thought he would scratch my eyes out. Whoever marries the widow will have a cash job training the boy. Likely enough I will have to marry the widow and orphan myself if Dell won't have me or if Mrs. King shows a disposition to let anybody else manage her property."

"Hullo, Tully!" cried a friend accosting him. "Been over to King's, I suppose. When is the funeral?"

"To-morrow at two. I suppose you'll be around," answered Stephen cheerfully. "We want to give the old fellow a good send-off."

"There's no fear about the size of the funeral. Every lawyer in the city will turn out. Everybody liked John King—and his partner, of course. By the way, I saw that pretty typewriter girl of yours in the park just now. Seemed to be waiting for some one; you probably," laughed his friend with a knowing look.

"It can't be me, old fellow. Probably one of the boys in the

office. They are all having a rest to-day, you know, and the entire staff are apparently captives at her feet."

"Oh, no, it couldn't be you. No one could seriously suspect you of making appointments with young ladies in the park," said his friend, slowly closing one eye. "You should give her some fatherly advice. She is too pretty to be out in the evening without her ma. Good-bye."

"Don't judge everyone by yourself, Chandler, you old rascal. Good night!" retorted Tully, and then, as he resumed his walk, "Confound that fellow, he is a worse gossip than his wife, and she ought to be indicted as a public nuisance. What put the idea in his head that I was going to meet Cora? I'll have to drop her if people are beginning to talk about it. We have never been seen together—that's one comforting fact—and I should not have made this appointment to-night if she hadn't insisted. There she is now; someone bowing to her! Yes, and he must turn around and size me up. This affair will have to end right here."

The young lady who stood waiting for Mr. Tully was strikingly handsome. Dark, self-possessed and graceful, her handsome and well-made garments displayed a figure of unusual symmetry. No one observing her haughty carriage would have guessed that she kept the books and operated a typewriter in the law office of King & Tully, Barristers, on the limited salary of ten dollars a week, and, had they been so informed, they might have wondered how she found means to buy fashionable dresses. Cruel and unjust remarks had indeed been excited by her stylish costumes, but those who knew her were aware that her mother was a dressmaker, and that the proud Cora did not disdain to sew for herself.

"How late you are," she exclaimed, as she joined Mr. Tully in his walk. "I have been waiting nearly half an hour for you."

"And enjoying it apparently," answered Stephen, somewhat crustily. "You seem to be quite the centre of attraction."

"Oh, you mean that fellow who cowed. He doesn't live here, so you needn't be afraid our meeting will be talked about."

"I think, Cora, you might have made yourself a little less conspicuous—worn a veil or something. I met Chandler just now; he told me you were waiting for me here."

"Told you I was waiting for you! He couldn't have known that. And why should I try to disguise myself?"

"Well, he saw you waiting, and guessed the rest. It'll be all over town before morning. I suppose it won't matter for once, but we'll have to take care that it doesn't happen again." With this Stephen endeavored to resume his good-nature, and tucked her hand under his arm.

"See that what doesn't happen again?" she inquired, her dark eyes fixed full on his face.

"Our being seen together."

"And why not?" she demanded.

"Because it will be talked about."

"And what if it is?"

"It will injure me, that's what," retorted Stephen considerably nettled.

"How?" she insisted.

"You know *how*, every *how*! Now that King is dead it will take me all my time to hold our business together. He had all the respectability and social position of the firm, and if it is said that I am—am—er—er too thick with a young lady clerk in our office, my high-toned clients will suddenly take their business elsewhere."

"And how about me?" she insisted huskily.

"Oh, I won't forget you, my pretty Cora. I'll look after you, but you had better get a situation in some other office, and I'll slip around and see you in the evenings, if your mamma won't object."

She had been leaning somewhat heavily on his arm, and her trembling moved him to pity, for Stephen Tully was a kind-hearted man. He would carry a lame dog for blocks, nurse it like a sick child and turn it loose when well, with the remark that it was now able to live on the public as he did, and would have to take its chances.

He never intentionally gave pain to anyone, and the humblest employe in his office always had a cheery greeting from Mr. Tully when he entered in the morning. Mrs. McCaffrey, the old apple woman; Kitty, the flower girl; old Dennis, who brought the evening papers, and the boot-black who made his headquarters in the hall below, all considered Stephen Tully the ideal gentleman and generous patron. Who, indeed, took up a subscription for Mrs. McCaffrey when she was sick, and paid old Dennis' rent when he got his leg broke, but Mr. Stephen Tully? Who bought Kitty's flowers and had her pin them on the coats of his friends when in the evening of a dull day she found him at the club? When Sorrel Top gambled off his bootblack's kit who gave him half a dollar to start him in business again? Who, indeed, but Mr. Stephen Tully? He never taught in mission schools nor secretly gave thousands of dollars to feed the poor as his partner did, but he was more popular with the boys, and some went so far as to say that he was even a kinder hearted man than John King, only he took a different way of showing it. He belonged to all the clubs, subscribed liberally when the boys got up regattas or games of any sort, and no dinner party was complete without Stephen Tully to start "For he's a jolly good

fellow!" and sing his inimitable comic songs. True enough, staid papas, who were glad to have him at masculine dinners, were often slow to invite him to meet mamma and the girls, for he was suspected of being a trifle "fast." The handsome Mr. Tully did not mind this, for he managed introductions somehow, and invitations in plenty were regularly coaxed out of mamma by the young ladies themselves, who never could believe anything bad about the brilliant young lawyer who was credited with an income of eight or ten thousand a year.

Stephen Tully's easy-going nature could not resist the emotion his abrupt announcement had caused, and yielding to his habit of temporizing with difficulties, he determined to defer his "break up" with Cora Burnham until a more convenient season, while he, in the meantime, would treat her more coldly and get her accustomed to the idea of looking elsewhere for employment and a lover.

"Don't feel badly about it, my sweet Cora," said he, putting his arm around her affectionately. "It won't be right away, you know, and in the end it will be for the best."

"I don't care for the situation; I won't starve if I lose it; but I thought you loved me!" she sobbed.

"I do love you, Cora, and I would not ask you to make the sacrifice even for a little while, if I did not believe you love me and would not like to injure my prospects."

"When shall I have to go?" she asked, after a struggle to control her voice.

"Oh, not for a month or more, till we get our accounts straightened out, and not then if I can get a good partner who can hold King's business and keep solid with the church crowd, who had so much confidence in the deceased and so little in me!"

Cora Burnham was too clever a girl not to know that Mr. Tully was trying to deceive her, but in time she felt sure she could make herself indispensable, and gain a power over him which would result in her becoming Mrs. Tully. Already she was possessed of knowledge which, had Mr. King been alive, would have made her a dangerous enemy. Now that Mr. King was no more, certain irregularities of which Mr. Tully had been guilty could be charged to the dead, and instinctively she felt that the favor she had done the junior partner in concealing the matter in the firm's books was to be forgotten, and the tie which had drawn them together was now to be relaxed and soon to be severed. As she walked by his side in the deepening twilight her brain was busy. How much could she depend upon his gratitude, and how long would she have in which to gain some fresh claim upon his confidence, if not upon his fear? If he had used money belonging to clients when it was guarded by

that vigilant and upright man who now lay dead, would not be likely to be still more reckless when alone and less careful of immediate consequences. She knew him well, and while he was thinking how nicely he was getting out of his entanglement she had determined on the course she would pursue.

"I suppose it will be for the best, and I won't care as long as I know that you love me, Steve!" she whispered, pressing her face against his shoulder and looking up at him confidently. "Have you thought of any one for a partner?"

"No; I can't say I have. Killick mentioned the matter to me the other day, when the doctors gave King up, and told me to come round and see him after the funeral."

"You wouldn't think of it for a minute, would you?" exclaimed Cora, stopping in astonishment.

"Why not?" demanded Tully, who really had not thought twice of the matter, "he is middle-aged and impressive; is a great temperance worker and church man, and has a big practice of his own. I think he is as good a man as I can get to hold King's business!"

"There isn't a more thoroughly bad old scoundrel in Toronto than James J. Killick, and you know it, Steve Tully!" gasped Cora in astonishment. "He knows about that other thing, too!"

"Well, what if he does? He can't use it now that King is gone," snapped Mr. Tully, who, not relishing the reference to his past offences, thought it would be advisable to remind Miss Cora Burnham that she no longer had any hold upon him. "If he has all the influence of being considered good and lacks the inconvenient scruples which used to make King such a nuisance, it will be all the better."

"Oh, Steve, you can't be serious," pleaded Cora. "It is a sin to mention him and poor King in the same breath! If you want respectability get some one else, for people will be sure to find him out, and no one is so detested as a sneak and hypocrite who trades on religion and morality, and uses them to hide his wickedness. Get some really good man, Steve! There are plenty of them who are prominent and good as Mr. King was. J. J. Killick means you no good or after knowing what he does he would not offer to go into partnership with you. He intends to get hold of your business and tangle you up and disgrace you, Steve, I know it as certainly as if he had told me."

If Mr. Tully's ire had not been aroused by the excited girl's appeal he would have seen the force of her reasoning; but he was angry and unreasonable. "Don't talk to me as if I were a fool. I guess I have taken care of myself so far, and J. J. Killick isn't smart enough to do me up."

"I'll say no more," sighed Cora, who felt that she had gone too far. "I worked in his office for a month and he insulted me, something no one else ever did!"

"There you see, it is nothing but a personal dislike," laughed Mr. Tully, "though, really, a man of his age and standing should be ashamed to make eyes at the young ladies in his office—he should leave that sort of thing to young fellows like me. You are home now, so good-night, my fiery Cora."

"Good-night, Steve! You are not angry, are you? I only spoke as I did because I love you so much, not because—because I wanted to remind you of that other thing," she whispered, still clinging to his arm.

"That's all right, Cora. I know you meant well! it made me a little hot to hear it, but here's forgiveness," and stooping down he kissed her good-night.

CHAPTER III.

IN MOURNING BUT NOT IN DESPAIR.

"Order the carriage, Dell, and take Jack out for a drive. I shall go crazy if I see you two moping about another minute. Dear knows, I have enough to bear without seeing you leading him around the house and whispering and crying together as if you were the only ones who feel bad because poor John is——"

At this point Mrs. King burst into tears, as she had done half-a-dozen times since she had been conveyed to her room in a half-fainting condition the day before, when she had taken the last look at her dead husband. She had scarcely left it since, and no doubt believed herself to be sorely stricken with grief; but twice when little Jack had crept into her room he found her sleeping. When she was telling Dell that she had not slept a wink all night and was afraid she would go mad with grief, she could not understand the queer look in her little son's eyes; probably had she been able to interpret it she might have realized, as he did, that she was indulging her inclination for corsetless and half-buttoned dressing gowns and unkempt hair rather than indulging her sorrow.

"I am sorry, Madge, if I have been disturbing you. I was trying to quiet Jack, he is feeling so badly, poor little fellow, and insists on going from one room to another and talking about his papa and continually pointing out where he used to sit and what he said to him and how he looked——"

"How can you talk to me in that thoughtless way, Dell, as if I

did not feel it a thousand times worse than Jack does?" sobbed Mrs. King, burying her face in the pillows.

"Madge, dear, you are unreasonable. I had no such meaning. I know you are suffering. How could it be otherwise? But Jack is such a little fellow and appreciates his loss so keenly that it is heart-breaking to hear him talk."

"It is because you encourage him in it! What can a ten-year-old boy understand about death? You humor him and put such notions in his head that he thinks he ought to "take on" like a grown person. He never acts in that way when he is with me."

"You do Jack an injustice," retorted Miss Browning, much more sharply than was her wont. "He is not only too young, but too sincere to be suspected of affectation. Last night I looked into his room after everyone in the house was asleep, and found that he had moved his bed to the window so that he could see out. There the poor little fellow lay with his eyes wide open, looking up at the skies. I went in and sat beside him, and he held my hand till nearly daylight, when he dropped asleep. He asked me if I thought his papa could see him and know that his little Jack was thinking about him."

Tears filled the mother's eyes as she listened, but a pang of jealousy brought back her querulous mood.

"You are thoroughly spoiling him, Dell," she complained, and then as if to excuse her neglect in not seeking to comfort him she added, "Why didn't he come to me? I thought he was asleep, or I would have gone to his room myself."

"He did come to you, Madge, but he said you were asleep and he didn't like to waken you," answered Dell, who in her eager defence of Jack felt justified in permitting her friend to know how much of the sleepless-night fiction she had believed. Mrs. King's face flushed as she answered, "He must have been mistaken. I am positive I didn't close my eyes all night. Take him out for a drive, and tell the cook that Mr. Tully and Mr. Stryde will be here for dinner."

After Miss Browning had gone, Mrs. King busied herself with her toilet. She was a handsome woman of the full-blooded blonde type, and the thirty-five years through which she had idled left her almost as youthful in appearance as when, twelve years ago, she became the wife of a man nearly twice her age. She had a look of smiling innocence which increased her girlish appearance, and this with a happy knack—when she thought it worth while—of making people feel at ease, made her very popular with the younger members of the circle in which she moved. Dell Browning was only sixteen when, two years before, at the death of her father, who had

been John King's bosom friend, she had come to live with her guardian, yet but few, unaware of the existence of Jack, would have guessed that there was such a difference in the ages of the two women. Miss Browning's imperturbable self-possession and quiet dignity gave her an appearance of maturity, while her wealth and social position, coupled with the nameless charm which belongs to the woman who, from childhood, has been assured that the world will hasten to give her a cordial reception, lent her an air of aristocratic hauteur, to which her companions showed unquestioning deference. Mrs. King knew herself to be morally weak, and, while recognizing Miss Browning's strength, felt irritated by the comparison. In the King household Miss Browning was the established authority on everything before she had been domiciled therein a fortnight. The cook looked to her for instructions, and the coachman often glanced at Miss Browning for a suggestion when Mrs. King was giving her orders. Jack had at once instituted an ardent friendship with the new arrival, and the head of the house, the stern, great-hearted John King, who had placed everything at the disposal of his friend's daughter, learned to talk to her of matters which he never thought of mentioning to his wife, and found in her advice and companionship a pleasure which in his home life had heretofore been denied him. Nothing could surpass Mrs. King's tact and she seemed invariably at ease; yet it was always a comforting thing for her to know what Dell Browning thought. Many a pang of jealousy had been excited by Dell's unsought supremacy, but her presence made her life considerably pleasanter, and anything that lifted a care from her mind was welcomed by the easy-going woman who neither delighted to remain up very late at night nor to rise very early in the morning, nor to spend her waking hours in planning for the morrow. She had sometimes ventured to complain to her husband that he paid more respect to his ward than he did to his wife, but she never cared to repeat the experiment. John King had been an indulgent husband, but sometimes was a very candid one.

"Mrs. Flambert, ma'am," announced the maid, as Mrs. King was putting the finishing touches to her toilet.

The greeting in the reception room was extremely effusive. Mrs. Flambert embraced Mrs. King, and Mrs. King wept; and then Mrs. Flambert took Mrs. King's hand and murmured words of comfort which were so effective that Mrs. Flambert was encouraged, whispered a few more sad but congratulatory sentences on the immensity of the funeral and the evidences of the late Mr. King's popularity, adding some conventional assurances with regard to his spiritual preparedness for death.

After a few further tears on Mrs. King's part Mrs. Flambert felt justified in referring to the circumstances which should partially assuage the widow's grief: she had been left comfortably provided for, which of course made the bereavement much less terrible than if she had been left in want.

Mrs. King could not but admit the force of this statement, and later on confessed that she did not feel quite so bad in her loneliness as if she had been left with a large family on her hands. Before she left, with an arch smile full of insincerity and false teeth, Mrs. Flambert had intimated that Mrs. King's life and perhaps happiness were still in the future rather than in the past.

Mrs. King had assured Mrs. Flambert that she never expected to smile again, though this forecast lost much of its meaning when Mrs. King, in an unguarded moment received with a surprised smile Mrs. Flambert's confidential communication of her friend Mrs. Holly's prediction, that the firm of King & Tully would never be dissolved.

"How could that woman say such a thing. I am old enough to be Steve Tully's mother," exclaimed Mrs. King, with an affection of astonishment and disgust.

"Now Madge, you know better. A woman is only as old as she looks, and you don't look a day over twenty; besides, Mr. Tully must be fully as old as you are by the almanac."

Mrs. Flambert was a dark woman, tall, large, and exceedingly unconventional. Rumor whispered that she once kept a boarding house in which she had met Mr. Flambert, who had formerly driven a dray, though as a railway contractor he had since made a large amount of money.

"I don't thank Mrs. Holly for suggesting the possibility of my marrying again," sighed Mrs. King. "I loved poor John too well ever to be untrue to his memory, and even if it were not for that, I could never think of giving Jack a step-father."

Thereupon Mrs. King's tears welled forth afresh.

Mrs. Flambert embraced her and said farewell.

Whatever was the cause, when Dell Browning and Jack returned, they found Mrs. King's tears had become showery rather than continuous, and in the fair spells she was absolutely cheerful.

CHAPTER IV.

INTRODUCES MR. JAMES J. KILLICK, BARRISTER.

The offices were large, dingy and comfortless as well as carpetless. Partitions of pine board painted a light drab divided the rooms of Mr. Killick and his chief clerk from the apartment in which the underlings were at work at rickety and ink-stained tables. Mr. Stephen Tully, faultlessly attired and with a bouquet in his button-hole, gave each one a cheerful good-morning before he knocked at the door on which was a little tin sign, "Mr. Killick, private."

The man who looked up from his work as Mr. Tully entered would have repelled the confidence of any passable judge of human nature. Physiognomists believe that when a rascal is born his Creator stamps his character on his face that no one need be misled. They could not have found a better example of, or a greater necessity for, such precaution than in the case of Mr. James J. Killick, yet he had succeeded in ingratiating himself in the favor of moral and religious societies which, had they known his true character, would have cast him out with the utmost loathing. His square forehead was supported by a large square nose, half Roman, half Jewish, with a hump on a level with the lower line of his eyes, which made him look as if, when he were put together, it had been a question which end of the nose was intended for the upper elevation. His hair, sprinkled with gray, was sandy and bristling, and his grizzled eye-brows sparse and straggling. But it was in his light eyes and the large mouth with its hyena-like smile, that the danger signals were chiefly located. The warts on his nose, on the side of his face and the back of his neck, were not pretty, but they were beauty spots in comparison with his mouth. If a man who knew the a, b, c's. of character reading followed his instinct, the moment he saw the face of J. J. Killick, he would turn on his heel and leave the office, but if he remained the lawyer's insinuating acquiescence, well placed compliments and thorough understanding of the questions before him, would invite confidence and excite respect if not admiration. James Joseph Killick was a clever man.

"Ah, Mr. Tully, delighted to see you. Hope you are feeling as well as you look, my dear fellow. Come into my private room," exclaimed Mr. Killick as he turned the key in the lock, grasped

Tully's hand and led him to the large vault door, which when opened disclosed the fact that the rear wall had been cut through and the aperture led into a private apartment which had no connection with the other offices, and where the fear of eavesdroppers need not disturb the most confidential interview.

The luxuriance of the private room contrasted strangely with the shabby office in which the clerks were at work. Heavy portieres hung over the door and crimson plush covered the couch and easy chairs. A cabinet and sideboard suggested creature comforts which the temperance reformer was generally considered to despise, and the pictures on the wall were certainly not of the class of which J. J. Killick was supposed to be fond. A peculiar feature of the room was displayed when the curtain at the entrance was pushed back to admit them: there was no casing round the door, the brick wall apparently having been broken through and left unfinished.

Stephen Tully glanced curiously at the aperture and Mr. Killick explained:

"Looks queer, doesn't it? This room belonged to Theodore Kahn, the diamond dealer, who defrauded the banks and forged a lot of paper last year. You remember I managed the case against him, and one day he came into my office to see if he could settle with my clients, and saw the vault that we came through and guessed I kept my papers there—in fact saw me take some of them from there. Next night, he or a friend broke through the wall and abstracted every scrap of evidence I had against him, and then disappeared. No. There was nothing in the papers about it; no use, you know, telling the public everything. We took possession of his stuff, and I now use the vault over there where he was supposed to have stored his diamonds."

Stephen Tully glanced somewhat incredulously at Mr. Killick. The abandonment of the prosecution of Kahn had been much talked about, and some of the more cynical of the profession had hinted that none but J. J. Killick could explain the mystery. Tully felt sure the explanation he had just heard was not the whole truth nor necessarily a part of it, but he made no remark. He was puzzled to know why he had been shown so much, for Killick was not given to these confidential outbursts. Nor was it probable that many people were admitted to this singular apartment.

"These are a few papers Mr. Henn, the broker, gave me the other day," continued Mr. Killick, taking a large envelope from the vault, "They show that you are indebted to him to the amount of ninety odd thousand dollars. He is willing to make a

reasonable settlement, and as you are now in a much improved position I thought I would be neglecting my client's interest if I did not talk the matter over with you."

"That deal was settled six months ago," gasped Tully, his face whitening; "you know to what lengths I went to get the cash. Why is it reopened now?"

"Well, you see Henn thought he was getting all he ever would, but since King died he feels you are in altogether a different shape and should settle the balance."

"But I hold his discharge of the liability," interjected Tully, who, nevertheless, felt that the rope was well fixed about his neck, or Killick would not venture to confront him with the papers.

"No doubt you had a discharge, but it is not wide enough to cover everything—particularly the deals you have been in since, so he thinks he had better sue for all the amounts together, and you can put in your receipt as a contra."

James Killick's voice was soft and his smile was never larger nor more carnivorous than then. His protuberant eyes were fastened on Tully's face as he gently smoothed out the papers with his hairy hand.

"I can see your scheme, Killick, and know that I might as well leave town as stand the publicity of a suit," snapped Tully, bitterly. "A man might better sell himself to Satan at once rather than get into your clutches, and I tell you now that you can go ahead and go to the devil. I'm pumped dry and won't try to raise another cent."

"Don't get excited, and particularly don't become profane, for I dislike violent language, and am acting in this matter more as your friend than as Mr. Henn's legal adviser." J. J. Killick was blander than ever, and the movement of his hand in smoothing out the papers had become almost caressing.

"Don't give me any guff, Killick; it sickens me. If you have a proposal to make, make it, and let me go!"

"Stephen," said Mr. Killick reprovingly, "avoid the use of slang, it weakens your address, and, worse still, it suggests improper acquaintances. You laugh! Don't do it in that tone, it betrays your uneasiness—"

"Let up, Killick, on your lecture and on that grin of yours. If my laugh betrays my discomfiture your smile suggests a damnable desire to fasten your teeth in my neck. Go on with your proposition, but don't fancy I'm frightened of you; I'm more than half-tired of trying to be respectable, and if you push this thing I'm going to quit."

Stephen Tully was no coward, and as he spoke he rose from his chair and stretched himself with a yawn, which plainly intimated that his patience was nearly exhausted. The sideboard caught his eye, and he stooped and opened the polished door. Well-filled decanters and cut glass goblets were at his hand, and with an ironically elaborate bow he filled a glass, and as he inhaled the bouquet of the brandy he expressed the opinion that brother Killick's co-workers in the temperance cause were probably never invited to this *sanctum sanctorum*.

"The sideboard is just as Kahn left it," answered Killick sharply.

"Make your story short, old man," cautioned Tully, smacking his lips incredulously and feeling the advantage of having Killick on the defensive, "or Kahn's brandy won't last till we're through."

"What I propose is this," said Killick, wisely deciding to get down to business before the brandy got into Tully's head—"and remember I am acting as a friend in this matter and as one who believes in your ability, and that you will have a bright future if proper restraints are thrown around you. I am willing to accept your note for twenty thousand dollars and pay that amount to Henn as a full settlement of his claim and enter into a partnership with you on even terms which will enable you to live well and return me the loan inside a couple of years. What do you say?"

"I say you are a damned old scoundrel, and decline to accept," retorted Tully, burying his hands deep in his pockets. "Now what are you going to do about it?"

"Don't be rash, Tully," argued Killick, "I can bring as much business into the partnership as you have brought, and quite as much ability. Why do you object?"

"Because I know that Henn will take less than half you ask for his claim which didn't cost him a cent, and because I don't propose to let you lead me around by a halter."

"Lead you around with a halter?" echoed Killick. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you have something behind this; you would not be anxious, crooked as you are, to have for a partner a man who has embezzled the trust funds of a client, if you had not a sinister purpose. You want me to do your dirty work, James Judas Killick, and I won't," vociferated Tully, striking the table violently. "If I have made a couple of mistakes I intend to make no more, even if I have to leave Toronto and start afresh."

"You mistake my meaning, Tully;"—interposed Killick earnestly. "That I have a purpose in wanting to go into partnership with you I do not deny, but it is not directed against you or your

interests. King had some clients—rich clients whom for years I confess I have been trying to get and have been on the verge of getting; if we go into business together I feel sure they will stay with us. There are two corporations which King had, worth five thousand a year each if they were handled as I could handle them, and last of all there is an estate which, if I can get, will make more difference to me than all the rest put together. I don't care if you never do a tap of work for the firm. I am willing to go halves with you for ten years if you will throw in your office business with mine. Don't be hasty, Tully, it will mean twelve or fifteen thousand a year to you and no responsibility. What say you?"

The earnestness and evident sincerity of the warty and repulsive old lawyer convinced Stephen Tully, but he did not see fit to yield at once.

"I won't shoulder any debt on the start off, so you may as well drop that out or quit the subject. Burn that batch of papers and give me a clear release as far as Henn is concerned, and I may entertain your proposition."

Without another word Killick began to write the articles of agreement, and ten minutes later the papers over which Tully had hastily glanced were burning in the grate and the signature of Stephen Tully was on the indenture.

"Say nothing about this room to any one; it may be handy for you as well as for me—and by the way, your offices being in the next building on the same flat, we can put a door through, and I can keep my old quarters."

"All right, answered Tully, complacently, wiping his moustache after another glass of Kahn's brandy, "fix it as you like. I guess I'll get out through the side door and not go through your office!"

"My dear fellow, no, none of my clerks are aware of the existence of this room, and they would wonder how you got out."

"Where the deuce do they think you've gone then, all this time?"

"Discipline, my boy! Discipline! Before I came in, I turned the card in the door—'Engaged'—and it would be instant dismissal if a clerk even rapped when that sign is out." Killick held the curtain in his hand, as he spoke, and the light in his eyes declared to Tully that any violation of the secret on his part would be a dangerous experiment.

"I'll keep it dark, my esteemed friend and partner, never fear, but I'd like to know how you manage to get it cleaned up? Do it yourself?"

"Yes, I do," snapped Killick. "Don't be so inquisitive."

Tully was gone, but "Engaged" was still the legend on James

Joseph Killick's door. Inside the private office the lawyer sat leaning his head heavily upon the table. "Now," he muttered, "everything is in my hand! I am near the end of the hunt and another month will tell the tale!"

The warty skin was ashen and the hairy hands trembled as he hastily drank a glass of "Kahn's" brandy, but when he bustled out of his office there was no sign on his ugly face that he had prepared ruin and humiliation for half a score.

Oh, Thou, who keepest our eyes from tears, our souls from fear and our feet from falling, preserve Thou us and those dear to us from such birds of prey!

CHAPTER V.

MORE ABOUT THE PEOPLE WE ARE TO MEET.

"I am afraid I am over punctual," murmured Mr. John Stryde with some embarrassment as he rose to greet Miss Browning in Mrs. King's reception room the day after the funeral.

"Not at all, Mr. Stryde," answered Miss Browning with a smile. "How can you suspect yourself of being over punctual when you have come at the time appointed?"

"But you see, Miss Browning, I know so little of the ways of the social world that I can't ever tell whether people are expected at the appointed time or an hour or two later. I never go anywhere without being the first one to arrive, and yet so many years of business life, in which punctuality has been one of the first rules, have made it impossible for me to be ten minutes behind time, even when I am quite positive I ought to be an hour late."

"I wish everyone were as punctual as you are," answered Miss Browning, who was exceedingly exact in her outgoings and incomings, but who, nevertheless, found Mr. Stryde's exactness somewhat trying. She had never expressed a wish in his presence which he had not fulfilled, and every word uttered in his hearing seemed to have been carefully stored away to be reproduced in subsequent interviews. She had never known a man so intensely in earnest as Mr. Stryde or so literal in his interpretation of what was said to him. If in a joke she had invited him to call at six o'clock in the morning she felt sure at that hour she would hear Mr. Stryde's step and his nervous pull at the door bell. He was of medium height, rather heavily built, and his strong, plain face and light brown hair began to show signs that his thirty-eight years had not passed over him without leaving traces of the constant and

wearing toll of his business. He was manager of a bank and no one in financial circles was more trusted than he. A clever judge of human nature, firm and yet kindly in his manner, upright and thoroughly business-like in his methods, the directors of the institution of which he was principal were content to leave everything in his charge. Mr. John Stryde was a religious man and his only moments of apparent enthusiasm were those when, in the religious meetings in which he took considerable part, he prayed or sang. His one charm was his voice, and no one could hear its irresistible sweetness and fervor without believing in his sincere piety. Mr. Stryde for several years had been the constant companion of John King in his benevolent and religious undertakings, and when, previous to the latter's death the banker had stood at the bedside of his friend, he had been implored to watch over her who was about to be widowed as if he had received her as a charge from heaven. Six months before, John King had informed his ward that his friend Stryde loved her. Nothing had been further from Dell Browning's mind and in her surprise she said some inconsiderate things which John King was careful not to repeat to his sensitive friend. Since that time their meetings had been less frequent and the old bachelor had always been much embarrassed in her presence.

After a somewhat awkward pause during which Mr. Stryde had looked at his watch and was nervously winding the chain around his forefinger, Miss Browning observed that over-punctuality was certainly not one of Mr. Tully's faults.

"No, I suppose not," assented Mr. Stryde who now had his watch chain rolled up in a tight knot. "Law's delays and the tardiness of lawyers are proverbial but," with the charitable impulse which was never absent from Mr. Stryde when speaking of other people, "he is, perhaps, loath to meet Mrs. King and witness the grief which she must feel over the loss of her husband. Do you know, I felt almost inclined to suggest that this interview be deferred for a few days until she had recovered from the first terrible shock of her grief."

"She is bearing her trial very well, though of course," added Miss Browning parenthetically, lest her words might convey the idea that Mrs. King did not appreciate her loss, "she is very much overcome."

"Indeed she must be," exclaimed Mr. Stryde earnestly, as he released his finger from his watch chain and clasped his hands over his knee. "It must be dreadful to lose one that we love. I thought so much of him, too," he added slowly, his blue eyes filling with tears, "that I can sympathize with her, and yet I know if I try to say so I will break down. You tell her for me after I go away."

At this moment Mrs. King entered the door, her blonde hair arranged as carefully as if she were going to a ball. She looked extremely well in black, and somehow Mr. Stryde was impressed with the fact that she knew it, but the tears which started from her eyes as he held her hand banished the impression, and he endeavored to speak some comforting words, but his voice grew so husky that he had to seize his watch chain with his thumb while he reached for his handkerchief with his other hand. The little cambric trifle with which Mrs. King dried her eyes looked very pretty, and she accomplished the task with a graceful ease which in his embarrassment escaped his notice.

Having drawn his handkerchief hastily across his eyes and engaged his forefinger in the benumbing entanglement, Mr. Stryde was able to observe that the weather continued warm, though it began to look considerably like fall.

Imagining that conversation with regard to her late husband was as awkward and distasteful to him as to her, Mrs. King continued to speak of the weather and inquired whether Mr. Stryde intended to take any holidays and where he proposed to spend them.

"O, I'm quite well, thank you. I don't need any rest, and these are rather trying times, you know, and I have to look pretty sharply after business."

"Yes, Stryde, always looking after business," cried Mr. Tully cheerfully, as he entered and shook hands with Mrs. King and Miss Browning. "Always looking after business. You'll be like poor King, taken away while you're looking after business. You ought to be like me," continued Tully, as he reclined comfortably in an easy chair and ignored Mrs. King's preparations to shed a few tears. "Never let business interfere with your pleasure. We are all going through the world for the last time. We ought to make the most of it. Isn't that so, Miss Browning? Our last trip, you know."

Mr. Tully felt that the occasion called for some reference to the uncertainty of life and departure from it, and his careless words were as near as he could get to something that he felt would be appropriate without being too funereal.

Mr. Stryde glanced at him in wonder, and Miss Browning neither raised her eyes nor spoke.

"That is what I often told poor John," sighed Mrs. King tremulously as she prepared her handkerchief for the reception of the expected tear.

"Yes, and I often told him that, too," continued Tully airily, "but then he never paid much attention to junior counsel in any-

thing. Nobody needs to warn me about hard work. I was born with a warning in my system, and I listen to it with a good deal more readiness than I do to my conscience, I guess."

"Yes, I believe you do, Mr. Tully," assented Miss Browning, icily, "or I am sure you would have worked yourself to death before this."

"You see, Stryde, Miss Browning doesn't believe in the existence of my conscience," laughed Tully stretching out his limbs complacently. "Cruel, isn't she?"

Mr. Stryde had never entertained a very high opinion of Stephen Tully and this flippant conversation jarred discordantly on his sense of propriety.

"Ladies are permitted to express their opinion of us with a good deal of candor, Tully, and I suppose quite often they get very near the truth."

"Doubtless! doubtless!" assented the unruffled Mr. Tully. "Candor is one of Miss Browning's many charms, and when I feel that I am rapidly approaching perfection I find it very beneficial to obtain Miss Browning's opinion, as it never fails to bring me back to a proper state of humility."

"I am surprised, Mr. Tully, that with your trained judgment you could ever imagine yourself approaching perfection," observed Miss Browning, whose good nature had been ruffled by the constraint of the occasion.

"You wouldn't have made a good judge, Miss Browning. Really, I don't know of anyone, in spite of your intellectual attainments and undoubted honesty, who would be such a complete failure on the bench as yourself. You look at things in such an intensely partisan way—can't ever see anything but one side—can't even forgive me while acting as counsel for myself for saying a few complimentary things about my client. Unlike Stryde here, you know, I wasn't born good, and it is awfully hard to get that way after having once made the error of coming into the world all wound up ready to run in the other direction. As I came up the street I saw some little girls with a mechanical toy, and when they wound it up the little tin man would run along as merrily as if he were flesh and blood. I thought when I saw it," and as Tully spoke his face saddened and he pushed his hands deep into his pockets, as was his habit in his rare moments of earnestness, "that mankind are a good deal like that toy. I know I am. I determine to go in a certain direction and lift up my feet to start, and away I go in the old path, at right angles to the point I had calculated to steer for." As he paused the bitter recollection flitted his mind of his first great mistake and of his interview that morning with Killek.

Dell Browning had never before heard the slightest tone of earnestness in Tully's voice, and it surprised and softened her.

"Surely you do not compare yourself," she inquired, "to a mechanical contrivance, wound up to run without regard to your own brain and the varying impulses Heaven has given you?"

"Yes, Miss Browning, I do. I regret to be so heterodox in such orthodox company, but there is scarcely a thing I do that I could refrain from doing. I may vary it a little from my original intention, but yet I can't help the varying of it. Just as when we are sailing our yacht we may dodge around and tack with the wind, yet we can never sail against the wind Heaven has given us, neither can I sail against the impulses Heaven has given me."

"Perhaps you never try," suggested Miss Browning.

"Now it is a remark like that which causes me to state," laughed Tully, resuming his careless manner, "that you are entirely unfitted for a judicial position. 'Never try!' Why, there is no man but tries if for nothing save an experiment. I have experimented on pretty nearly everything. Try! Why, all the excitement of life is in trying, but then you know we never try anything we don't like, though occasionally we think we like things for the simple reason that we never tried them. I have never liked anything I have tried. The mere fact of having to try it spoils it for me, leaving no pleasure in it but the winning of it."

"Isn't that rather queer doctrine, Tully," interposed Stryde, who, as the conversation drifted from the topic he feared, began to feel more at home. "I always imagined that men like best those things which they have to struggle for."

"Well then, you always thought wrongly, my dear Mr. Stryde. A man never has to struggle to make his mother like him, and yet he is a brute if he doesn't appreciate her affection. Neither you nor I have a wife and I don't imagine we ever will have one until some woman likes us because she is so foolish that she can't help it. I certainly wouldn't like to set myself the task of making a woman like me because even if I thought I had achieved it I would always be expecting her later on to develop some spontaneous attachment which would leave me out."

"I am afraid, Mr. Tully, you are less fitted for the bench than I am. You seem to forget that all women are not alike, and because you appear to know that class which can give no reason for their attachments, you presume that none of us are guided by anything more than romantic sentiment."

"No, Miss Browning, I did not make that mistake," smiled Mr. Tully as he rose and stretched himself as if desirous of changing the subject. "I do not believe all women fasten their affections

on a man for the same reason, nor for the best reason, nor, indeed, for any reason, but when they do make a selection they do it with both hands, as it were, and all their might, and when I am selected I want to be selected just that way."

"I should think, Mr. Tully, you would think yourself extremely fortunate if you were selected in any way," retorted Dell, who resented Mr. Tully's very direct address to herself.

Mrs. King had considered it wise to refrain from taking any part in the conversation, believing no doubt that everyone present imagined that she should be too grief-stricken to take the slightest interest in anything except the grave. She was the exact opposite of Mr. Tully. He cared little or nothing for public opinion. She guided her every word and act and tear to suit the ideas of society.

When Mr. Stryde proposed that they should now proceed with the business which had been rendered so unfortunately necessary by the death of his friend, Mrs. King, much interested in Mr. Tully's views of matrimony had been about to join in the conversation, but found it requisite instead to burst into tears.

The will was read, and Mrs. King concealed behind her handkerchief and innocent face the pleasure she felt when she found that half of the property had been left unconditionally to her, while she was to have the use of all of it until her son attained his majority. In preparing his will King had apparently endeavored to show his confidence in his wife by making no stipulation except that the sum of a thousand dollars a year was to be set apart by the executors for Jack's education, while all the funds were to be invested by the executors who were instructed that nothing but the interest should be paid to the widow. Mr. Tully had witnessed the will, and, of course, was aware of its contents and had already in a careless way considered the financial advantages which would accrue to the man who could succeed in being Mrs. King's second husband, but as he looked at the beautiful girl whose fortune was quite as large as Mrs. King's, he wished he had been good enough to excite her respect and love, and in spite of his assertion that he wanted no woman whose affection did not seek him, he again resolved to woo and win her, and as he watched her lovely face and comprehended the glorious loyalty of her heart, he wondered if there might not be some way of influencing her sense of duty in favor of his suit.

CHAPTER VI.

CORR BURNHAM'S HOLD ON MR. TULLY.

"Mrs. Burnham, Fashionable Milliner and Dressmaker," in somewhat damaged gilt letters adorned the window of a small King Street store, over which, in two not uncomfortable flats, Mrs. Burnham and her daughter resided. While the business was not very profitable, it more than provided for the widow's wants, and every week a small sum, together with a portion of Cora's salary, were deposited in the savings bank. Mrs. Burnham believed that her daughter had been born to be a lady, and had been unremitting in her efforts to save enough money to give Cora an opportunity of some day posing as a young woman of means and refined leisure, believing that no young person in employment could hope to make an advantageous marriage. Cora had scarcely put on short frocks before her mother began to think of the wedding which was some day to be; the natural result, of course, was that Cora grew to believe that a woman's great and only aim was to marry as early and brilliantly as possible. That a score and two years had passed without this consummation so devoutly hoped for, was not Mrs. Burnham's fault. While she sat basting on tucks and frills and fastening the draperies of dresses, she had woven romances in which Cora had in succession married nearly all the eligible young men in the city. She, too, had made plans to capture them for her daughter, but they were such poor, feeble plans and as Mrs. Burnham was only an unimportant dressmaker, they all had failed even before she tried to put them in practice. What could she do to get her daughter into society? True, Cora was much handsomer and better educated than some of Mrs. Burnham's wealthiest customers who were numbered amongst the upper ten, but this made no difference, for there is no competitive examination for entrance to the charmed circle.

Before Cora was fifteen she and her mother had often sat in the little back parlor for hours of an evening discussing the best means of making money and obtaining social rank, always arriving at the same conclusion—that her only hope was in marrying a professional man, who, with the assistance of an ambitious wife, they imagined might be able to achieve a distinguished position, even though his commencement might be somewhat lowly. When Cora was but sixteen her mother decided that, as she had to keep a

girl to do the housework, she might as well let her front room to a couple of gentlemen lodgers, and she and Cora both hoped in this way they might entertain a social angel unawares, and thereby lay the foundation of the matrimonial alliance ever uppermost in their minds. Nor was it strange that these things should have so possessed them. Mrs. Burnham knew nothing of the world outside of her shop, and in it she heard nothing but the talk of the fashionable women who came to be measured and fitted, echoed in a still smaller but more persistent way by the half-dozen sewing girls in the back room, whose busy tongues dwelt on nothing but beaux, and their longings were for nothing more ennobling than a chance to marry and quit sewing.

After various experiments with young gentlemen lodgers, some of whom came home tipsy and others went away without paying the rent, Mr. Stephen Tully engaged the apartment. He had recently been called to the bar, and was working hard at a practice which, though it had brought him already into prominence, had made him but little money. Mrs. Burnham at once decided that Mr. Tully would exactly suit Cora, who was immediately taken from school to act as amanuensis for a young lawyer. It was hardly a month before Mr. Tully obtained a partnership with John King, and, his future being assured, he sought more fashionable quarters. Then a legacy left him by an English uncle, and much exaggerated in amount by the newspaper items which announced it, suddenly made Mr. Tully quite a lion in the social world, and Cora Burnham saw nothing more of the handsome lawyer for several years.

She and her mother, however, did not despair, and it was decided that she should learn stenography, just then becoming a favorite employment for young women, and endeavor to get a situation in Mr. Tully's office. Sometimes in the law offices where she was employed she saw Mr. Tully, who always chatted with her in his jolly way, and her long-nursed liking grew into love. Two years before this story opened she became bookkeeper for Messrs. King & Tully, and joy began to brighten Mrs. Burnham's back parlor, for the mother and daughter saw their plans at last nearing fruition, and every evening Cora would tell her mother what Mr. Tully had said during the day, and how he had looked at her and praised her work, and how much confidence Mr. King was placing in her. Sometimes the dread would come upon them that Mr. Tully was too proud to marry his bookkeeper, but they would comfort themselves by deciding that as soon as Cora obtained a firm hold upon him she would leave the office, and make it possible for them to be married without gossip or loss of caste on his part.

When the speculative wave swept over the city there was no bolder operator than Stephen Tully. His reputed wealth made it possible for him to engage in large deals on a very small margin, and when the reaction came no one was deeper in the pit than he. Fortunately it was not known that he had not confined himself to the use of his own capital but had invested a large amount belonging to a client, who fondly supposed that his money had been put into a mortgage. The circumstances were rather peculiar. The client had called to advise with his solicitor about the investment of \$20,000 and Mr. Tully, who managed all his business and was the custodian of all his papers, assured him that he could place the amount with absolute safety in a half-a-dozen properties upon which other clients were anxious to obtain loans. The client reposed entire faith in the lawyer, and gave the firm a check for the amount. Being in very great need of funds, and believing that in a few days the tide would turn, Tully used the money to protect some property upon which he must lose his margin if the amount were not immediately forthcoming. A couple of weeks later on he assured his client, in answer to a casual question, that the titles of the borrowers were being investigated, and in this way kept the matter standing for a month. Matters were becoming still more serious, and in his desperation Tully consulted Mr. Henn, a well-known broker, and was assured that a couple of thousands put on a wheat margin would be sure to realize a little fortune, as it was absolutely positive that the market would jump up within a week. This time office money was used, and to avoid detection Tully asked Miss Burnham not to enter the check in the cash book for a few days, as a point of law in the matter in which he was acting made it necessary for the entry to be delayed, as their books might possibly be brought into court. Four years in a law office had made Cora Burnham much more astute than Stephen Tully thought her, and when he cautioned her that nothing be said to Mr. King, as it was necessary that he as a probable witness should not be aware of the transaction, she at once suspected that something was wrong. To make matters still worse, the owner of the \$20,000 having discovered what he considered a magnificent opportunity of purchasing a property under foreclosure called on Mr. Tully and asked him if the mortgages had been accepted. Mr. Tully told him they had not, as the title had not yet been made entirely satisfactory, but that he had no doubt the papers would all be signed the next day. The client expressed a desire to get his money back, and instructed Mr. Tully to finally object to the titles, and charge him with what expenses had been incurred. While he was talking Tully was quietly writ-

ing on a slip of paper, and, springing from his chair, he said: "I will be able to fix that all right, but I had better ask the book-keeper whether any of the transactions have been closed." The little slip of paper was dropped unobserved by the client before Miss Burnham's eyes, and she read the hurried lines, while the lawyer enquired at some length if the moneys had yet been paid out. Her hand trembled as she brought the cash book into the private office, turned over the leaves and announced that the mortgages had all been accepted and the money paid. Mr. Tully's client remarked that it was not material, as the mortgages would no doubt be accepted in lieu of cash. Tully promised to see to the matter, and thus gained a day's respite. Troubles came thicker and faster. Wheat did not advance, but Broker Henn assured him that the change had to come, and vigorously advised him to make his margins good. Tully told him to keep up the margins and charge the amount to him, giving him a note for a large amount as security. By disposing of a very large block of property at a ruinous sacrifice Tully obtained his client's money, and assured him that he had been able to cancel the transactions by the payment of a small discount. This forced Tully to still further make a confidante of his fair bookkeeper, and loss after loss having been made, and wheat continuing to go down instead of up, Mr. Tully was still unable to make good the check which Miss Burnham had been assured would be returned in a few days.

The gambling spirit finds its easiest victim in the man who has been made reckless by impending ruin. The less a man can afford to lose, the more apt he is to take desperate risks. Having once begun operations as a grain and stock speculator, Tully continued to supply broker Henn with his notes of hand until his indebtedness had reached a very large amount, and the broker consulted with Killick, his solicitor, as to the solvency of his creditor. Killick sent for Tully, and the latter, with professional and financial ruin staring him in the face, was forced to make over the remainder of his property to avoid exposure and consequent disgrace. This did not cancel his debt to Henn, only quieting him. The original two thousand dollars Tully had used of the firm's money had still to be found, and he was about to ask Mr. King for a loan of that amount, even though he knew it would materially damage him in the eyes of his partner, when relief came from an unexpected quarter. Cora Burnham had become thoroughly frightened by the condition of affairs, particularly by her own share of the guilt, and in consulting with her mother as to the best way out of it they had decided to take from their savings an amount, sufficient to cover the deficit, and offer it to the handsome Mr. Tully as a loan. That this would

certainly be a favor which Mr. Tully could not forget and would probably reward by a proposal of marriage, strengthened them in their resolve to act the part of friend-in-need even though it took half of their savings to do it.

Next morning Stephen Tully came into the office looking dejected and miserable. A late night at the club where he had been drowning his sorrow in too copious libations left sinister lines on his handsome face. As he passed his bookkeeper he inquired if Mr. King were down yet. His face almost frightened her as he turned and entered his private room. The door had scarcely been closed when, with a bundle of papers in her hand, she gently tapped for admittance. His surly "Come in" was unlike the cheerful tones of the gay young bachelor who was such a general favorite, and as she closed the door behind her he glanced sullenly up to see who it was, giving a very perceptible start and demanding nervously, "What is the matter?"

"Nothing," she answered tremulously, "but mother and I were talking over your difficulties last night, and as we have a little money saved, and—and—and as you have been so kind to us, I—we—we thought if you would not be offended we would offer you this check which will be enough to make your account all right."

Tully picked up the check which Cora had laid on the table, glanced at the amount, and then swinging around in his chair stared for a moment at his bookkeeper as if he could scarcely comprehend the impulse which had prompted the loan. The girl's blushing face and downcast eyes revealed to him in an instant—what he had perhaps suspected—that affection had led her to act as his confederate and she was now offering the sacrifice of her little fortune to save him. Springing to his feet he seized her hands and his words of gratitude were quickly followed by those of love. She confessed that she liked him better than everything and everybody else in the world put together, and trembling with happiness not unmixed with triumph she felt that her fortune was at last made. Until released by the noon hour she sat in her little glass partitioned room gazing at the columns of figures in the cash book, thinking how proud her mother would be when she heard the news, and how, when she—Cora Burnham—was Mrs. Tully she would take good care that her husband made no more reckless ventures and compromising mistakes.

After the check had been cashed, the money returned and the danger past, Mr. Stephen Tully with his door locked, lay back in his chair, his feet high on the desk before him, thumping as he pulled steadily at his cigar, that he had been far too impulsive and had gotten out of one difficulty by getting into another.

"Confound it," he thought. "I might have shown my gratitude without making an ass of myself. A man doesn't need to marry everybody who lends him a couple of thousand. It will knock the town cold when they hear I am going to marry the bookkeeper in my office—and that vulgar, scheming old mother, she'll damn me socially even if I could work Cora into good society."

The longer he thought of it the more gratitude gave way to selfishness, and when he put on his hat and resolved to go out and brace his nerves with a brandy and soda, he had decided not to be in any hurry in marrying the lovely Cora, and by-and-bye he might get out of it altogether. In the meantime he would caution her to say nothing about their engagement, which he did as he passed her desk.

"Be sure and don't mention that matter we were speaking about, Miss Burnham," he said in a formal half whisper as he bent over her book. "Of course you understand it would be injudicious."

This was the first blow to her new-found happiness, and her castles were not quite so lofty nor so plainly in sight when she went home to her luncheon, as they had been in the morning.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MRS. BURNHAM.

It was still early in the evening when Mr. Stryde, who had a church engagement, found it necessary to say good night to Mrs. King and Miss Browning, and Tully was quietly given to understand by the latter that nothing would be more appropriate than his departure at the same time. As they walked down the street together Mr. Tully remarked that Mrs. King's grief evidently did not affect her appetite. Mr. Stryde inquired what he meant.

"Oh, nothing particular, only I noticed that for a heart-broken woman she relished her dinner a little more than might have been expected."

"You are very observant," replied Mr. Stryde, coldly.

"Perhaps," assented Tully. "What do you think of Miss Browning?"

"Be kind enough not to make any remarks about her, Tully. She is my ideal of a good and beautiful woman."

"Why, you surprise me, Stryde. You betray more enthusiasm than I ever saw you display outside of a prayer meeting. Strange, isn't it, that men so different as you and I should realize our ideal in the same woman."

"There is nothing to wonder at. No man could know Miss Browning without sincerely admiring her."

"Why Stryde, old fellow, you have got it bad, as men always do when they get it late in life. I hope the er—er—admiration is mutual."

"Really, Tully, I don't think I am under cross-examination," answered Stryde very pointedly as they stood on the corner where they were to separate, "but lest she might be misunderstood I will say that the admiration is all on my side."

"That is my case, too," smiled Tully as he extended his hand with great cordiality. "We're both in the same boat again! I guess we'll have to look elsewhere for our ideal woman. Good night."

Though he never liked Cora Burnham less than when he had just left Miss Browning, Tully always felt as many better men have done, a strong desire after he had been repulsed by the woman he cared for, to seek consolation in the society of one who cared for him. When the cold Miss Browning wounded his vanity the warm Miss Burnham healed it by her flattering devotion, even though the comparison between the hauteur of the one and the subserviency of the other further excited his preference for the former and a greater distaste for the latter.

After glancing up the street to see that he was unobserved he tried Mrs. Burnham's shop door, found it unlocked, and guided by the light which shone through the entrance to the rear apartment, he made his way into the presence of the dressmaker and her daughter. Aroused by his footsteps, Cora who had been lying on a sofa with a shawl around her shoulders, sat up and began hastily to smooth her hair.

"Bless me, was that store door unlocked?" exclaimed Mrs. Burnham, who was a thin and very bilious looking woman.

"It was indeed, my dear madam. You have never furnished me with a key, and I assure you I didn't come in through the window," answered Tully in a tone which was not intended to be conciliatory. "You had better go and put up the bars or someone will get in and steal you, first thing you know."

"That wouldn't be so serious, Mr. Tully, as to have someone come in and steal my daughter's happiness," she retorted, with an effort to be overpoweringly stern.

"It wouldn't, for a fact, my dear madam, though I would miss you awfully."

Mrs. Burnham invariably aroused the most disagreeable part of Tully's nature, and he found it almost impossible to treat her even with a pretence of politeness. "But to guard against both it

would be prudent to lock the door, and if you would be kind enough to take about fifteen or twenty minutes to do it I would be delighted to have a little chat with Cora."

Mrs. Burnham marched out of the room with the light of a stern resolve in her faded eyes, and no sooner had the bolts been pushed into their places than she marched back again and "planted" herself in the rocking-chair, bolt upright.

"Now, my dear madam," began Tully, banteringly, "don't begin one of your lectures. Wait till I have half a day to spare and I will come around, consult with you as to my frailties and obtain your opinion all at once. It is very unsatisfactory to hear it in such a fragmentary manner, and with due respect to your exalted virtues I confess to having become slightly weary of hearing you dilate on the absence of the same beautiful attributes in myself."

"It is a long while since I have had a chance to say anything to you, Mr. Tully," began Mrs. Burnham, with unabated vigor.

"Yes, my dear madam, and it will be longer still before you have the next chance if I see you first. One doesn't need to go about hunting for trouble nowadays. It is less formal than society, and will make its calls regardless of introduction or merit. I have enough of it without coming to hear one of your orations, and if you will be kind enough to let your absence take the chair I will really feel everlastingly grateful."

"You think of no one but yourself, Stephen Tully," snapped Mrs. Burnham, hotly. "You are utterly selfish—"

"With the accent on the 'utterly,' my dear," interpolated Mr. Tully, with sarcastic truthfulness.

"Yes, with the accent on everything bad. The way you have used Cora is simply shameful—outrageous. What you said to her the night before last in the park fairly made my blood boil."

"Now really, Mrs. Burnham, do you intend to convey the idea that you have blood, and that it actually boils? Your brunette appearance indicates that your veins are filled with molasses or unfiltered fluid from the storm-tossed bay."

With a gesture of despairing heart-break Mrs. Burnham fell back in her chair, her hands uplifted and fingers outspread, as if to conceal from her gaze the sneering face of the young lawyer.

"O, Steve, how could you say such a thing to mother?" ejaculated Cora.

"I do not know anything I couldn't say to her; she aggravates me beyond endurance. I came here to-night to have a pleasant chat with you—one of our good old times, such as we had before your mother began insisting on buying the marriage license and

having the wedding come off before I leave—but instead of giving me a chance to act in the way that I always endeavor to conduct myself with other people, she begins her nagging and prepares me for almost anything, not excepting manslaughter."

Tully knew how to influence Cora, and could always detach her support from her mother by intimating that the old lady was the only bar which separated them. Cora looked reproachfully at the angry woman who, in great agitation, was swaying to and fro in the rocking-chair, and Mrs. Burnham detected the unflinching glance. She stopped rocking, and grasping an arm of the chair with each hand, she leaned forward and hissed in Tully's face:

"I understand your tricks, Steve Tully. You are trying to get Cora to turn against me, even after you treating her like a dog. Now you want to discard her and make her hate her mother as the cause of your desertion. I know you, you embezzler, you thieving—" Cora sprang forward and covered her mother's thin and trembling lips with her hand, and as she pushed the enraged woman back into the chair she exclaimed hoarsely:

"Mother, you promised never to say that again. It is enough without anything else to drive Steve away forever."

"I don't care if it is," cried Mrs. Burnham, who, grasping both her daughter's wrists had released herself from restraint. "When he was on the verge of ruin we saved him, and if what you have done for him won't keep him to his promise, nothing will. If I thought I was in the road," and as she spoke Mrs. Burnham buried her face in her daughter's arms, to which she still clung, and sobbed, "I would go away and never see either of you again."

Cora was really an affectionate daughter, and in endeavoring to console her mother she softly stroked the tightly plaited hair which was so rapidly turning gray.

"Do not speak of that, mamma, only please don't quarrel with Steve."

"Quarrel with him, Cora! I didn't quarrel with him until I could see that I wasn't the stumbling block. He doesn't love you, child, and never did. His selfishness and pride are more to him than gratitude or honor or the love of a thousand girls as good as you."

As the mother spoke, her uplifted face, sallow and unhandsome though it was, shone with the glorious light of maternal love, and the tears on her cheeks softened the hard face so that Stephen Tully, callous as he was, could not resist the appeal.

"You are wrong, Mrs. Burnham. I do love Cora, and when you act like an affectionate mother as you are doing now, and not as the designing old match-maker as you generally do, I can even endure you."

Cora saw her advantage, and, sitting on the broad arm of the rocking chair, her arm thrown tenderly around her mother's shoulders, she asked:

"What do you really mean to do, Steve? Be honest for once, that we may know what to expect. I say *we*, because for twenty years mother has had no one but me to love and think about, and her very life is bound up in my happiness. If you are determined to break our engagement, do it now—I think I can survive it," she added tremulously, but the very thought of losing him upset her self-possession, and springing from the arm of the chair she threw herself on her knees at Tully's feet crying, "O Steve, Steve, remember how I love you."

He bent down and lifted her up, and though he had been through several scenes similar to this he could not resist the flood of pity which carried away with it the resolution with which he had armed himself when he entered.

"Come now, Cora, don't be silly," he whispered kindly as he placed her in the chair in which he had been sitting. "Don't be frightened at your mother's ghost stories. You two sit in this back room talking things over until you work yourselves into a regular panic. I told you the other night the reasons why our marriage is utterly impossible at present and if, Cora," he continued giving her an affectionate caress for which she raised her face in affectionate thankfulness, "you trusted me half as much as you do your mother you wouldn't lie awake nights imagining all sorts of direful possibilities."

"I do trust you, Steve," whispered Cora, seizing his hand and pressing it against her face, "but it has been so long, with always something in the road, and now it seems further away than ever."

"I don't know about that, little one. It may be nearer than you think. By the way I went into partnership with Killick to-day."

"What?" cried Cora in a voice of genuine horror.

Mrs. Burnham simply sat upright and, as was her habit, uplifted her hands in astonishment.

"Why, what is the matter? You seem as startled as if I had told you I had gone into partnership with the devil himself."

"You might almost as well," gasped Mrs. Burnham, folding her hands and continuing to stare blankly at her daughter.

"You don't mean to say Steve that the papers are signed," inquired Cora faintly.

"Yes, I do," snapped Tully. "Now be kind enough to tell me why you look upon it in the light of such a terrible catastrophe."

"The old villain," gasped Mrs. Burnham.

"Do you refer to me," demanded Tully.

"You know she means Killick. I told you why I dislike him, Steve, and I can't understand how you endure him for a minute after the way he treated you."

"Well, it is all over now. I will have to make the best of it, and you must do the same. He has the pull on me again, and you will have to watch the books pretty sharply, Cora, to see that he doesn't get away with what little I have left."

"Is he coming into your office or are you going into his," inquired Cora who was clever enough to understand that no good would result from a further discussion of the inevitable.

"Neither. We are going to cut a hole in the wall and unite the two flats."

"Unite the flat and the sharp," snorted Mrs. Burnham who now that she felt that Tully was getting into trouble was inclined to assume a more dictatorial air.

Tully was insulted, and he retorted angrily, "Don't imagine, Mrs. Burnham, that because you have worked me for a flat everyone can."

"Mother!" cried Cora warningly, and Mrs. Burnham taking the hint fell back in her chair and began rocking with most tantalizing vehemence.

"I see the storm gathering again," said Tully, as he arose and fixed his hat jauntily on his head, "and I had better leave before it breaks. Send me word, Cora, when your mother gets over her bilious attack and I will drop in again and give you some points on watching James Judas Killick, but remember one thing, you can be of no use to me in the office if you appear devoted to my interests. Get solid with old Killick and report progress whenever you find anything out."

"But Steve, I can't bear him. He gives me the creeps every time he comes near."

"Well, you will just have to get over the creeps. I wouldn't have gone in unless I knew I could work him through you. Now be kind enough to keep your seat, Mrs. Burnham. Don't rise and let your indignation get the better of you. I know exactly what you are about to say. I know you object to your daughter being made the object of Mr. Killick's very warty attentions, but be kind enough to remember that I will be there to keep him within bounds. Good-night, Cora," whispered the gallant Tully, as in his most devoted tone, and with all the charm of his most fascinating manner he kissed her good-night. "Don't let it fret you if I treat you as a stranger. I will come and see you oftener and make amends when my esteemed partner and the man in the moon are not looking."

As the clever Mr. Tully hurried up the street he felt he had done a very smart piece of work and would now be able to inaugurate the period of frigidty which would at last relieve him of the too devoted Cora. As a matter of fact he had indeed set a timely watch, though he did not know that the loyalty which he despised would yet have another opportunity to save him from disgrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Love, truly lovest thou me best?" ask'd he.

"I love him best who best loves me," said she.

"Mamma, do you like Mr. Tully?" inquired little Jack as they sat at dinner.

The question was unexpected and very pointed. Jack had laid down his knife and fork, and with his elbow on the table and his chin in his hand he gazed steadfastly at his mother, waiting for an answer. There had been some discussion regarding Mr. Stryde and Mr. Tully during the afternoon, and the subject had cropped up again at dinner. Master King had the proverbially large ears of a small boy, and his retentive memory and seriousness of manner combined to make him a very disagreeable inquisitor.

"Why, of course I respect Mr. Tully. Why shouldn't I?" replied Mrs. King, busying herself with a piece of chicken and, as Jack thought, rather avoiding his gaze.

"Why should you like him, mamma? I don't. He is always making fun of people. I would like to kick him."

"Jack!" cried his mother, sternly, "you should be whipped for saying such naughty things—and about your poor dead papa's partner, too!"

Jack's eyes filled, his food seemed to choke him for a moment, but after a struggle he recovered his composure. "I didn't like him when papa was alive, and I don't believe papa did."

"You are mistaken, Jack. Your papa placed great confidence in Mr. Tully. Even if he didn't you should speak well of him for Aunty Dell's sake; he is her friend."

Jack's quick eye sought Miss Browning's face and detected the angry glance which was her only reply to Mrs. King's frivolous evasion of the facts.

"That is not so, is it Aunty Dell?" demanded Jack. "You hate that fellow Tully, don't you?"

"Jack, dear, you surprise me. Where did you learn to speak of a gentleman who comes to your mother's house as 'that fellow'?"

asked Miss Browning severely, half-conscious of an effort to turn the subject.

"But you don't like him, do you?" persisted the boy.

"It isn't pretty for you to ask so many questions, Jack. Hasn't your tutor told you never to inquire concerning the preferences of your friends? It is not nice, and some day if you persist in it you will get some very unpleasant answers."

"But say, Auntie Dell, you don't like him, do you?" continued Jack, determined to have his answer before he left his question.

"Like is a very indefinite word—"

"I mean do you like him as you like —?" explained Jack, his chin still supported by his hand.

"Of course not, Jack. I like you very much; I love you, Jack, dear."

"But you don't love him, do you?"

"Certainly not," retorted Miss Browning somewhat sharply, for the questioning had grown a little wearisome, nor had it been made more pleasant by her knowledge that Mrs. King was watching her sharply and betraying as much, if not more, interest than her son in her replies.

"Then, you like me better than anybody?" again demanded Jack, who seemed determined to have a complete and unequivocal utterance before he would be satisfied.

"Certainly, Jack, except your—"

"O, don't except me, Dell," began Mrs. King, peevishly pushing her chair from the table. "I thoroughly understand that you have supplanted me in Jack's affections, and I sha'n't quarrel with you."

While Jack was taking a little after-dinner stroll in the garden with Miss Browning, he stopped her to inquire still again, "Do you think mamma likes Mr. Tully better than she does me, Auntie Dell?"

"Why, certainly not, Jack. It is very rude and wicked of you to ask such a question. Your mamma likes you better than anyone else in the world."

"Say, Auntie Dell, I like you better than anybody in the world."

The tone, more than the words of Jack's protest of love, seemed to indicate his doubt of his mother's preference for him. She had always let him take care of himself, excepting that she had provided a nurse and then a governess to look after him. He had reason for suspecting that he absorbed but little of her thought, as he knew he had a very small share of her attention.

The evening was warm, and before they left the piazza Mrs. Flambert dropped in to cheer Mrs. King up a bit. As she extended

herself in a big red rocking-chair and prepared to impart and receive news on the shortest notice, she exclaimed:

"Why, do you know, I never heard such a thing in my life. The very ideal! To think that Stephen Tully would go into partnership with old Killlick. Everybody is talking about it, and I don't wonder either."

"Why, he is your husband's lawyer, isn't he?" inquired Miss Browning, who had frequently heard legal affairs discussed in the household.

"Yes, I know, of course, one can do business with people one wouldn't want to be in partnership with, but I have always opposed Flam, having even that much to do with old Killlick."

Mrs. Flambert in her confidential and playful moods frequently referred to her better half as "Flam," and he with equal playfulness and a fine sense of humor completed the word by calling her "Bert."

"Why, what do you see so disagreeable in Killlick?" inquired Mrs. King. "He is said to be one of the cleverest lawyers in the city."

"He looks like a warty old toad and I always want to rub my fingers with my handkerchief after I shake hands with him. I really think he is the nastiest man I ever saw, I feel crawly all over whenever he comes near. Did you ever shake hands with him, Dell?"

"No," replied Miss Browning coldly, "and I never want to."

"Did you ever get your hand imprisoned in that claw of his, Madge?" continued Mrs. Flambert vivaciously, mimicking the performance she was describing.

"No; at least I can't remember anything particular about it if I did."

"O, it's lovely! He begins to squeeze so gradually, he pushes your hand down as if he were trying to hold it under water, clutching more convulsively every second until it is enough to burst the fingers out of one's gloves, and while he presses and clings he gazes at you out of those bulging, meaty eyes till I want some lonesome place to be seasick in. Ugh! It turns all one side of me into goose-flesh to think of it."

"Why, he must have been making love to you, Mrs. Flambert," observed Miss Browning, with a look of disgust.

"Making love to me," cried Mrs. Flambert, clasping her hands. "Why the old animal was never left alone with a woman a minute without making love to her, and the worst of the warty reprobate is he won't even wait until there are no eye-witnesses. A couple of times I have met him out, and he has followed me

around the room with those big flabby oyster eyes till I felt he either had to take them off me or I would scream. I told Flam. about it too! He said I flattered myself; Killick wouldn't look at a woman long enough to know the color of her hair unless he got paid for it, but I know better."

Mrs. Flambert was an exceedingly good story-teller and though her recitals were not always delicate or timely they were invariably amusing, for as she spoke her face and her feet and every part of her seemed to be in sympathy with the narrative and were all used to impart full dramatic effect. Mrs. King could not refrain from joining in the little ripple of merriment though she suppressed her laughter immediately.

"And has Mr. Tully gone into partnership with such a man as you describe?" inquired Miss Browning.

"He certainly has. Killick told Flam. this very afternoon and the old silly seemed to think it was a good thing for Tully too, but I don't. Flam, you know, thinks a man is in luck if he is in the way of making a dollar, no matter what sort of people he has to live with."

"I think you must be painting Mr. Killick blacker than he is," interposed Dell. "He is a religious man and is quite prominent in a number of societies."

"Prominent! Yes, Killick will be prominent anywhere he is. Nothing but assassination would keep him out of prominent places. But you will know him better now he is associated with Mr. Tully. He will find an opportunity to get better acquainted with you both; as Mrs. Killick number two is in poor health, it is highly probable that he is already looking about for her successor. But to think of Tully, a smart, good-looking fellow as he is, being harnessed up to an old gorilla like that, it makes me shiver."

"I am obliged to you for the compliment, Mrs. Flambert," laughed Tully, at her elbow, as he leaned over the railing of the piazza and gallantly raised her hand to his lips. "I am really inexpressibly delighted to know that you think I am 'a smart, good-looking fellow.' To have you think so and say so is really to have one's fortune made, but I am dying of curiosity to know the identity of the 'old gorilla' to whom I am harnessed. Surely you haven't heard that I was married to your friend Miss Beecher?"

"Poor old Miss Beecher," exclaimed Mrs. Flambert laughing immoderately. "You never forget anything. If I had known you were so near I wouldn't have said pretty things about you. I am glad you came just when you did or maybe I might have passed on to things not quite so pretty."

"But who is the 'gorilla,' Mrs. Flambert?"

"Old Killick to be sure. How on earth could you do such a thing,

and poor King scarcely buried. It is as great a scandal as if Madge here had married him. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"You forget this is purely a business matter, Mrs. Flambert. There is nothing sentimental about law," replied Tully gravely. "Business has been collecting on our hands and it is impossible to get through it with our present staff, and as there is a limit even to law, says, something had to be done. I do not think it is a matter for surprise or complaint that I should have gone into partnership with one of the cleverest men in our profession."

"O, but the looks of the creature are enough to drive business away from a boneyard."

"Everyone has not the good fortune to be born beautiful as you all are," answered Mr. Tully, with a smile and a bow to the three ladies. "His recommendation is utility rather than beauty."

"I suppose you will take him out calling with you, won't you, Tully. Your friends will be so delighted to see him, and he is a most charming conversationalist."

"You are too hard on him, Mrs. Flambert," laughed Tully. "Have you met him, Miss Browning?"

"Yes, a few times; and I can't say that I was favorably impressed; but then many homely people are much nicer than handsome ones when you get to know them."

"That is a drive at you, Mr. Tully," remarked Mrs. Flambert.

"O, is it?" he answered. "Compliments seem all to be coming my way to-night, though that one seems to be in the direction of exalting my good looks at the expense of those charms which are only developed by intimate acquaintance. You know, Mrs. Flambert, Miss Browning is always taking pains to bring to my attention certain shortcomings of which she imagines I am gully. I think it is really cruel of her, and a very poor return for the homage I pay her when she is near, and the praises I am never tired of singing when I am absent from her charming presence."

"You ought to feel flattered, Mr. Tully, if Lady Indifference takes enough interest in you even to point out your faults. It is a most encouraging sign," replied Mrs. Flambert puckering her mouth and looking knowingly at Miss Browning.

Little Jack was leaning over Miss Browning's chair, and when he heard these bantering remarks he dropped his hands from the shoulder of his goddess and turned angrily to re-enter the door. Dell caught his arm as he passed, but he jerked it pettishly from her and would not be detained. Mrs. Flambert noticed the boy's clouded face and angry movements.

"Why, Tully, I believe little Jack is jealous of you," she cried. "Things are getting serious."

Remembering Jack's persistent inquiries at the dinner-table, Dell's face flushed and annoyance was distinctly perceptible in her tone as she retorted, "I should think, Mrs. Flambert, you would be more judicious than to make such remarks before children."

Tully smiled. "I am glad," said he, "there is some one besides myself lacking in a fine sense of propriety. I was beginning to think I was the only one who violated Miss Browning's rules of decorum."

Mrs. Flambert only laughed the louder. "I can see that my guess is not far astray or you wouldn't get angry about it, Dell. Do you know Mr. Tully, Dell is not like other women. She whom she loveth she chastiseth—"

"Mrs. Flambert, be kind enough to drop the subject," said Dell, with quiet voice but flashing eyes, "I think you are quite as lacking in a sense of propriety as Mr. Tully himself. I am not fond of being the subject of discussion, particularly when the topic is ill-timed and in bad taste."

Mrs. Flambert's merriment did not abate. "Dell, you are really betraying yourself. I actually didn't think you took any interest in Mr. Tully until now—and a very handsome couple you would make, too. Tully here, tall, gallant, waving mustache, elegant of dress and a rising man in his profession, and you," continued Mrs. Flambert, motioning gracefully in the direction of the angry girl, "beautiful, intellectual and wealthy. Don't forget the latter, Tully. A dowry is a splendid thing to get with a bride."

"Yes, and a splendid thing to get with a husband," added Tully, who to do him justice was endeavoring to put a stop to Mrs. Flambert's jesting, and yet pretending to enjoy the whole thing as an excellent joke.

"Good night, Mrs. Flambert. Good evening, Mr. Tully. I think I will leave you to finish the discussion."

"Why, Dell!" cried Mrs. King, apologetically.

"Hadn't you better come in, too, Madge? It is quite chilly out here." But without waiting for a reply Dell Browning stepped through the French window and disappeared.

Mrs. King who could no longer pursue her policy of saying nothing and looking sad, as she felt the recently bereaved widow should, was forced to enter into conversation.

"Dell never likes to be joked," she explained, "and yet when she gets going she is the greatest tease one could imagine."

"O, well, that is always the way. Jokers never like to be joked," smiled Tully, who was still entirely at his ease.

"So you have really taken Mr. Killick into the firm?" Mrs. King inquired.

"Yes, the arrangement was concluded to-day," replied Tully, briefly.

"I might as well mention it now," said Mrs. King, "Mr. Killick and Dell's father once had some business dealings or something which resulted in a very bitter quarrel between them. Poor John mentioned the matter to me with the warning, no matter what I heard about it, never to speak of the matter to Dell. It was years ago, and I never really understood what it was all about. All I know is that Dell knows nothing of it, and I speak of it now because I suppose it would be wise to continue to conceal it from her. Poor John hated concealment of any kind, and he wouldn't have spoken unless the matter was important."

Tully sat on the railing of the verandah, his eyes half closed as if he were seeking to discover the meaning of Mrs. King's words. He remembered Killick's explanation of his desire to obtain the management of some estates which had been entrusted to the firm of King & Tully, and wondered if the old quarrel had any bearing on Killick's consuming desire to force him into a partnership.

"Had you heard anything about it, Mr. Tully, inquired Mrs. King.

"Not a word," he replied. "If I had known of any such disagreement I would have hesitated before taking Mr. Killick as a partner. However, Miss Browning need never know of the old trouble, whatever it was. Mrs. Flambert, we can rely on your discretion?"

Mrs. Flambert had fine eyes, and this implied doubt of her ability to keep a secret made them flash as she looked up at Mr. Tully. "I have long known more about the matter," said she sharply, "than either of you and I can give you a word of warning, my smart and good-looking Mr. Tully, that Mr. Killick not only remembers the grudge, but imagines that Dell knows all about it and that the feud between him and her father was the cause of her very icy and disdainful reception when he was introduced to her last winter. And more than that, I would advise you to personally manage her business, for Killick is as slimy as a snake and revengeful as an Indian, and I would be sorry for anyone he dislikes if he or she were at his mercy."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Flambert, you do Killick an injustice. There is no beauty in him that anyone should desire him, but that is his misfortune. He is a much better man than he looks."

"I don't believe it, Tully. I believe he is a worse man than anybody imagines, and I have told Flam. a dozen times that he will be a poor man yet if he lets Killick manage his business."

Tully began to be alarmed though he succeeded in concealing

his disquiet. "You can both be sure," said he, "even if the worst be true of him, that none of our old clients will be injured; I shall personally supervise all the estates we had in charge. I hope, Mrs. King, you do not feel as suspicious of poor Killick as Mrs. Flambert does. Your business and Miss Browning's, you may be sure, will receive my most careful attention."

Even Mrs. Flambert's presence did not prevent Mrs. King from being a trifle gushing as she replied, "Don't mention such a thing, Mr. Tully. You know I have entire confidence in you."

"Well, that is more than I would say about any man," remarked Mrs. Flambert, with a sagacious shake of her head in the direction of Mr. Tully.

"Come now, Mrs. Flambert, don't take up Miss Browning's role of the cynic. If you are going home I will go with you and see that the spooks don't get you."

"Come along," she laughed. "I am much safer under your escort than if I were younger and prettier."

As they walked slowly down the street, Mrs. Flambert stopped in her chatter with the exclamation, "What is this I hear about you, Tully, and that type-writer girl in your office?"

"Well, I am sure I can't say until you tell me what you heard."

"O, you naughty man, you must be more discreet than this or you will never win Dell Browning."

"I am aware that the air of injured innocence never sits well on me," answered Tully with a somewhat uneasy laugh, "but I should like to know what you mean."

"Why, you met her the other night in the park, and that doesn't look very well, Mr. Tully."

"Now, Mrs. Flambert, I know who told you that. It was that female nuisance, Mrs. Chandler. Wasn't it now?"

"Yes, it was," she admitted.

"Chandler happened to meet me as I was going towards the park, and he had seen the young lady in question waiting for some one, and at once guessed it was for me. It didn't happen to be the fact, but I knew the story would be all over town inside of forty-eight hours, and I find my conjecture correct."

"O, of course I accept your apology, but let me advise you, young man, never to do it again."

CHAPTER IX.

IN PRIVATE CONFERENCE.

The firm of Killick & Tully had been in existence for six weeks. The door connecting the two offices had been opened, the duties of the clerks re-adjusted, and Tully was surprised to see how the work had been systematized. Never before had he known a man who could accomplish so much in so short a time as Killick. His head clerk, Caleb Dooley, though himself a barrister, had been reduced to the condition of a machine, and was approaching the meridian of life without ever having dared to try anything unsupported by the advice and instructions of the astute Killick. Little details which Tully had been hitherto forced to personally supervise were quickly transferred to Dooley, and though Tully could scarcely perceive the change he felt that his entire routine duties had been transferred to the bald-headed clerk who never left the office, no matter how late it was, without first knocking at the door of Mr. Killick's room, and then at Tully's, to inquire if there was anything else they would like to have done. At first Tully was rather pleased by the change. It gave him more time to talk politics at the club, and more leisure to pursue his counsel business. At the end of a fortnight, however, when he realized how much of the important business of the old firm had drifted entirely away from him, he began to feel uneasy and made petulant demands of Dooley as to why such and such papers had been removed. The clerk never entered into discussion, but went at once and brought them back saying he had presumed Mr. Tully would not care to trouble himself with such small matters; Mr. Killick never did.

"Damn Killick," roared Tully one day; "he is not my model. Don't quote him to me all the time; you make me tired."

"Certainly not," murmured Dooley apologetically, as he walked slowly backwards towards the door. "Shall I keep a note of these papers in my diary, or will you look after them?"

"Keep a note of them, of course, and remind me when there is anything to be done. For that matter you may as well take them away with you," added Tully, feeling half-ashamed of his exhibition of temper, "but don't take any more of the papers you find here into the other office without first speaking to me about them."

"But you know, sir, the duties of the clerk who kept your diary have been added to mine, and unless you make a note of these

matters the rents, interest, insurance and that sort of thing won't be looked after as promptly as they should be."

Tully hated to look after details, and the interview ended by his instructing Dooley to go through all the papers and make entries in the diary.

The next day the bustling Dooley was at his elbow with a number of documents referring to Miss Browning's affairs, and very obsequiously reminded him of a neglected duty in the matter of Mrs. King's estate. The thought that he was neglecting even these important matters again angered him, but he was exceedingly busy with some important cases in the courts and was obliged to delegate his duty to the tireless Dooley.

"He is a great worker, isn't he, Tully," remarked Killick one day, "I never knew his equal."

"Yes, he is the best office man I ever saw. How much are we paying him?"

"Only a thousand," whispered Killick confidentially, with a triumphant poke of the finger at his partner.

"Do you mean to say that fellow works as he does for a thousand dollars a year instead of practising for himself?"

"Well, hardly," answered Killick with some reticence of manner. "He sees after all my private business and I allow him something for that."

"How much," demanded Tully.

"Well, I do not know that that is material. He certainly earns all we give him, but I admit that I pay him nearly as much more. Couldn't keep him if I didn't."

"Oh," answered Tully meditatively, the suspicion passing through his mind that Dooley was the instrument by which Killick meant to seize hold upon the affairs of the old firm.

"By the way, Tully," observed Killick, "you have been so busy at the Hall I haven't had a chance to speak to you for a week. Some investments made by the executors of Miss Browning have matured, and there will have to be a re-investment. Of course, as you are one of King's executors you will succeed him as manager of the Browning estate. It must be worth nine or ten hundred a year. You might as well have it as anybody, and it falls naturally to you instead of to Stryde or Miss Browning herself."

"I will see about it," answered Tully, somewhat suspiciously.

"Of course," explained Killick, "I do not expect it to be a firm matter you know. Whatever you get will be your own."

"Of course," assented Tully, "but I am very doubtful that Miss Browning or Stryde will let me have it all in my own hands as King had it in his."

"You can manage it, Tully, if you work it aright," continued Killick, eagerly. "Don't let a thing like that slip away from you. Dooley can do all the work and keep you from being worried about it. If you think there is any chance of someone else getting it I'll help you with a scheme to keep it. You know, Tully, it is little things like these which determine the success of a man. If you once get your hands on a good thing never let go, even if you have to do a little pulling to keep it."

Tully was watching curiously the eager and hungry eyes of his partner as he spoke.

"You needn't be afraid, Killick, that I'll let it go if I can keep it, but Miss Browning has never exhibited any great confidence in me. On the contrary she seems to think me devoid of conscience and is always watching to catch me tripping."

"It is a good sign, Tully, splendid sign," cried Killick slapping Tully on the knee. "She wants to believe in you or she wouldn't take the trouble. Depend upon it, man, she is interested in you, in love with you likely enough, and is only trying to conceal it. Now don't be afraid of me. If I can give you any advice or help, come to me just as you would to your father. I am an older man than you are and I understand men and women about as well as the next one. She is rich, beautiful, accomplished! Why shouldn't you marry her, Tully? A man like you can marry anybody you want to. You would be a fool to marry poverty when there is wealth waiting for you."

Very few men, even if they are naturally secretive, are unwilling to talk with a business associate or intimate friend over their matrimonial projects. Almost before he knew it Tully had confided the fact that he would like to marry Miss Dell Browning, but that his chances were apparently poor.

"Quiet down for a spell, Tully. Teach in her Sunday School; go around and visit the poor with her. You needn't keep it up, you know, after you once get solid, though of course it wouldn't hurt you if you did. Show her that you are willing to do anything she wants you to do. That will catch her, sure."

There was genuine contempt in Tully's eyes as he regarded the animated but repulsive face of his partner.

"I'm no angel, Killick, but I am too much of a man to play the hypocrite and hang around churches and Sunday Schools to catch an heiress."

"Yet you do the same sort of thing in court to catch a jury and think it is all right," smiled Killick, blandly, leaning back in his chair and uniting the tips of the fingers of both hands in a little pyramid in front of him.

"Yes, but that seems a part of business. It isn't like going to a sacred place and playing the sneak."

Killick laughed softly. "Your ideas of morality and what is manly, are positively amusing. I know you are having a drive at me in what you say, but my feelings are not near my skin at all—it is pretty hard to hurt them. Now, then, in the score of love affairs you are credited with, how often have you had to play the hypocrite, and not only make false vows but swear to them?"

"That is a different thing, Killick, though I deny having had as numberless attachments as you suggest. I, at least, can feel as if I were telling the truth at the moment, though perhaps I protested a little more than was absolutely justifiable. Everything is fair in love and war."

"That is exactly it, Tully, and what doesn't come under the head of love, can be easily classed under the caption of war. Business is all war; getting money is war; keeping it is war; getting a position, either professionally or in society, is war. Your own rule legitimizes everything that I suggest, and as to making one's self feel that one really believes what one is saying or is justified in what one is doing, religion generally is ahead of love-making, for the enthusiasm of the moment is unfeeling and adds to the sincerity of one's sayings and doings. I am just as well aware as you are that I am not an exemplary character, but while I am in church or engaged in church work I feel good, and it isn't as much to make other people believe that I am not all bad as it is to retain a good opinion of myself which impels me to a Christian life."

The very perceptible grin on Tully's face, caused by the last few words, led Killick to add, with an explanatory wave of his hand:

"Outwardly, at least, and I think it is much better even to assume a virtue which we have not, than to take pride in declaring to the world that we are without it."

"I admire your candor in confessing that you are lacking in some of the virtues you assume, and I suppose I ought to thank you for the delicate compliment contained in the hint that I am in the same condition, but without sense enough to conceal it."

Killick had his face turned up to the ceiling, his head leaning over the back of his chair, his short pudgy legs extended and the warty hands with glistening red hairs on the back of them were folded complacently on his capacious vest. He continued to look at the ceiling rather than at Tully as he answered, "I think it is a mistake to formulate truths so bluntly. Smart sayings of that kind are very uncomfortable when they get into the mouth of some-

body else, but I must confess that your statement of the case is very neat, and contains many elements of truth."

Suddenly straightening himself up he shook his freckled forefinger at Tully, pursed up his lips and remarked, "There is one thing I suppose we might as well understand, that there are no pretences necessary between us. You understand me—I understand you! This mutual appreciation of one another makes any moral lecture unnecessary, in fact it makes any morality itself unnecessary except in our relations to one another. Everyone else is fair game, eh?"

"Aren't you afraid that this system of considering everyone fair game may after a while be applied to one another," inquired Tully.

"No, I'm not. Each one will need the other to protect him man can't get along alone. For a long time I have relied on Doc but he is not presentable. He can't carry out any big scheme. You are handsome and dashing, and can accomplish things I dare not undertake without your assistance. I am the schemer to prepare the plans—to make the bullets, as it were, for you to shoot. You could not get along very well without me. There is plenty for us both. Don't be suspicious of me, Tully!"

Tully made no answer. With his hands deep in his pockets he stood meditatively gazing in his partner's face. It made Killick feel uneasy. A silent scrutiny has that effect on the majority of false and crafty men. They seem to imagine it necessary, in order to comply with the rule that an honest man can always look you in the face, to return a stare with interest. It is a difficult and unpleasant thing for one man to look another in the eyes; there is usually no reason why he should; it is much easier and more self-respecting to avert one's face from an impertinent stare. The false man dare not let his eyes shift, but endeavors to get over the disagreeable position by adorning his face with a smile which more than anything else declares the embarrassment of his position and the deception in his heart. But if he does not desire to be pleasing, the stare with which he answers the scrutiny of another is accompanied by a frown or a fierce demand as to what his inquirer is looking at. Killick was trying to be pleasing and insinuating. His projecting teeth were garlanded by his coarse lips into what was intended to be a soft smile, but which more resembled the yearning grin of a hungry tiger enjoying the reminiscence of a long digested meal.

"Come into the other room, Tully, and try some of Kahn's brandy. The day's work is over and I'll join you in a little nip."

Tully followed him through the vault door observing Killick's uneasiness with a half-contemptuous smile.

As the old lawyer filled a goblet with the liquor he remarked, "I

think this is pretty good proof of my confidence in you. I am doing something which no other man has seen me do in twenty years."

"Indeed," sneered Tully, "I am doing what the world is welcome to see me do at any time."

"Ah, Tully, but it doesn't taste as sweet to you as it does to me. Stolen sweets you know! Let us drink to the firm of Killick & Tully."

"Here goes," answered Tully, his eyes opening with astonishment to see his senior swallow a tumbler of neat brandy at a gulp. "You seem to drink that as if you were used to it."

"Well, perhaps I am," replied the older man, passing the back of his hand over his lips. "I cannot take enough of it to affect me. I could drink a bottleful, eat a couple of candies, go out on the street, and no one would suspect me of having taken a drop. Have some more."

Tully took another glass and Killick again filled his tumbler.

"In ten years," said he, "you ought to be a rich man if you look after half the chances I'll throw in your way. I have got nearly enough now. It isn't money I am after as much as it used to be. It is ambition."

"What is your ambition, Killick?"

"I'll tell you some other time. Let us pull together and there is nothing in this city that we can't divide between us."

"You are a good divider, Killick. I know that by experience. You very successfully divided up everything I ever had. I hope after this that you will get a new system of division in which you won't be the divisor and I the dividend."

"Don't make any reference to the past, Tully. I had to do it to get you into line. Now we are working together there won't be any more of that."

As Tully strolled thoughtfully homeward he tried to solve the problem of Killick's intentions. "The old schemer could have no designs on Dell Browning's little fortune or he would not have suggested the advisability of my marrying her. Perhaps he thinks he could rob her more easily if she were my wife and I had control of her money," thought Tully, with a bitter smile. "I hope he may have the chance. I'll win her even if I have to take his advice and play the hypocrite to do it. But why play the hypocrite? Isn't it possible for me to sincerely interest myself in her pursuits? I have had enough of this infernal deception and recklessness."

It was raw and gusty and the rain was beginning to fall. He buttoned up his coat tightly, raised his umbrella and was hurrying along the darkening street full of his new resolution. He had determined to forsake his old habit of dropping into the club on his

way home to dinner, and was just opposite the door with the umbrella held close before his face when he collided with Miss Cora Burnham.

"Why, Steve," she exclaimed, "how late you were in leaving the office. I have been watching to get a word with you before you go home."

Tully frowned ominously: "This is no time or place for a meeting, Cora."

"Then come up to-night, It is important. Something about Killick!"

"All right, about nine," he replied curtly, turning sharply into the club, and feeling justified in drinking a couple of brandies and sodas to take the chill out of his blood. Later he joined a party of friends and decided to have his dinner down town, mentally excusing himself for his early departure from his resolution by the thought that it was pretty hard for a man to do right when he was in partnership with a rogue like Killick and tangled up with a girl like Cora.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH MISS BURNHAM DEFINES HER POSITION.

The rain was pouring in torrents as Stephen Tully, closely buttoned in a mackintosh, walked rapidly towards Mrs. Burnham's little shop. He was not sorry that the night was stormy, for it gave him an excuse for the upturned collar of his coat and the downturned rim of his hat which would effectually prevent anyone from identifying him. His interview with Killick in the afternoon had disturbed him. The disregard of his good resolutions made him more or less the object of his own contempt, and these things, together with the heaviness caused by too much drink and the inclemency of the weather, combined to put him in a very unpleasant temper. If it had not been for the fear that Killick was plotting against him he would have disregarded his appointment, for he was by no means anxious to be the actor in another scene with Cora and her mother.

There was no light in the shop, and the door was fastened. Without waiting to ring he entered the narrow hall at the side, climbed the stairs, and in the pretty little parlor before a mirror he found Cora gazing with unconcealed admiration at the figure reflected there. She was arrayed in a decollette ball dress of white, which displayed her fine arms and shapely shoulders to

much advantage. Her mother was rearranging some of the draperies and making considerable pretence of discovering places where alterations were necessary.

"So this is what I was brought here to see, is it?" demanded Tully crossly.

"Well, isn't it worth the trouble?" asked Cora, his cold reception driving some of the brightness from her face.

"Well, I can't say that I would have walked as far as I have through this horrid storm even to see your fine figure, Cora. What are you going to do with the dress?"

"I am just trying it on for mamma. I might have waited till after you were gone, yet I thought, may be, you would like to see me with a nice dress on," answered Cora wearily; "but I see you don't care how I look."

"I am glad it isn't anything more serious. I was afraid that your mother had got you ready for the wedding, had the license in her pocket and the preacher hid in the cupboard," said Tully teasingly, peering behind the piano to see if anyone were hidden there.

"I suppose you want to drive me out of the room, Mr. Tully," snapped Mrs. Burnham. "You needn't take so much pains to be insulting, for I'm sure I don't want to stay in the room with you, but I think it is a very mean return for the trouble Cora has taken for you."

"My dear Mrs. Burnham, you under-estimate the amount of pleasure I find in your society, but as you insist on leaving the apartment, permit me at this safe distance to wish you a fond and tearful farewell, and if you are not unwilling to increase the number of favors with which you have already overburdened me, you might take this hat and coat and hang them where their wetness will do no damage. Ah, thank you. What is home without a mother-in-law?"

As Mrs. Burnham took the dripping garments she gave the handsome Mr. Tully a look which was anything but friendly, and made her exit with the remark: "Be careful to keep your muddy boots away from that dress, Mr. Smart Aleck."

"Don't alarm yourself, my dear madam, I have been in the neighborhood of ball dresses before, and am not in the habit of wrapping my feet up in a train; however, to calm your professional fears I will remove my rubbers. If I had time to stay I would borrow a pair of your slippers and spend the evening family style."

Without further noticing the angry look Mrs. Burnham gave him as she left the room, Tully turned to Cora who was sitting on the piano stool, the bright expectancy in her face having given place to sadness and disappointment. Tully saw the change, but resisted

the impulse to cheer her by compliments and caresses. Sitting astride of a chair with his elbows on the back of it, he examined her critically and remarked, "You are looking exceedingly well in your borrowed plumage, Cora, but as you sent for me on important business, you will excuse me if I don't go into raptures until after I hear what you have to say."

An angry flush swept up the lovely neck into the chagrined face of the girl, and a look flashed in her dark eyes which Mr. Tully could not remember to have noticed there before.

"I suppose you think," she began with a metallic ring in her voice, "that this was only a trick to get you up here and show myself off."

"I confess that it did strike me somewhat in that light, but you can easily disabuse my mind of the suspicion by imparting whatever information you have to give."

"And if I fail to impart any information," she inquired, sarcastically, "you will consider that you have been tricked?"

"I admit that I will so consider it," assented Tully, still more frigidly.

"And you won't feel that you have been rewarded for your walk by seeing me at all?"

"No, my dear Cora, as I see you every day I freely confess that I am not entirely prepared to make pilgrimages through the rain to gaze on you in the evening."

"Then, Mr. Tully, you can consider yourself tricked, for I have nothing to tell you except that I know you to be an unprincipled and an utterly selfish man. I have tried to make myself believe that you loved me," at this point a tremor crept into her voice, but only for an instant, "now I feel certain that you are only making a fool of me and I can tell you right now you can't do it any more."

Tully maintained his easy attitude, but his face betrayed his astonishment. "So, my fair Cora, as your mother isn't here to do it you are going to take a tantrum yourself, are you?"

"Yes, and it will be a tantrum you won't forget, Mr. Tully. You can devote yourself to Miss Browning hereafter without any fear that I shall make any claim on your attention."

"Indeed," exclaimed Mr. Tully with a sardonic grin, "and why Miss Browning, pray?"

"Because you are trying to get her to marry you."

"Indeed."

"Yes, indeed. She is rich and aristocratic and when Mr. King died you made up your mind to drop me and marry her. That was the meaning of the talk you gave me in the park, and I can see it as the reason for everything you have done since."

"This is an attack of jealousy then is it, my fair Cora," laughed Tully very unpleasantly. "Who has been putting these ideas into your head?"

"Would you like very much to know, Mr. Tully?" retorted Cora her tone growing still more biting.

"Not particularly," answered Tully flippantly, "only it would be a little satisfaction to know who is paying so much attention to my business and yours."

"Then I can tell you, it was Mr. Killick."

"Ah! Mr. Killick, eh? So this is what you had to tell me about my partner."

"No, this is not what I had to tell you about your partner, but I thought it would be pleasant for you to hear this much as an indication of the way things are going."

"Oh, indeed. How are things going, pray?" Mr. Tully's tone betrayed an awakening interest.

"Find out for yourself, Stephen Tully. You can look to me for neither information nor assistance."

"Then, Miss Burnham, I think the sooner your engagement with our firm terminates, the better."

"I don't depend on you for my situation, and I would have you know that I can stay where I am as long as Mr. Killick says so."

"You can, eh?" ejaculated Tully, his voice strident with angry astonishment.

"Yes I can, and what is more I intend to stay," Cora announced triumphantly.

"Has Mr. Killick assured you of this?"

"No," answered Cora flatly, "but I know too much about you to take any dismissal from you, and Killick is too anxious to keep control of you to send me away unless he has some personal reason."

Tully was but half-convinced that Killick had not been plotting with their bookkeeper; but he was well aware that Cora understood the use she could make of her power over him.

"So you intend to make love to Killick instead of to me. I wish you luck. You think I haven't used you well, but when Killick gets through with you, you will think I am an angel," said Tully, half inclined to attempt a reconciliation.

"I know and hate Killick, but he will never be able to use me as badly as you have done. I wouldn't have been such a fool, only I loved you and thought you loved me. I have found out my mistake and I sha'n't love anyone hereafter but myself and then I won't be any man's dupe."

"Cora," whispered Tully, coaxingly, "you are jealous or you wouldn't doubt my love for you. Why should you fly into a rage

because I come in feeling cross and snappy? I have had a hard siege of it to-day and the weather and everything else seemed to conspire against me. Don't you think you might have let me exercise a man's prerogative and make all the row there is necessary? I know I disappointed you, that you expected me to admire you and say pretty things, but Cora, I was really in such an ugly temper that I could not. Forgive me, won't you?"

Rising from the chair he pushed it from him and advanced towards her with extended hands, but Stephen Tully had mistaken her mood, she resolutely held her hands behind her, and though a flush crept into her face there was no other sign of softening.

"It is too late, Stephen Tully. I have said things to-night which would forever estrange us, even if you were not already estranged."

"Pshaw, Cora, I don't mind your silly little threats. I make them myself too often to think of them twice. I know I have treated you badly, and deserve everything you have said, and I confess I like you all the better for having seen your spirit."

The flush had grown deeper on Cora's handsome cheeks, but the full red lips were drawn tightly together and the black eyes were hard and bright. "No, Stephen Tully," said she, and her voice though unsteady betrayed no wavering, "I have made up my mind and your blandishments can't change it. You thought I was your slave and treated me like one. From now until the time you marry me you shall be the slave and I will handle the whip just to give you a chance to see how you like it. Until I know that you are going to marry someone else I won't do anything against you or to help Killick, but as soon as you marry anyone but me you can expect the worst that a woman can do whose love has been scorned and turned into hate."

While he listened to her Stephen Tully bit his mustache, pushed his rejected hands into his pockets, and in several other ways betrayed unusual embarrassment. His first impulse was to turn on his heel and leave the room, but he feared to further excite Cora's resentment. He felt that it would be advisable to adopt the opposite course and by kisses and caresses win her back to her old self, but there was something in her look and voice which forbade the none too respectful endearments of which he had once been so lavish. Her pride had been wounded, and her resentment gave her a dignity which excited his respect, and then, too, in her handsome evening dress she was beautiful and had the bearing of a lady.

"Cora, you absolutely stagger me. Your righteous indignation has fixed me to the floor, and I don't know whether to advance or retreat. I confess I feel most like running away. That outraged

look of yours is enough to keep a man awake nights. Soften down a little, Cora, and grant me the forgiveness I don't deserve and let us be happy again."

"Happy, happy, did you say!" she exclaimed as she pushed away the arm with which he was trying to encircle her waist. "Happy! You have never made me happy, except with the foolish thought that you loved me. Happy! Only for an hour—the hour after I lent you that money when you tried to pay the debt by lying to me about the love you never felt. I know you too well now to be made happy by words which you don't mean."

"But Cora, do you think you will be happier without me?"

"No, I don't expect to be happy; I expect to be miserable, but I shall find something else to fill my mind with."

"Cora," he whispered again, with a last effort, "I do love you, never so much as to-night. Forgive me, darling; let us kiss and make up." He caught her in his arms but she, unable to release herself, averted her face, and, motionless as marble, received without response the kisses he pressed upon her cheek.

"Cora, is this to be my answer?" he entreated.

"Yes—or rather there is no answer," came slowly from the tightly-drawn lips.

"Won't you even kiss me good-bye?" he asked, loath to be driven away without some sign that she was yielding.

"No, for it is not good-bye," she answered, and by a sudden movement she freed herself from his embrace and stood with flashing eyes facing the man to whom she had long yielded so meekly. "The most of our acquaintance is still to come, Stephen Tully. There will be many meetings and partings before you will be able to say good bye to me. I shall be passive, as I was in your arms just now, until time has proved that you have never loved me and until your marriage with another makes hope for the fulfilment of your promise to me no longer possible."

"Cora," cried Tully, endeavoring to resume his old bantering tone, "you have been filling your head with novels, and there have been so many scenes in the house between your mother and me that you seem determined to dramatize the rest of the chapter with yourself in the title role of Queen of Tragedy. Drop it, for it will end disastrously, and I am in no humor to play hero in any private theatricals—"

"No," interrupted Cora, bitterly, "stage villain is more in your line."

"Well, then, stage villain," he retorted. "Unless you are reasonable I will quit the troupe and refuse to make any more appearances."

"Don't forget, Mr. Tully," answered Cora, with a steady self-possession which put Tully quite in awe of her, "that you can't disappear from the scene quite so easily, and another thing, don't go away with the idea that I had planned a scene! I confess I put on this dress, not so much that mamma could fit it as to appear to the best advantage in your eyes. At one time my efforts to look my best didn't strike you as ridiculous. They do now. Mamma has often told me that you were playing me false, but I never believed it until I saw the sneer on your face when you came in to-night. While you quarrelled with mamma and treated her like a servant I made up my mind that the farce was over." Her voice trembled, and the flush crept back to her cheeks. "It has been a farce to you, but, sneer as you may, it has been a tragedy to me——"

"You are making all the tragedy yourself, Cora," answered Tully, endeavoring to be cheerful, but feeling keenly the sting of her reproaches.

"No, Steve Tully, I am making no 'tragedy.' Perhaps in the past my ambition to be something better than an office drudge led me to an ambition which has brought misery and humiliation, but it is you who have brought desolation to my life——" She paused and looked at him. The flush deepened on neck and cheek and brow, and then slowly receded, leaving in its stead an ashy pallor—"and something, Steve Tully, very much like hate."

The handsome Mr. Tully dropped his eyes before her fixed gaze, and with a sudden loss of the self-possession which had served him in many a similar crisis, he turned uneasily, grasped the back of a chair, which, yielding to his weight, tipped backward. Recovering from his loss of balance, he resumed his old posture astride the seat, with his elbows resting on the back.

"Really Cora," he stammered, "I believe you missed your avocation. You would have been a brilliant success in the tragedy line. As Warren Hastings remarked, when listening to the oration of Edmund Burke, I feel like the wickedest man alive. I suppose there is nothing I can say which will palliate my offence or mitigate the sentence you have pronounced. But you wrong me when you say I never loved you. I did, I *do*," he protested, "but the conduct of your mother in always insisting upon our marriage when it would have been professional suicide, made me include you with her in a scheme to entrap me——"

"——That won't work now, Steve Tully. It has been tried too often and I am ashamed to say with success. I have blamed poor mamma too often for your short-comings and you have tried your best to make me dislike her as the cause of your coldness; but it is all over."

"Oh, is it?" sneered Tully, irritated by his failure. "What is all over? Your conspiracy with your sweet-tempered mother to make me marry you whether I would or not? You never cared for me or you never would have made this sudden change."

"It makes no difference how you sneer at me or mamma. The future will be just the same. You know you tell a falsehood when you say that I never cared for you. It would be an untruth if I said that I do not care for you now, for I do, and will, until love turns to hate, but I am not going to be a fool any longer, and especially I am not to be the fool of a man who has treated me as you have. I will go and get your coat and this 'scene' which is so disagreeable to you need not be prolonged any further."

Catching up her train with a quick motion which would have done credit to the belle of half-a-dozen seasons, she swept past him to the door and met her mother so suddenly, that in a suspicious mind it might have given rise to the idea that the old lady had been listening.

"Mamma," she cried in a choking whisper, "bring Mr. Tully's coat and hat, please."

While her mother was absent on her errand Cora leaned against the newel post of the stair watching the angry Mr. Tully putting on his rubbers. As he rose from his stooping position his face red and angry, he exclaimed, "You have found it easier, Miss Burnham, to play the grand lady with me to-night than you will to-morrow, and if your tenure of office is somewhat brief you can thank yourself for the change. Killick's schemes are too large to permit a rupture for such a trifling matter as the bookkeeper, and I think you will find you have over-estimated your strength."

"Perhaps I have," she answered wearily, "but I won't starve even if I have to leave."

"You will have to leave all right, my Lady Disdainful, don't make any error about that," retorted Tully hotly.

"We shall see, Mr. Tully. The matter needn't be discussed further till to-morrow."

She did not change her posture while he was enveloping himself in his mackintosh, nor did her face betray any emotion when he made his ironical bow and wished her good-night and happy dreams. Mrs. Burnham, however, could not refrain from the remark, "Well, Mr. Tully, you see the worm has turned, now you can look out for yourself."

"Yes," he laughed bitterly, "it has been a wormy business all through and I am glad to be out of it, and the greatest pleasure of all will be to be relieved of any further necessity of concealing my opinion that you are a scheming, miserable old hag. Good night."

As Mr. Tully ran rapidly down the stair Mrs. Burnham was remarking in a shrill treble that she might be all he said and not be an embezzler or a thief.

The door slammed behind him and Cora with a pitiful cry fell forward into her mother's arms.

"Now don't faint; for heaven's sake, don't faint! Keep up your spirits, child; and come and get that dress off. Don't fall down in it and get it full of creases. Poor little thing! Didn't I tell you what a villain he is?" She led her daughter into the parlor and quickly stripped off the borrowed finery, even the maternal heart refusing to enter fully into sympathy with the weeping girl until her professional fear that the dress would be injured had been removed. After the white satin had been tossed on the old-fashioned piano, the mother sat for hours stroking the hair of her darling and patting the soft, bare arms, as she would have comforted a baby, telling her all the while that she was well rid of that villain Tully, and that she might now have a chance to make some new and more fortunate engagement.

CHAPTER XI

DISCLOSES ONE OF MR. KILLICK'S "SCHEMES."

"Say, Killick, don't you think it would be better if we had a masculine bookkeeper? Miss Burnham is all right, but a man could do her work better and be more useful in the office generally."

Tully had strolled into his partner's private office ostensibly on some other business, but with the fixed idea of having Miss Burnham discharged. He was afraid since their quarrel she would ally herself with Mr. Killick and prove as dangerous an enemy as she had been valuable as a confederate. Moreover, he proposed to make her dismissal a test question. If Killick appeared resolved to retain her he would know an alliance between him and Miss Burnham had already been effected, and that Killick had determined to carry matters with a high hand. In thinking the matter over he was forced to the conclusion that if Killick resisted her dismissal she would have to stay, and he was determined on adopting a certain course of action under those circumstances which would enable him to largely retain the business of the old firm in his own management. While weighing in his mind the different courses open to him, he felt galled to find himself absolutely in his partner's power, but the comforting thought came to him that Killick at least would not assist Cora to force him into a marriage.

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While Tully was speaking Mr. Killick concluded a letter, signed it, enclosed it in an envelope, addressed it, marked it "private," rang his bell and had it taken to the postoffice, before answering.

"Excuse me, Tully, I just had time to catch the mail with that letter. What was the suggestion you were making about getting another bookkeeper? Do you think we need two?"

"No, I wasn't proposing to engage another, but I think it would be a good idea to let Miss Burnham go and get a man to do her work."

"O, just as you like, Tully. Don't you think it would be hard to get a man who understands bookkeeping, shorthand and type-writing, and able to do her work for the same money?"

"No, I don't think it would. Bookkeepers and stenographers are plentiful as blackberries."

The old man, while concluding his letter, had planned his campaign carefully, and was determined to offer no opposition to Tully's scheme. "Well, advertise for one, and see what we can do. We ought to have a responsible man, first-class recommendations, and all that sort of thing, if we are to let him handle our cash. Perhaps we had better turn the money over to Dooley."

Killick was well-informed of Tully's conduct toward his head clerk, and knew that he feared him, and would not feel at all disposed to put him in charge of the cash.

"We had better get a good man. Dooley's got enough to do now," answered Tully quickly. "To whom shall I have the responses addressed?"

"To yourself, Tully. Pick out two or three of the best ones and we will decide which one to take."

Killick's ready compliance with his suggestion pleased Tully immensely. It gave him greater confidence in his partner and at the same time he saw his opportunity of finally disposing of Cora. "That settles her hash. She and her mother will have to sing low from this time out," he chuckled as he re-entered his room. Half an hour later John Stryde called upon him to say he had received a note from the firm that thirty thousand dollars of the trust funds of Miss Browning's estate had fallen due and would need re-investment.

"Have you any suggestion as to where we should invest it," inquired Tully.

"No, not in particular, but I had an application this morning from Col. Moore for a loan of the same amount on his property. If he is otherwise unembarrassed, it might be well to let him have it. The land he offers in security is worth at least three or four times the amount he wants to borrow."

"I wonder what he wants money for! He is a careful, close-fisted beggar. I never heard of him owing a cent to anybody. What interest does he offer?"

"Six per cent. It is a good rate for so large a sum. What do you think of it?" inquired Stryde.

"I will look into the matter if you say so, Stryde. I don't think we could put the money in a safer place. How long does he want it?"

"Five years. The interest and the time are both satisfactory, but somehow he impressed me as concealing something, and acted in just such a way as would have kept me from lending him our bank funds even on gilt-edged notes. But then I may have been wrong, and we can be taking no chances if his title is all right and his property unencumbered. Make the search yourself, will you, Tully?"

"Yes, I shall see it is properly attended to. Our man Dooley is one of the sharpest real estate lawyers in the city, and I shall go over the thing myself as well."

On the previous evening, about the hour when Stephen Tully was visiting the Burnhams, a small and dapper man groped through the darkness of the hall-way leading to Mr. Killick's office, and tapped on the door of the private room.

"Ah, Colonel, glad to see you," exclaimed Killick cordially. "Sit down a minute till I lock the outside door." The dapper little man was middle aged, slightly bald, had a small, black mustache fiercely waxed, and affected a very imperious manner. Mr. Killick re-entered the room carefully closing the door behind him and rubbing his hands as if in excess of good nature. The colonel demanded the reason of the imperative summons he had received to make a call on Mr. Killick at such an unseasonable hour.

"Very private business, Colonel, very private; very urgent, very urgent business, indeed, Colonel! I have another room in here," exclaimed Killick, opening the vault door and leading the way. "I always use it when I desire to avoid any possibility of being overheard."

Col. Moore entered rather reluctantly and viewed the handsome interior with considerable surprise.

"I can't understand your air of mystery, Mr. Killick," said he. "Be good enough to explain without any further preliminaries."

Killick dropped into a chair, assumed his favorite attitude of throwing his head back and gazing at the ceiling, while he united his finger tips in a little pyramid in front of him.

"You see, Colonel, I happen to know something about the title of the estate left by your father."

Long pause.

"Well," snapped the Colonel, interrogatively.

"Well," resumed Killick, slowly, "your title to that valuable property isn't worth a straw."

"What is that you say?" gasped the little dandy, springing to his feet.

"I say," returned Killick, still studying the ceiling, "that your title to that property isn't worth a straw!"

"You must be crazy, man," cried Col. Moore, excitedly. "It was in my father's possession for fifty years."

"Yes, that is true, but your father only had a life interest in it," answered Killick, drawing in his chin and turning the steady gaze of his meaty eyes on the pallid face of his excited listener.

"You don't know what you are talking about, Killick," roared the Colonel. "My grandfather left it to my father by will. There has never been the slightest dispute about the title."

"No, there hasn't been the slightest dispute, my friend, but there is going to be a dispute of very large dimensions, right off, unless you and I make some little arrangement to-night. If you will keep quiet for about five minutes, I'll tell you just where you are and what you'll have to do. Suppose we take a little something to drink before we begin." With most effusive hospitality, Mr. Killick busied himself with decanter and glasses, and after taking a liberal potion he placed the brandy bottle within easy reach of his hand and began his recital.

"Your grandfather died in January, 1834, and in his will he left all his property, including the farm, which was then a mile from the business portion of the city, but which is now almost in the heart of the residence district of Toronto, to his second son George William Moore. Left it to his *second* son George William Moore, mark my words, to his *second* son George William Moore—no mention of his heirs or assigns—"

"—But that is understood isn't it," interrupted the little Colonel.

"Nothing is understood, my dear Colonel, in law. If a thing isn't in a will or a deed it is supposed to have been intentionally left out. So much was that the case and so little was it understood that a bequest only became the property of the one to whom it was made and not to his heirs or assigns, unless the indenture so specified, and so much litigation was caused thereby that in March, 1834, the law was changed and property left to any person named became a portion of the estate of his heirs or assigns,

even if no such stipulation were made in the will. But you must observe, my dear Colonel, that the law was changed after your grandfather's will was made and his last testament consequently comes under the old rule. By the way, here is the statute made and provided. Look for yourself."

The gloved hands of the Colonel trembled as he grasped the volume and endeavored to realize the meaning of the words which seemed to dance before his eyes. Looking up he asked weakly, "How do you know that the will made no mention of the heirs?"

"I have plenty of proof, Colonel, quite plenty! abundance! Don't think I would have sent for you unless I knew what I was about."

"How is it no one else discovered it in all these years? Transfers of portions of the property have been frequently made," exclaimed the Colonel, assuming a more defiant tone.

Killeck still lay back in his chair seldom diverting his gaze from the ceiling. "That point was very well taken, Colonel, but you see I am a lawyer, and I had thought of that before. Strange, isn't it, that we should get in the habit of looking out these weak places in advance? I have noticed the same tendency which you display in a great many of my clients. They are always afraid we haven't thought of everything, and imagine they can make very valuable suggestions," continued Killeck with a wave of his hand. "They do sometimes present some very good points."

"That is no answer to my question. How do you account for the discovery not having been made by the many lawyers, who, like yourself, are so clever in anticipating weak points and detecting flaws?"

"Really, Colonel, you have a very logical mind. Bring my own argument to bear in answering me! Ha, ha! very good," cried Killeck gleefully rubbing his hands together. "However, I can explain this discrepancy by the fact that the will to which I refer was never registered; it happened to be a very long one, and at the time of which I speak it was not always customary to make a complete copy of the will in the books of the registry office, but summaries called memorials, were made—a sort of a digest of the will you know—and registered. Very frequently the lawyer who had the will in charge did his work imperfectly, causing no end of trouble and litigation, and then again, other lawyers did their work too well and registered in the memorial what did not exist in the will. Your case would come under the latter heading. Your father happening to be a lawyer, discovered the omission, or at least his partner did, and in making out the memorial the words were inserted which were so fatally absent from the original document. Registrars did not invariably hold it

to be their duty to compare the memorials with the original will. In this case the registrar accepted the affidavit of the lawyer and the memorial was registered. But my dear boy, the original will was not destroyed," whispered Killick, exultingly and with a triumphant poke of his finger towards his thoroughly frightened auditor. "Your father's partner retained the deed, thinking that some day it might be useful to him, and I might tell you that by some curious circumstance the identical document came at last into my possession. Now then, what do you think of it?"

Colonel Moore was speechless. Great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead; the carefully gloved hands were knit tightly together over the law book which still rested on his trembling knees.

"What—what—what do you intend to do?" he gasped.

"Unless you agree to my terms, I intend to produce several of your grandfather's heirs who will divide up the very valuable estate with you," answered Killick, still gazing at the ceiling; "in fact, they will take the entire property from you, on account of the fact that you are the issue of the second son and the law of primogeniture was in force at the time the will was made—that of course would give your holdings to the heirs of the eldest son of your grandfather."

"What are the terms?" inquired the Colonel feebly, the blood rushing into his face. "Nothing dishonorable, I hope?"

"Oh, no, not at all. I would neither suggest nor agree to anything dishonorable. No, no, *no sir*. The intention of the will was, no doubt, to leave the property to your father, his heirs and assigns, and it would not be dishonorable to suppress the will."

"That is exactly the view I take of it, Mr. Killick," echoed the Colonel, with returning vivacity.

"Of course," continued Killick, placing the tips of his fingers together and closely observing the center piece on the ceiling; "the chance of my having discovered the will should be valuable to me, and I will have to be paid for my trouble."

"Of course, of course," cried Moore. "You certainly ought, and I am the last man to refuse to do what is right."

"I am glad to see you meet me half-way, Colonel. You know you have the reputation of being what my grandfather used to call 'near,' very close-fisted, you know. Of course the report may do you an injustice, but I was afraid you might be a little bit rebellious. I happen to need thirty thousand dollars to-morrow, and that is why I sent for you in such haste to-night. I think that my little find ought to be worth that to me. How does it strike you?"

"Thirty thousand dollars," gasped the Colonel. "Wby, man, it is monstrous."

"Well, it does seem a little high, doesn't it? Just a little trifle dear now, doesn't it, Colonel. At the first blush I confess that it would strike me as being almost exorbitant, but then the property is worth from a hundred to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars—easy—and increasing in value every day. You are in peaceable possession and have been for, let me see, pretty nearly a month since your father died isn't it, Moore?"

"Just three weeks," answered the Colonel, dejectedly.

"Just three weeks, just three weeks to-day, and I think you would rather pay thirty thousand dollars than have the estate eaten up by a law suit, and eventually taken from you."

"Yes, but I haven't got the money, Killick. Where in God's name could I raise such a sum?"

"Well now, with the foresight which I credited myself with at the beginning of this interview, I made the arrangements for the loan. I know just where you can go and get it to-morrow morning. If you follow my instructions you can borrow it on a mortgage on the property which, between you and me, isn't really yours. It is better, isn't it, Colonel, to encumber the property a little than to lose it?" inquired Killick, leaning forward and bringing his villainous eyes to a level with Moore's face.

"I suppose it is," answered Moore sulkily, "but I will have to see the will before I give up that much money."

"Well, my dear boy, that is nothing but fair. Here it is," answered Killick, smilingly, drawing a revolver and a yellow parchment from the drawer. "You are at liberty to glance over it, but don't move it from the table."

Killick seemed to be curiously examining the firearm while his unwilling client scrutinized the will.

"You find it as I stated, don't you, Colonel?"

"Yes," assented the little man, tremulously.

"Well," continued Killick, "to-morrow morning at ten o'clock apply to John Stryde, one of the executors, and an hour later to Mr. Tully, my partner. They have some trust funds in hand which will need investment. Offer him a mortgage on your entire property at six per cent. for five years, and he will lend you thirty thousand dollars, which I will expect you to immediately transfer to me. My firm has taken the precaution to notify Mr. Stryde that the investment has expired and the money will need re-investment. Do not fail to see Mr. Tully as I tell you, and of course as we will make the search into the title, it will be passed all right."

"And when you get the money you give me the old will, of course."

"Certainly, certainly," cried Killick, effusively. "Good-bye, old man, you've done a good stroke of business for yourself to-night."

So it came to pass that Mr. Stryde and Mr. Tully were in consultation, and at the opportune moment Col. Moore applied for the loan and obtained it.

CHAPTER XI.

A SOMEWHAT UNCERTAIN REFORMATION.

The rebuffs which Miss Browning had given Mr. Tully had no other effect than to make him determine upon her conquest. He may have thought her possessed of ideas highly antagonistic to his own, but with the cheerful egotism which was one of his chief characteristics, he ascribed their existence to an ignorance of the world and the proper methods of enjoying life. It is doubtful if he ever considered them in any more serious light than as prejudices very desirable in a wife, but exceedingly inconvenient as rules by which he might by any chance have to guide his own life. Of course he never entertained the idea of accepting her ideal, and it would be but fair to give him credit with not proposing to persuade her to adopt his own elastic and selfish standard of right. He imagined, as many men do, that it is unnecessary for a husband and wife to have the same rule of conduct. When he thought the matter over, he decided that it would be supremely comfortable to have a wife in whom he could trust, and one can imagine him indulging in these reflections with a grin as he appreciated how little he could be trusted himself.

"It is a different matter," he argued, "when you come to apply such things to a man. A woman is really the head and fountain of family honor. If she is all right, there is no stigma cast upon the children, and any little eccentricities on the part of the husband are overlooked by society."

Undoubtedly he meant to be kind to her—it never entered his mind that he could not win her—he knew it was his habit to be kind to everybody as far as he could without injuring himself, but he was resolved on no sacrifice and had determined on the abandonment of no pleasure or vice, nor had any impulse of reformation stirred within him except such as in outward seeming would make him attractive to the woman he thought he loved. If it had been

made apparent to him that he must choose between her and a life of selfish indulgence and whatever his passions or weak nature suggested, at this period in his history, Stephen Tully would have abandoned all desire to become the husband of Dell Browning.

Something had been accomplished, however, towards his moral improvement when he decided that it would be necessary to assume a different attitude when in the presence of the woman he had determined to win. He felt that it would destroy his chances, unless by easy stages he abandoned the role of scoffer and cynic, and understanding that the most subtle flattery is offered by the one who apparently yields to the power or persuasion of another, he resolved to gradually become converted to the ideas and prejudices of the little Puritan of whom he was enamored. Possibly it would be necessary during this process to broaden her mind by frequent expositions of his own easy ideas, and while he might appear to forsake them, he imagined they would have more or less impression upon her and would tend to make her more lenient in her judgment of him.

These reflections passed through the mind of the handsome Mr. Tully as he was giving the finishing touches to his toilet before making a call on the one, outside of himself, most concerned. As he surveyed himself in the glass he was forced to admit that he was pleasant to look upon, and it struck him as absurd that any woman should object to so comely a man simply because he was not possessed of any fixed principles or addicted to the practice of stern virtues. He had inserted that advertisement for a new bookkeeper in the evening papers, and felt confident that he was now rid, not only of his engagement to Cora Burnham, but would no longer be troubled by her very self-assertive presence.

"A man has only to wait," he laughed to himself, "and all his letters will answer themselves and his troubles and embarrassments will of necessity take flight because they can't afford to linger any longer. By Jove, I have had a hard siege of it lately, but everything has cleared away, and to-night I am going up to see the prettiest and richest girl in Toronto with a good chance of marrying her. All the little mistakes of the past have been carefully folded up and put away where no one can reach them, and I am just as well off as if I had never made a blunder. I always was a lucky fellow!"

He smiled as he stroked his mustache, and looked approvingly at the reflection in the glass. "If I could only persuade myself to travel with a little better crowd I believe the opportunities of having a good time would be increased, and I wouldn't be taking half the chances of getting into the troubles which have beset me,

O, yes, my pretty Asphodel, I am a reformed man, and I intend to walk uprightly—in your sight at least—and to lead a different life as far as you will ever hear of it."

He had buttoned his overcoat and his gloves, and still stood before the tall glass brushing his glossy hat with a silk handkerchief, and admiring the handsome gentleman so well displayed in the mirror. He took off his hat to himself. "Farewell, old friend Hyde, from this time forward I assume the roll of Dr. Jekyll, and if I am obliged to cut your acquaintance for the time being, recollect that I am forced by circumstances to be utterly respectable. Later on, old fellow," he cried, with a merry laugh at his own conceit, "we'll meet again. Perhaps not at Philippi, but where these moral restrictions will not be enforced." He reached up to turn down the gas, but did it slowly; it suited his whim to see the figure in the mirror fade slowly away. "That is the way I will work it," he thought to himself, "not too fast, or else she may think my conversion too sudden, but with an occasional glimpse of my old self, like this," and he turned on the gas again, making the smiling image in the glass as prominent as before, "then more quickly down again until only a shadow of the old rascal can be seen." The light was now turned very low.

He felt in his pockets. "By Jove, I have left my cigar-case." Again he turned up the light, and his callous and good-natured smile was again reflected. "Yes, my boy, I guess whenever I want anything I'll turn on the old Tully again full glare. No! I won't smoke on the way up," he continued reflectively; "it might be objectionable to Saint Browning. I will burn a weed on the way back. Self-sacrifice, my lad! May as well begin now! It will be the sooner over!"

This blissful frame of mind lasted until he arrived at the gate of No. 25 Mowburn Street. At that point a change was wrought by the sound of a harp and piano accompanying the rich, sympathetic voice of a man who was singing one of Moody and Sankey's most popular hymns.

"Lord bless my soul," ejaculated Tully, "that beggar Stryde is here ahead of me! I suppose he has attained the mind of the gentle Browning to a key of such high spirituality that I am afraid I won't be able to join in the chorus to-night with any effect."

When he was admitted he had to confess to himself that he felt somewhat rattled in his programme, and it ended by his appearance in the drawing-room as the same *debonair* Tully who had smiled at himself in the glass.

"Ah, Miss Browning, you are looking remarkably well to-night. Music seems to exhilarate you and bring a *spirituelle* brightness to

your face." He began his remarks with his usual fluent cheerfulness, but the look she gave him, and her cold reply, made him stumble a little in the last few words.

"What an unexpected pleasure," he exclaimed with genuine cordiality as he shook hands with Miss Beatrice McKinley, a jolly little soul known to all her friends by no other name than Bee. "When did the honey-bee fly back from her seaside conquests?"

"Nearly a week ago, Mr. Tully," answered Bee, with that charming vivacity of face, voice and manner which enables the possessor to enliven a whole company and almost dispel the gloom of a foggy day. "Nearly a whole week, and you haven't called or even said you were sorry you couldn't, and now, you daring impostor, you are trying to make believe you didn't know I was home."

"But I really didn't. If I had known the queen bee had returned to the hive, I at once would have hastened to do homage to her, even at the risk of being stung as I have been before. Good evening, Stryde! I stood at the door for quite a little while listening to your song, and I was so impressed I thought it would be almost sacrilege to pull the bell until it was over. Do you know, Miss Bee, I think Stryde is the only one who can sing a religious solo and make me feel it. When he sings and that happy smile lights up his face I feel that I would be content with no other accomplishment if I had either the power of the smile or the song."

Stryde's honest face flushed. Nothing was so distasteful to him as compliments. "You are too flattering, Mr. Tully," he answered, curtly.

"That is right, Mr. Stryde. Don't accept any of his blandishments," cried Bee. "He isn't an artist in flattery or he wouldn't try to lay it on with a whitewash brush. You know, Mr. Tully, you really do put it on too thick! Not in Mr. Stryde's case, because I really feel an uplifting when he sings, and if any one put their fingers under my heels and just gave me ever so tiny a little lift, I think I could fly, I feel so heavenly. I really do, Mr. Tully. Don't laugh! That is what spoils you, that mean way you have of smiling away people's enthusiasm!"

"I believe it has been remarked," answered Tully, "that if one smiles he can be at least sure of company, while if he weeps he is apt to do it in dismal solitude—and you know that I am averse to tears and solitude. Don't you think, Miss Browning, that Bee does me an injustice as to the quality and intention of my smile?"

"No, on the contrary, I think she has expressed your most noticeable, I may say most offensive, peculiarity," answered Dell promptly. "As you have the habit of saying that I am your candid friend, I must confess that nothing dissipates my enthusiasm, or

good humor even, so quickly as that cheerfully condescending smile of yours, by which you seem to express a serene forgiveness of all the mortals who are not created with enough egotism to be a Stephen Tully."

"I suppose you will be glad to know, Miss Browning," retorted Tully, "that you have really succeeded in wounding me. Business and professional men have to be pachydermatous or else the arrows of outrageous fortune would be continuously sticking in us where they would do the most hurting. If I have cultivated a serenely egotistical manner, as you call it, it has been to shield myself from these things, and so acute an observer of human nature as you are should know that the people who always go about armed with frigid hauteur or smiling aggressiveness are almost always the most sensitive to unkindness or sarcasm, and try to ward it off by even an objectionable manner, rather than suffer it."

"But, Mr. Tully, there is another class who assume these aggressive airs: those who have reason to expect attack because their conduct has been such as to deserve it."

Bee McKinley had been the witness of a good many of these fencing matches, and the good-natured little soul disliked them very much. "Why, Dell," she exclaimed, "you are candid if you are classifying our gay Mr. Tully as one going about armed with a smile so as to escape arrest, as it were, for his misdemeanors. But do you know, Mr. Tully—now I think of it—you would make a very picturesque desperado if you only wore a slouch hat, high boots and a couple of big pistols. One could picture you as quite a brigand."

"Miss Browning seems determined to force me into some such role," answered Tully, dejectedly.

"That remark is quite characteristic of you, Mr. Tully," exclaimed Dell, with considerable warmth. "You always want to lay the blame of your misconduct on somebody else. If we accepted your estimate of your virtues you would have been canonized as a saint long ago, had it not been for the wicked world that has forced you to do wicked things."

"But I don't admit, Miss Browning, that I have done 'wicked things'—that is, not wickeder than can be charged to the majority of people."

"O, of course, Mr. Tully! You are fortunate in having a lenient judge when you appeal to yourself for mercy, but there is a possibility you know, of having such a good opinion of one's self that it sanctifies everything that one does as right."

"I haven't at least fallen to that depth of unsaved egotism, for this very day, not an hour ago. I was examining myself and had resolved that I was anything but what I ought to be," answered

Tully, his face reddening as he thought of how exactly otherwise his thoughts had been. "I really think, Stryde, lots of men are driven into evil courses, or at least are forced to follow in them, by the very spirit Miss Browning manifests. Our total depravity is assumed, and our best impulses are misrepresented as being either egotistical or hypocritical, and what can we do?"

"I admit," answered Stryde slowly, and with a queer scrutiny of Mr. Tully's face, "that such a thing is possible, but I must say I never before to-night heard you plead for a more lenient judgment. I really thought you took a pride in being considered careless of public opinion and the restraints which so many of us esteem desirable."

"There!" exclaimed Tully betraying an agitation which was perhaps caused by his attempt at the role of a penitent, "you are another proof of what I said. Don't you think there is a danger of self-righteousness in those whose lives are perhaps more exemplary than mine—even in the beautiful life of Miss Browning?"

Dell Browning's arm was resting on the old harp of which she was so fond, and the odd turn the conversation had taken, particularly Mr. Tully's extraordinary demeanor, influenced her to a kinder tone. "It isn't hard, Mr. Tully, to convince even us 'self-righteous' people that you are anxious for better things. You cannot accuse the Saviour of self-righteousness and yet he told us 'that by their fruits shall ye know them.'"

"Would it be too much to ask you, Miss Browning, to state," inquired Tully in guilty confusion, "by what particularly obnoxious fruit you and Stryde have been judging me?"

The audacity of the question rather staggered them both. The prevalent rumors regarding Mr. Tully were not of such a nature as to permit them to formulate any direct charge. The blush which suffused Dell's face brought Stryde hurriedly to her rescue.

"Really, Mr. Tully," he answered with a somewhat strained laugh, "you should hardly consider us under cross-examination. The habit you have acquired of confusing a witness and endeavoring to make him say things which he feels ought not to be said, is hardly one which will meet with approval in the social circle."

This was by no means what Stryde set out to say, but the candid directness of the man made it impossible, with Tully's notorious profligacy in his mind, to say anything else, even though he knew that the impoliteness of his very suggestive words might be open to the charge of being spiteful.

Though the same sentiments were in Miss Browning's mind, the superiority of a woman's tact saved her from making the mistake of uttering them, and Mr. Stryde fell several degrees in her estimation

by his blundering honesty, and it must be admitted that she felt he had been spiteful, even though she knew spitefulness to be the very opposite of his character. "You must know," said she, "that instead of trying to conceal your views of life, you have always been ready—yes, over-anxious, to assert them. If one cannot, without being accused of self-righteousness, judge of a man's views by his own words, I don't know what just way there is of forming an estimate of any one."

Little Bee McKinley's kind heart had been touched by the evident desperation of Tully's defence, and, in an endeavor to change the conversation, she jumped from her seat with the laughing exclamation, "O, really, Dell, you are too hard on Mr. Tully. We all know he says oceans of things he doesn't mean just for the sake of hearing himself talk and of watching the effect on us poor unsophisticated youngsters who have to pretend to be so much shocked in order to prevent being suspected of knowing too much. Come on, Mr. Tully, show the sincerity of your reformation by singing a hymn. Dell and I will play the accompaniment for you."

Tully was unused to this sort of singing, though his deep and powerful voice had stirred many a social gathering with patriotic and humorous songs, and his voice without any other accomplishment would have made him a welcome guest at banquets and jollities of all sorts. He had once heard Sankey sing *The Ninety and Nine*, and had been deeply impressed in his evanescent sort of way, and in a spirit of rivalry, rather than anything else, had memorized the words and proved to his companions that he could be effective as a singing evangelist if he tried. He picked up the book on the piano and running his fingers through the leaves, he came across the solitary piece with which he was acquainted, though he didn't confess to having made a specialty of it.

"You know the air, don't you, Bee? I heard Sankey sing this once, and if you will let me have the book I'll endeavor to give you it as the great evangelist gave it. You know he is not much given to sticking to the music as it is written, and if you will endeavor to follow me rather than play it correctly, it will assist my performance considerably."

He sang it with a feeling and expression new to all his auditors. The stirring movement of pity, sacrifice and, finally, joy, were interpreted with an intensity of which none of them had believed Tully capable. As he finished Stryde sprang up and grasped him by the hand. "Tully," he exclaimed, scarcely able to restrain his tears, "you can't be a bad man and sing that hymn as you do. Forgive me for what I said. The moment it was uttered I recognized that it contained an innuendo which no man should cast upon another."

"Stephen Tully!" cried Bee, swinging around on the piano stool, "I'm in love with you! One more song like that and I would be capable of almost any demonstration of idiocy. I feel on the verge of publicly kissing you right now, but mamma has made me promise that I won't kiss anybody for fear if I once begin I'll kiss everybody. If it will assist you in appreciating my sentiments I'm willing to squeeze your hand or look unutterable things as far as my greenie-brownie eyes will express emotion, or anything beyond a tendency there is in our family to go crazy! Dell, say something pretty or I'll think you like Mr. Tully so well you have to make believe you hate him!"

"Mr. Tully doesn't need to be told he is a good singer," observed Dell, without a sign of enthusiasm, "but his rendition of that song was"—she paused for a word—"perfect."

"Tully," exclaimed Stryde in a fit of unusual enthusiasm, "would you mind singing that at our 'Gospel Rally' Friday night in the Pavillion?"

This inquiry by its inappropriate spontaneity struck Bee and Tully cold with astonishment, but Dell, seeming to think it a good test of Tully's sincerity, warmly urged him to accept.

"Certainly! I shouldn't have the slightest objection!" Tully answered, with a cheerful alacrity which by no means reflected the conflicting emotions surging within him. The thought of the jokes and jeers with which his companions would greet him almost stopped the beating of his heart, but this opportunity of convincing Miss Browning of his sincerity could not be lost, and he determined to cross the Rubicon at once, no matter what came of it. With a sickening feeling of dread and disgust he arranged the details with Mr. Stryde and after some fragmentary conversation started for his apartments, finding but little consolation in the friendly hand-clasp which he received from Dell when she said good-night.

When he lit the gas in his room he found no comfort in the mirror. "Steve Tully," he muttered, as he gazed at the handsome figure reflected in the glass, "you have at last become an infernal scoundrel. Even Killick would blush to do what you have promised to. I would refuse even yet but no excuse would satisfy Dell. Be taken sick! Oh, no," he groaned, "that would but prove me a hypocrite! I'll do it if it kills me."

Mr. Tully's conversion had at least reached the point where he began to appreciate his own falsity.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BITTER-SWEET OF NOTORIETY.

It is wonderful how sometimes we have a confidential impulse towards people we neither like nor trust. When one is in either a mental or physical funk, strength is what one looks for. After a night of uneasy sleep Stephen Tully was both mentally and physically out of repair. If he had had any liquor in his room he would have stimulated himself past the point of self-contempt, but he had made it a rule never to keep a bottle; this was one prejudice he had retained. Some one had told him that if intoxicants were too accessible it would lead to dram-drinking, and it was his habit to boast that he seldom took a drink alone and never if he could find anyone to join him. He would have gone to the club, but already he felt that his engagement at the Gospel Rally separated him from anything of that sort. In the morning he felt an inclination to slip out and get a brandy and soda somewhere, but he thought of the audience which was shortly to hear him sing, and he feared someone would remark, "Why, it was only yesterday I saw him taking a drink," and he refrained.

"I suppose," thought he in bitter self-communion, "that I'll have to adopt Killick's plan and do my drinking on the sneak, carry a flask in my pocket or eat opium or do something not easily detected." As he walked towards his office full of his newly-found misery, it struck him that confiding the matter to Killick would bring a certain measure of relief. He didn't love or trust Killick any more than he did the brandy bottle, but he felt he could confess his wretchedness without any sense of shame as long as the confession was made to someone worse than himself. Then, again, Killick was so strong and so astute he could give him some advice as to the attitude he should adopt towards his old companions under these altered circumstances. He hung his hat and overcoat in his office and started towards his partner's private room. He had to pass Miss Burnham's desk, and the cold, quizzical look she gave him seemed to have a threat in it which made him tarry by her desk a moment that he might conciliate her, particularly as her engagement with the firm was soon to be terminated. He thought the clerks looked at him curiously, and he detected a broad grin on the face of a raw and red-headed country youth who had just been

articled, and made up his mind that the golden-haired young man wouldn't last in the office of Killick & Tully very long.

When the door of Mr. Killick's little office snapped behind him, he noticed that his partner was wearing an unusually broad smile, which was saying a good deal, as that gentleman's remarkable face had been very aptly described by Cora Burnham as a wilderness of warts, yellow teeth and stubby beard.

"What seems to have pleased you so immensely, Killick," curtly demanded Tully, still smarting from the affront he imagined had been offered him by the raw student.

Killick began to laugh, and kept on laughing until his fat sides fairly shook with his noiseless merriment.

"What the devil are you laughing at, Killick?" snapped Tully, viciously. "Everybody in the office seems to have clothed himself with an infernal grin this morning, while I feel like anything but laughing."

"Really, Tully, my boy, I can't help it; I don't see how anyone can help it when they see you announced as the leading attraction at the Gospel Rally to-morrow night," and with this Killick roared again until he found it necessary to assume his favorite attitude of lying back in his chair and gazing at the ceiling. With his eye fixed on the crack in the plaster he appeared to be struggling to regain his composure, an event which did not take place until Tully had nerved himself almost to the point of throttling his partner in the chair.

"So it is in the paper, is it? Stryde is fool enough to do anything except mind his own business," he groaned.

"You will have a big house, Tully, it will be the greatest Gospel Rally there's been in the Pavillon for years," and again Killick fell into a fit of laughing.

"Don't act like an ass, Killick. What the devil is there so funny in my singing in the Pavillon? I've sung there before for a dozen different societies. I don't see anything so infernally funny in my obliging the gospel cranks for one night."

"H-u-s-h, h-u-s-h," exclaimed Killick in a sibilant whisper, "mustn't talk that way, Tully, or you'll spoil the good effect of the whole thing. You've begun just right, couldn't have done it better, but it must have taken a good deal of nerve to make the suggestion to Stryde. I wonder he didn't think you were making fun of him."

"I didn't make the suggestion, I'm not fool enough for that. It was the Idiot's own invitation made in the presence of Miss Browning, and I couldn't refuse."

"You must have been playing it pretty fine, Tully, to get an invitation so soon. Do you know?"—again Killick was seized by an

uncontrollable fit of laughter—"I had no idea you would take my advice so suddenly. I thought it would take you a month or two to get inside the fold, but within a week you loom up as a singing evangelist. You're a cool one, Tully! You are the boldest operator of us all!"

"Confound it, Killick, stop your giggling and talk sense. You don't suppose people will take this singing business as a sign that I have joined the church?"

"Why, certainly," answered Killick, drawing himself up in his chair. "That's what you intend, isn't it?"

"No, it is not. I'm not going to join anything but a lunatic asylum—I seem to be partner in one now," cried Tully angrily, turning towards the door.

"Don't go away mad, Tully. Keep your temper and keep sober and you will be the idol of the town. You never did a better thing in your life! More money in it than there is in wheat margins, Tully; more business and less risk!"

"There is one thing I wish you would remember, Killick, not to speak of this as if I had definitely decided to play the part of a sneak and hypocrite as you do."

"Tut, tut, man, don't talk that way. Of course you have decided to take a religious stand and you'll have to stick to it or else be worse off than before. Coming down on the car this morning, Chandler and half-a-dozen of those fellows were talking the matter over, and they asked me what it meant. I told them that you were going to join the church—had been thinking of it for the last two or three months, in fact, ever since King died—and probably his death was the cause of the serious frame of mind which has been so noticeable since the funeral."

"What did they say?" inquired Tully, miserably.

"Said they hadn't noticed it; but I pointed out how proud and reserved you are, and told them you had been struggling very hard to hide it."

"Did they believe you?"

"Can't say they did—not all of them."

"What did Chandler say?"

"O, something mean. He is too spiteful to be noticed."

"But tell me what he said," demanded Tully, eager to know the full extent of the scorn he had excited.

"Oh, something to the effect that he guessed you must have shaken the typewriter girl and were shining up to Miss Browning."

Tully's face flushed hotly. "I'll pull his nose if I hear any more such remarks as that from him."

"Don't mind it, my boy! We all have to suffer these things for

righteousness' sake. I had to take several little stabs myself. Billy Errett guessed that maybe you were doing the piety racket so as to hold King's business. I told him it was a nasty, mean thing to say, that you didn't have to do it, that you had a religious partner. He sneered, and said people had sized my religion up quite a spell ago."

Tully stood by the door fiercely biting his mustache, completely crestfallen and unutterably miserable. He knew how the boys talked, and that he had been one of the loudest and most merelless critics of those who used their religion for an ulterior end. The one virtue he had always assumed had been candor and entire freedom from hypocrisy. He had indeed rather paraded his sins with the idea of teaching his companions that he was not afraid of public opinion, and did not desire to be thought any better than he was.

"I am not very thin-skinned, Killick, but by the gods I can't stand this sort of thing. It seems to knock the manhood clear out of me. I feel as shaky and ashamed as if I had been on a big drunk and was being balled out of the police station and frightened to go home. The best way to do is to face it; let the boys understand that I am not putting up any religious schemes just yet."

"How are you going to do it?"

"Well, I am going down to the club to take a drink. If there is anybody in there I'll treat the crowd, then the boys will think it is only a joke."

Killick rose quickly from his chair and taking hold of Tully's arm leaned forward and whispered, "*Don't*. If you want a drink come inside and I will give you one and you'll feel better for it, but don't go bumming around the club."

In the other room assisted by the brandy, Tully began to recover.

"Stick right to it," his partner counselled, "you have made a break and where one man will laugh at you fifty will think you a moral hero. It will double your popularity, Tully, keep you from spending money, prevent you from getting into habits, which, unless you change, will ultimately disqualify you for business, and last and most important, it won't take you a month to get engaged to Miss Browning. After you marry her and get your reputation established a little, you can do pretty nearly as you like and it won't be noticed. It won't be very hard to behave yourself for six months or a year, and after that you will be able to afford a little license."

"But the curse of being suspected as a hypocrite! Why, great Jove, man, I can't stand it for a day, let alone a year."

"But my dear Tully, you will get used to it, get to rather like it after a while. The consciousness of your sincerity and exalted motives together with the applause you will receive from the half of the community which believes in you and these things will be

like sweet incense. How much better it will be than any vote of confidence that could be passed in you by a mob of sodden loafers who drink your wine, smoke your cigars, and after you are gone whisper to one another that you are probably spending your clients' money. Give it a fair trial, keep out of the road of those who will jeer at you, till you acquire the strength which will come of appearing in public on the gospel side."

"But Killick, if I meet any of these fellows I'll blush myself to death."

"Oh no you won't, Tully. Bow with cold politeness as if you were cutting the intimacy and could barely condescend to recognize the acquaintance."

Killick's encouragement and two glasses of brandy had at last got Tully's courage screwed up to the sticking point, and he returned to his room determined to utilize the occasion of his public appearance to cut adrift from his old associates.

Who should he find waiting him there but Jimmy Errett, the most consummate wag in the town—his friends used to tell him that it was doubtful whether the monosyllable should begin with a "w" or a "v"—Tully nodded distantly, took his seat, and swung around as if to inquire his caller's business.

"Let me congratulate you, Tully," explained Errett, pulling his chair up closer and extending his hand, which was received but coldly.

"What is the occasion of the congratulation, Errett?"

"Why, Killick told me this morning coming down in the car that you had joined the church; and do you know, Tully, I was real glad to hear it, for you need it pretty nearly as badly as I do."

"That is rather a left-handed compliment, Errett, but I can't say I'm obliged to you for it."

"Confound it, man, don't you know how hard it is for me to say anything like this? I want to tell you that the old crowd won't think any the less of you. It is what a lot of them would do themselves if they had the moral courage to come out."

"I don't say that I have 'come out,' as you call it," answered Tully icily, "but I know that it takes a good deal of moral courage even to be suspected of trying to behave one's self, if a man's so-called friends make such flattering remarks about him as you did about me this morning."

Errett looked up quickly; his face flushed. "I suppose Killick has been telling you what I said. I am heartily ashamed of it and I came around to apologize. After I left him I met old Dennis, and I remembered how you took care of him the winter he had his leg broken, and Katie the flower girl, to whom you have been so good,

and it brought back a half-a-dozen instances of your generosity and good-nature, and I said to myself: 'If Tully has joined the church, he means it,' and I can tell you this, that I am going to try and brace up myself. If you pull through this thing, you can count on my being the next one. I was tipsy last night, and I have a head on me this morning as big as a barrel, but I think repentance will last even after the headache is gone."

Errett had the reputation of perpetrating jokes of the most outrageous character, and of "stuffing" people, while wearing an air of the gravest sincerity. Tully suspected him of endeavoring to get material for a good story at the club, and told him so.

"You can tell your friends," continued Tully, "anything you like, but understand one thing, I have not joined the church or made any profession of religion. I have simply consented to sing to-morrow night because I was invited to by some friends, who, I confess, are anxious to see me living a different life. I didn't expect to achieve so much publicity, but I am entirely indifferent to the opinion of those who see fit to criticize me."

"Tully," Errett explained as he rose to go, "don't think I am trying to put up a job on you. I mean just what I say. If I could travel with someone a little stronger than myself, I believe I could act differently. Don't you think if we worked together on this thing it would be easier for us!"

"Errett," cried Tully with returning cordiality, "if I could only believe you! I would like immensely to go into partnership with you in an effort to behave ourselves, but you are such a confounded wag that I can't take you seriously until I have had a little further proof that you are not making fun of me."

"I'll give it to you, Steve, I'll give you all the proof you want. If you see me sitting on the front row to-morrow night applauding for all I am worth, take it seriously. I just want to come out and show myself, too."

An hour later Chandler dropped in nominally to see about some law points in a case of his in which Tully was counsel.

"What is this I hear about you, Tully, joining the church and going into gospel work the next day?"

Tully blazed out in a moment: "If you want to know the exact facts, Chandler, I will simply tell you it is none of your confounded business."

Chandler merely grinned as he replied: "Well, that sounds, Tully, as if I had been misinformed. I see the old Adam has not been quite crucified yet."

"No," replied Tully, in sudden and overpowering rage, "if the fool killer were attending to his business, old Adam Chandler

wouldn't be alive or his she-satan of a wife either. I heard of your courteous remarks this morning, and I have been told, too, of the reports that Mrs. Chandler has been so eager to circulate, and I want you to understand that I have had enough of both. As far as I am concerned, the whole Chandler family can go to the devil."

"If we do," retorted Chandler, rising and placing the brief in his inside pocket, "we shall expect the pleasure of meeting Mr. Tully there in spite of the transparent hypocrisy with which he is endeavoring to cover up his tracks."

"Very well, Mr. Chandler. Your presence there would but add another terror to the place, and gives me an additional reason for trying to escape it."

In Osgoode Hall in the afternoon Mr. Tully argued a case, but his haughty coldness, while awaiting his turn to speak, repelled any familiarities. Then he spoke with such dignity and force that the judge, who was a kindly old soul, and had noticed the paragraph in the morning papers, went out of his road to compliment him. Tully returned to his office feeling that the new life was not altogether objectionable, and was congratulating himself on the accident which had forced him into it when Miss Cora Burnham tapped at the door and requested a brief interview. There was a hateful look in her face which gave Mr. Tully notice that her visit boded him no good.

"I see you are advertised to sing at the Pavillion to-morrow night," she began.

"Well!"

"I wanted to give you these letters which were sent over here from the newspaper offices. They are in reply to your advertisement for a bookkeeper and stenographer."

"Oh, are they?"

"A newspaper reporter called here a while ago; here is his card. I told him you were out, but to come back to-morrow. He said he wanted to interview you, that he had heard," she added spitefully, "you were going to quit law and go into the pulpit."

"Oh, did he?"

"I didn't know whether you were anxious to be interviewed or not."

"Well, when he comes back you can tell him that my intentions are none of his confounded business."

"I won't tell him anything of the sort unless you promise me that I can keep my situation."

"I told you once before, Miss Burnham, that the sooner your engagement was ended the better for us both. I simply repeat it now," answered Tully, with a feeling of uneasiness. "At any rate, I don't see what that has to do with the reporter."

"It has very much to do with the reporter, Mr. Tully. If I am to be discharged I shall supply him with a very interesting interview with regard to your past conduct."

"So then, you intend to blackmail me," exclaimed Tully, bitterly. "I thought I had expiated my sins against you, if a good-natured attempt to repay a kindness by a profession of love which I discovered to be a mistake is to be called a sin."

"You can call it what you like, Mr. Tully. I propose to stay here and do my duty; and," she added, with a tremor in her voice, "see that you fulfil your promise or suffer the consequences."

"Put the letters in the waste basket, Cora. You may stay, but for God's sake don't torture me with the past. I am sick of it, of myself, of life. Give me a chance to be something better than I have been. If I have wronged you, forgive me, but don't drive me to desperation. If you interfere with me, there is nothing left for me but to leave the city or go to ruin."

There was no forgiveness in her look as she grasped the bundle of letters and left the room.

As he was going home, he dropped into Killick's room and explained: "I suppose it doesn't make any difference to you, Killick, but that Burnham girl is very anxious to remain, and I haven't the heart to send her away."

"That's all right, Tully. It is a matter of indifference to me."

CHAPTER XIV.

RESULTS IN FURTHER COMPLICATIONS.

His early return to his apartments gave Mr. Tully a couple of hours before dinner, during which he committed to memory another song which he thought probably would be needed as an encore. It must have astonished his landlady and the other occupants of the house to hear his violin discoursing the "Handwriting on the Wall," but the two hours' practice made him almost perfect in the words and the air.

In the evening he ventured to call on Miss Browning, explaining to her that it was possible he might be invited to sing twice and he desired to be able to comply. Two people who have music as a common ground upon which they can meet, and have also an undefined attraction for each other, make rapid progress. As Dell played the accompaniment with sundry suggestions as to expression, he admitted to himself that he was having not only a novel but a delightful time, and when Dell suggested a third

selection he threw his whole heart into the mastery of the air and words. Then they had a little rehearsal and he sang his three pieces with such accuracy that their practice was concluded.

Mrs. King was absent, and had been, for a couple of days, but while Tully was telling his experiences of the day to his attentive and sympathetic listener, the widow arrived home and ten minutes later was seated in the drawing-room.

"A gentleman," said she, "was telling me on the train that you have been converted and were going to sing to-morrow evening at the Gospel Rally in the Pavilion. I am so glad, Mr. Tully. I am sure you will find it do you good."

"I thank you very much indeed, Mrs. King," answered Tully, gravely, "but rumor is a little premature in this instance."

"Aren't you going to sing, then?"

"Yes, it is all right as far as that is concerned, but as to the conversion, I am afraid I can't claim to have had the privilege."

"You have always had the 'privilege,' Mr. Tully," suggested Dell.

"Possibly I have, but what I meant was, I am afraid I have not had the experience of conversion."

"Are you expecting," inquired Dell, "to have a sudden and violent transition out of your old state into some new one, Mr. Tully?"

"No, I can't say that I am, but I don't think merely accepting an invitation to sing at a gospel meeting is sufficient to warrant me in claiming to have been converted."

"Oh, is that all you've done, Mr. Tully," exclaimed Mrs. King, with an air of relief. "Why, of course, a singer can sing anywhere without being expected to join the society he is singing for. I suppose your voice makes you in demand everywhere," added the fair widow with her very sweetest smile, without at all concealing her desire to please.

"Well, that's the view I take of it, Mrs. King," said Tully, who, withal was sorry that the conversation had drifted away from the tone of sincerity in which Dell had been talking to him.

Mrs. King in her quiet way was a good judge of human nature, and one of the things which attracted her to Mr. Tully was his good-natured profligacy; and when she heard how the invitation came about she felt that Tully would thank her if she made it appear less serious than his friends seemed inclined to make it. Comprehending his selfish and care-going nature she imagined he would turn to her for comfort if she were willing to sympathize with him under all circumstances and having been away from the city for a little time she felt justified in being a little more lively than heretofore.

"Isn't it absurd," said she, "that these religious fanatics should claim you as a proselyte under such circumstances. It is a way they have of getting hold of people and then making them stick to it for fear other people will call them backsliders."

"I don't imagine, Mrs. King, that they have got hold of me particularly, as the invitation was given and accepted under circumstances which do not warrant people to expect anything more of me than they did in the past."

Dell Browning had listened to this conversation with growing impatience.

"Do you mean to say," asked she, "that your singing to-morrow night is only to be a display of your voice? I certainly thought better things of you. You led us all to believe last night that you had determined to be a better man. I don't believe Mr. Stryde would have invited you if he hadn't had that impression."

"Why, Dell, how absurd," said Mrs. King. "Would you tie poor Mr. Tully to the apron string of an old stupid like Stryde, and make him go around talking religion and scandal like Mrs. Chandler? I really like Mr. Tully better as he is."

This unconcealed bid for popularity placed Tully in a rather delicate position. He dared not avow his intention of being a better man lest he might affront Mrs. King, while on the other hand he felt he was losing everything he had gained with Dell.

"I confess," said he, addressing himself to the widow, "I am getting tired of the altogether too reckless life I have been living, and really intend to drop some of my dissipations and the companions who have had anything but an improving effect upon me; but I think I can do this without going the length of joining the Salvation Army or engaging with brother Stryde and sister Chandler in their mission work."

"Certainly you can," answered Mrs. King with a reassuring smile. "After a man passes thirty I should imagine he would begin to weary of the frolics of his youth, and commence to think more of his profession and home life."

"Yes, that's just exactly it, Mrs. King," answered Tully, grateful to her for having outlined the middle position for him.

"I think you are making a mistake, Mr. Tully," said Dell, coldly, "in imagining that half-measures will be successful in your case. Unless you do something which will separate you from your old companions and make it almost compulsory to discard them, you will find that it won't be long before you are drawn back into the vortex from which you were congratulating yourself on your escape."

"I hope you don't think me so weak, Miss Browning, that my

good resolutions mean nothing unless I am compelled by public opinion to stick to them."

"Everybody is weak, Mr. Tully, and needs the help of good surroundings if one intends to break off old associations and habits."

"Yes, but one can do that," said Mrs. King, yawning as if Dell's Puritanism bored her, "without going to the other extreme—filling one's life with Psalm-singing and prayer-meetings."

"I hope you are right, Mrs. King, otherwise I am afraid my good resolutions won't amount to much, for I can't conceive of myself—at present, anyway—going about with the fervid Mr. Stryde and his friends, preaching and singing and praying in all sorts of ridiculous places. I really think it would be too much to expect of me, no matter how sincere disgust of my old life may be."

As Tully spoke he felt that Dell had been weighing him and found him wanting, but determined to get into sympathy with her once more, he asked her to play the accompaniments and he would sing his pieces again before he went home and be sure that he would not make a failure on the following evening.

"Really, you have spoiled your singing for me, Mr. Tully, by disowning your good intentions."

"But you surely didn't expect me to turn street preacher all at once?"

"No," answered Dell, contemptuously; "nor yet to feel ashamed of turning your talents in the direction of good instead of evil. I never saw any good come out of half-hearted changes and I—"

"Aunty Dell! Aunty Dell!"

The half-whispered call came from little Jack, who, in his night-robe, stood at the head of the stairs hoping to attract Miss Browning's attention without revealing himself. He had heard Mr. Tully singing in the drawing-room and had been worked up to a wonderful pitch of jealous unrest. Miss Browning heard the boyish voice and she rose and excused herself, saying that she had promised to read Jack a story before he went to sleep.

"I'll play the accompaniments for you if you like, Mr. Tully," volunteered the widow. "I am not as good a musician as Dell, but if you tell me what you want I'll try and please you."

He found her a good accompanist, and in half-a-dozen places she showed him where he could be more effective, for, unlike Dell, she was not absorbed by the subject of the song and was able to more thoroughly criticise the performance from an artistic point of view. While pointing out some of the notes her shapely white hand, unconsciously perhaps, touched his, and no inclination was shown to suddenly remove it. Mrs. King had heard the rumor that Tully's religious streak was but part of a line to win her late husband's ward,

and when she came home and found them discoursing so sweetly together, the resolution was quickly made to divert the course of Mr. Tully's affections to herself. When she made an effort to overcome her inertness and be pleasing, she was a rarely charming woman of that full-blooded and magnetic sort which relies on contiguity for its greatest influence. She knew there was temptation in the touch of her hand, for during her days of wifehood she had seen the blush come to the face of many a youthful admirer when she bent towards him or when her arm or even her robes touched him, and she was not wrong in supposing that Tully was susceptible to the magnetism with which she was so plentifully endowed.

Perhaps Mr. Tully was not aware how much admiring familiarity there was in the attitude in which Miss Browning found them on her return to the drawing-room—he was leaning against the piano, looking down in the fair face upraised to his, laughing as gaily and thoughtlessly as ever—but Mrs. King knew of Dell's presence several moments before Tully made the discovery and tried to rather exaggerate than conceal the delightful time she was having with the audacious young man.

"Good night, Madge; good night, Mr. Tully. I have a headache and I think I had better retire."

The tone more than the words startled Tully, and made him feel like kicking himself, for he recognized the disdainful look in Dell's face, and at once comprehended the situation. He proposed leaving at once, but Mrs. King insisted they should try the pieces over once more. The exercise was not conducted with much spirit; but it served her purpose in making him linger still later. When at last he rose to go, she stood beside him and endeavored in the many ways of the clever society woman to make him feel how much she cared for him, and in the farewell her hand not only lingered in his, but very perceptibly returned the pressure.

Tully was angry with himself and with Mrs. King, still the thought suggested itself, that if Dell were going to be so awfully stringent, there was still the widow left to fall back upon.

Why, indeed, should he be in love with such a prudish little Puritan? Why not with Bee McKinley or any one of the dozen jolly girls he knew? For one thing they were not rich, and while marrying, one might as well try and find all the virtues and a good dowry besides. "But it isn't money," thought he to himself. "I am not very particular just how I get money or what I do with it, for I can make all I want without marrying it. What a dog's life it would be if I married a girl I didn't care for because she had wealth. It wouldn't be much better for her either, for I don't believe I could

treat her well. If she loved me she would be always spooning around me, and that would make me tired, for somehow I like to do the spooning myself and a very little of it goes a long way, if one has to do it with the same woman all the time. Then of course she would be jealous. They imagine their money ought to buy a man, body, soul and breeches, and if he gives even a strabismic glance at some other female he is violating the contract and must be prosecuted in all sorts of inhuman ways peculiar to the enraged female, and like old mother jaw-jaw Chandler they deem it their duty to refer even to the household furniture as 'mine,' feeling no doubt that they are over-generous when they allow the husband to escape the watchful eye long enough to go down town and attend to business. And great gods! what curtain lectures a man must get from a woman like that! It makes my blood run cold to think of the reception a fellow would get from a woman of that sort if he came home late with a jag on. I wonder if I may expect these things from Dell? One thing I may be sure of, she won't be noisy, but then she is deucedly candid and would probably make remarks before my friends calculated to turn my life blood into ice cream. Certainly she is too well bred to be rubbing the money business into me all the time, but I don't think I would be able to endure more than six of those icy looks of hers without taking to drink. They would give me rheumatism. I can imagine her, too, sitting up in her night-dress preaching to me, and what in thunder would I do? I could not snarl back or there would be a separation next day, and yet I am certainly not prepared to stand unlimited and uninvited tuition as to how I should act. I might be willing to accommodate my mode of life to hers to a certain extent, but that won't do. I must give up everything, take up my cross and follow her, and I may just as well look the facts in the face."

He lit a fresh cigar. With his hands deep in his overcoat pockets he walked thoughtfully along. "I wonder what makes her act as she does to me? She seems reasonable with other people, and, until lately, treated me as if I were not a monster in human form. It is evident that she likes me well enough to care what I do, but if her crankiness increases in proportion to her affection, by the time she likes me well enough to marry me she will need a straight-jacket. Till King died she was as jolly as Bee McKinley, but now she seems to imagine she ought to do the mourning, which the widow of my old partner is evidently failing to do. I think that young villain Jack with his morbid, half-sprouted notions is helping to spoil her, but, then, when she goes into society again she will be all right, and, thank Heaven, that won't be long. She is going to the Flamberts' next week, and that

suggests the advisability of having a consultation with the stately Mrs. Flam, as to what I ought to do.

"I wonder what made Widow King so sweet on me to-night? I believe she was trying to make Dell jealous—and succeeded too. I think Madge desires to marry, and is determined to have a more lively husband this time than she had last. Poor John! No doubt your good works follow you, but I reckon your widow is more than half glad you are gone, and when the period set apart for mourning has elapsed she will be as gay as a peacock. Nice too! Awfully pretty and soft little hands: I think as a wife she would be less troublesome than Dell, though I can't say I relish the thought that if I should happen to come to an untimely end, I would be mourned by no one more sincerely than by the magnetic Madge, and feel confident that she would be on the lookout for number three before I was cold. It wouldn't be so with Dell! But what difference does it make? Is a man to be miserable all his life for the sake of having a widow who will cry for him when he is gone? For that matter I think Cora would make a good widow if she clung to my memory with half the desperate vigor with which she hangs on to me."

The thought of Cora Burnham turned Mr. Tully's self-satisfied reflections into another channel. "Confound her," he thought, "I wish she and her saffron-colored mother were in Ballyhack. It is evident that she intends to black-mail me. I'll have to get Killick to attend to her, or else she will be the ghost at the wedding-feast, no matter who happens to be the bride. What a scene it would be if I were about to marry Dell, and Cora stalked in as the mysterious stranger heavily veiled, to denounce me as a bold bad man. Of course Dell would side with her."

His thoughts during the remainder of his walk could not have been pleasant ones, for he slipped in the little side door of a saloon near his lodgings, and with half-a-dozen half-tipsy street laborers staring at him, drank a bottle of ale, comforting himself with the thought that no one in that little smoky back room knew him, and if they did would not be apt to talk about it. Of course the proprietor knew him for he had taken many a night-cap at illegitimate hours in the room where he sat, but never before had he felt that he was degrading himself while slipping in there for a quiet drink before retiring. To-night he blushed at himself even when excusing his weakness by the thought that Cora Burnham's persecution was enough to make any man go wrong. He thought of the morrow, and it struck him that it would be wise to have a flask of something to keep his courage up. The idea of taking drink to his room made him feel like a sneak, and it was par-

ticularly repulsive when he recalled the fact that he was about to abandon the one virtue of which he had been so proud, that he never drank alone or kept it in his rooms.

It was closing time and the brisk little landlord requested the occupants of the smoking-room to permit him to lock up. The half-fuddled laborers left at once, but Tully lingered until he was alone with the proprietor and then in a shame-faced sort of a way asked him for a bottle of whisky to take home with him.

Two or three times between the saloon and his rooms, he felt an impulse to throw the newspaper-covered bottle over the fence, but he retained it, carefully concealing it in his overcoat as he went through the hall and up the stairs to his apartment. As he looked at it on his dressing-case, he tried to remember when he felt so humiliated and ashamed of himself as at that moment; but the repentance ended by trampling upon his conscientious qualms, and, pouring out a liberal portion, he drank it off. Then he hummed the air of the sacred songs and found himself letter perfect in the words.

"I needn't fret myself into an early grave over this thing. If I don't get Dell I'll get somebody else, and if I don't get anybody at all I'll be happy, so what is the use of moping? I needn't be so much ashamed of taking a quiet drink by myself either; it isn't where a man takes it that does the harm. I might better drink it here than down at the club, where the chances are I would take twice as much and spend five times more money. Killick's scheme has its advantages, and I suppose if I am going in for that sort of thing, I might as well adapt myself to his methods."

Then he poured out another drink, and as he stood with the glass in his hand he caught his reflection in the mirror. "Yes, Stephen Tully, you have at last arrived at that stage when you will find it easier to be a sneak than a man with courage enough to let the world know your true character. This reformation business of yours is pulling you down lower rather than lifting you up higher. I never knew before to-night what it was really to want a drink. I didn't know I cared for it at all, but now when I imagine I can't have it, I feel that I must have it. I suppose I will next have to keep a bottle in my desk. Well, here's to Tully the hypocrite," he said to himself bitterly as he raised the glass to his lips, adding with a remorseful remembrance of the scripture readings of his childhood, "and the last state of this man shall be worse than the first."

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH WE MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MRS. CHANDLER.

Mrs. Flambert's house—no one would think of calling it Mr. Flambert's, or think of him in any other connection than as a person who belonged there—was an exceedingly pretentious one, the exterior covered with little gables, projecting windows, porches, verandas, balconies and everything else which might have the effect of proving to the passer-by that its owner had much more money than taste. Internally it displayed the profusion of a man and woman who had so frequently become the victims of enterprising dealers that no more space could be found for the bric-a-brac, pictures, rugs, curtains, bronzes and s'auary which made the reception rooms look like a disordered curiosity shop. Mr. Flambert was in the habit of excusing himself for seldom appearing in the drawing-room by stating that he had never been in there yet without breaking something. Notwithstanding this crush of articles of vertu and what not, there was plenty of space for guests if, when moving around, they held their elbows pinned tightly to their sides or remained in the middle of the room.

At the present moment a half-a-dozen ladies are sipping tea and talking gossip, principally the latter, in the presence of the bronzed gladiators and staring pictures.

"Yes, indeed, Miss Browning, he used oaths—most odious oaths. My husband could hardly excuse them except on the ground that he was intoxicated—absolutely drunk," repeated Mrs. Chandler, in a soft tone of mingled awe and spite, "and he told Mr. Chandler 'to go to the devil and take his she-satan of a wife with him.' He must be bordering on delirium tremens or he wouldn't have conducted himself in the absolutely frightful manner that he did! Just yesterday too, and yet he is to sing at the Gospel Rally to-night! I wonder how he dare do it. If I were he I would have been afraid of being struck dead with the awful words in my mouth! Yes, and the poor type-writer girl sitting there in the office looking perfectly broken-hearted and ready to drop. He has used her just frightfully, promised to marry her, and even worse than that, used to meet her in the park, I have often seen them there myself, or, at least, Mr. Chandler has, carrying on just dreadful—"

"I can't see why you should address these remarks to me, Mrs. Chandler," answered Dell, with frigid self-possession. "I am not Mr. Tully's guardian, nor am I responsible for his appearance on your programme to-night."

"Oh, indeed, I beg your pardon, Miss Browning, I must have misunderstood Mr. Stryde when he said that you urged him to invite Mr. Tully," resumed Mrs. Chandler, with a strong effort to retain her society tone. "He told me so no later than last evening at the prayer-meeting—or, at least, I understood him to tell me so—when I reproached him for making such an outrageous mistake and bringing scandal on the cause."

"I think you must be mistaken," said Dell, quietly. "I am quite certain Mr. Stryde said nothing of the kind. He is a gentleman who is not accustomed to throw the blame of a mistake on his friends or to tell what is not true!—nor is he given to exaggeration," continued Dell, with a strong but polite accent on the last word.

"And do you really mean to say you didn't press Mr. Tully to sing?"

"What I mean to say is, that hearing Mr. Tully sing we were all taken by surprise and Mr. Stryde invited him to sing this evening and I seconded the invitation which, I think, is a very different thing to urging Mr. Stryde to invite him."

"You did perfectly right, Dell, and there will be the biggest crowd in the Pavilion to-night that has been seen there at any religious meeting. I hope, poor fellow, he won't lose his voice or get frightened when he sees the crowd," suggested Mrs. McKinley. "Bee heard him sing at Mrs. King's and said it was superb, didn't you, Bee?"

"Yes, indeed I did, I was quite in love with him and told him so."

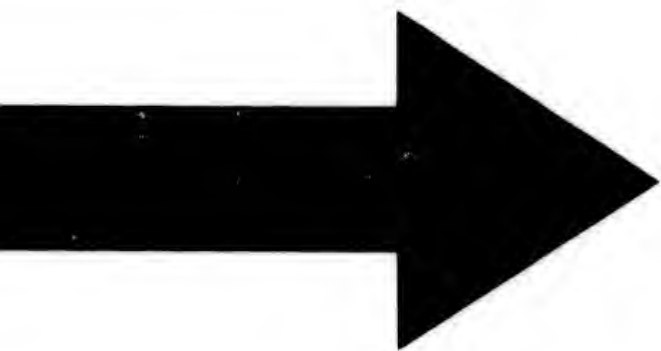
"Why, Bee!" exclaimed her mother.

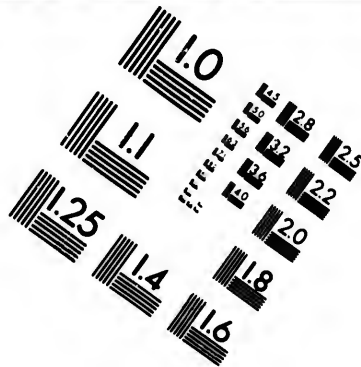
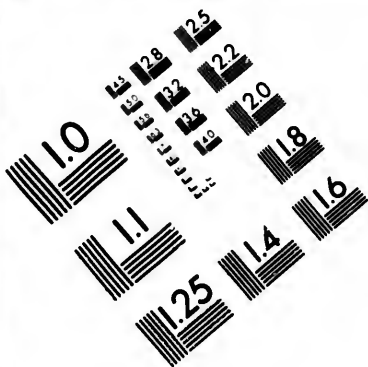
"Yes I did all the same, mamma; I couldn't help it; he seemed so sad—that is for him—and I really believe he is trying to be a good man. For that matter I think he is about as good as the majority now, only he doesn't try to humbug people."

"Humbug," exclaimed Mrs. Chandler explosively, and with a total loss of her sweet tone, "there isn't a greater humbug in Toronto than Stephen Tully, nor a worse villain. I am surprised, Mrs. McKinley, that you let your daughters associate with him. It is positively enough to ruin their reputation to be seen speaking to such a man."

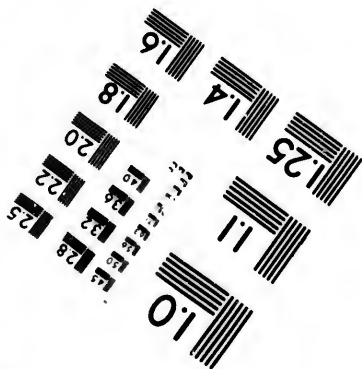
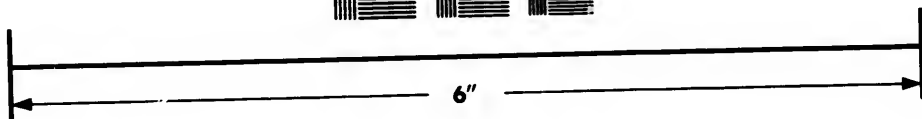
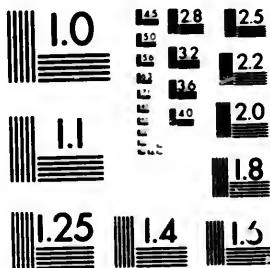
"Now, now, Mrs. Chandler," cried Mrs. Flambert, in good humored protest, "you are really going too far. Stephen Tully is one of my especial proteges. He isn't half as bad a fellow as







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people try to make out. You are down on him because he called you a gossip and a scandal-monger, and you know, though you are awfully good fun, that you, like all the rest of us, are inclined that way a little."

"Wby, Mrs. Flambert," protested Mrs. Chandler, her face reddening.

"I really won't take it back," answered the candid and over-polite Mrs. Flambert, who, in her heart, hated Mrs. Chandler for numerous affronts and damaging reports concerning herself. "When you take a dislike to anyone, you can't chop up their character too fine. If you knew anything bad about me, I would really commit suicide rather than have you start telling it, because you wouldn't quit till everyone in the town knew it, and then you really lay it on so thick that a little piece of truth is made into a mountain of fibs. I don't actually think you know how much you say when you get started."

"I thank you for your candor, Mrs. Flambert, but you might have reserved your remarks until it would have been unnecessary to affront a caller in your own drawing-room, but then nothing better could have been expected."

These remarks were made by Mrs. Chandler after she had risen to go. She was trembling with anger, and, it was evident, desired to say a few further words before taking her departure. She was a little woman, with her hair smoothed very carefully over her high, square forehead, and had exactly that sort of a face which so often accompanies severe and censorious uncharity. Her low voice was over sweet, and her praises, when she saw fit to be laudatory, always had a sting in them; but when she began to "run on" anyone she seemed to lose her satirical sweetness and self-possession, and often used a succession of the most denunciatory adjectives, accenting them with such vigor that her voice often escaped from the sweet undertone to a shrill and vengeful pitch which made her criticisms doubly dangerous. In her moments of domestic anger these tones were said by the neighbors to develop into a shriek; but much as she was disliked socially she was greatly interested in church work, and belonged to several committees from which, were it possible to offer a resolution for her ejection, she would have been unanimously dismissed.

"Don't go, Mrs. Chandler," said her hostess with careless good-nature. "It is nearly a year since you were here before, and I would very much dislike to have you go away angry. I am used to calling things by their right names, you know, but I don't wish to be rude!"

"Yes, it is a year, isn't it? I hope it won't be so long before I come again, Mrs. Flambert, I have had a delightful call I assure you," answered Mrs. Chandler, with an ironical bow as she separated the *portieres* with her trembling hand.

"I had no intention of being impolite, but really your denunciation of poor Tully was enough to agitate one into almost anything. Oh, must you go! Be sure and come again soon!"

"I'll be sure to! Good afternoon, Mrs. Flambert. Good afternoon," and with a stiff bow to the little company the insulted Mrs. Chandler was gone.

"Isn't she just frightful," cried Mrs. Flambert, mimicking Mrs. Chandler's talk. "It was quite a scene, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and I am just glad you told the old hateful the truth. Poor Mr. Tully, I am as awfully sorry for him as can be. He is such a jolly, good-hearted fellow, he wouldn't say a mean thing about anyone for the world. Why didn't you defend him a little bit, Dell?"

"Because I am afraid that not a little she said about him is true, and I haven't much faith in his good resolutions. With all his cleverness, half the school boys in the city have more moral strength than he has."

"You ought to marry him, Dell, you have moral strength enough for two," suggested Mrs. Flambert.

If the scene which they had just experienced had not prepared her for disagreeable things, Dell would have been disconcerted, but as it was she smiled and said she wasn't contemplating a reformatory school for young men.

"I think for my part," Mrs. Flambert announced, settling herself comfortably in her chair, "young ladies expect too much from young men. Boys will be boys, you know, and every man who amounts to anything has raised a field of wild oats somewhere. Tully's misfortune is that his crop has flourished under our very eyes, and he is so bold about it that lots of people who wish him well, talk about his escapades as if he would be proud to hear the recital, while no one appears to know anything about the good things he does. I heard an instance of the good side of him this morning. Our chambermaid, Bridget Dennis, had a visit from her father who sells newspapers, and he looked so old and feeble that I inquired about him, and he told me a long story of his woes, exclaiming every now and then that if it hadn't been for Mr. Tully he would have been dead long ago. I came to find out, that the scapegrace Tully has been paying his rent and looking after the poor old man for two or three years! If he does it in one case I am sure he likely does it in plenty more that we never hear anything about."

"Still, that doesn't make him a desirable *parti*," suggested Mrs. McKinley. "He is so reckless. A man may be very good-natured and generous and still be a dangerous member of society, particularly if he gambles and drinks. I confess I can't help liking him, but I am always afraid to see him with any of my girls."

"You needn't be afraid, mamma," cried Bee, clasping her hands in mock resignation, "he doesn't want to run away with us and we are too well-bred to run away with him, but he is so delightfully jolly I can have better fun with him than any man I know, and everybody says the same. No one in our set can say a word against him, he has always acted as properly as can be and if he gets tipsy it isn't at dinners where he gets his wine for nothing. That is the sort of temptation which overcomes Mr. Chandler."

"Don't you all think," inquired Dell, hiding a little yawn, "that we have had just about enough of Mr. Tully?"

That night Dell Browning was not one of those who crowded the Pavilion. Mrs. King and Mrs. Flambert occupied front seats and applauded generously, but Stephen Tully looked in vain for the fair face of the only one he cared to please.

He had debated within himself whether he should wear evening dress. The first thought was that he should, in order to make it seem as if he were appearing in a sort of professional-singer capacity, but Dell Browning's suggestion inclined him to the idea that he had better avoid that line. He was glad that he had so chosen when he noticed the informality of all the others who were on the programme, but when he stepped forward to sing, and had an opportunity—while the applause made it impossible for him to begin—of studying his audience, he experienced a bitter disappointment. Jimmy Errett was there in the front seat with a dozen of his club companions, and Mrs. King sat but a few benches behind them with Mrs. Flambert, but Dell! Where was she? His quick eye found the McKinleys, but she was not with them! Dell had stayed away! He felt his heart sink, but he was afraid of no one else, and his singing was not marred by a single tremor. He was recalled by peal after peal of applause, and sang again and then again. A third *encore* was answered by a bow, and then there were enthusiastic demands for a speech, which he refused to answer. He thought with unreasonable bitterness of what his course would have been had Dell been there; he would have gone to the front and told the audience that he had resolved to live a different life, but she was absent—

evidently she did not believe in him—and he might as well give up trying to gain her confidence. He slipped on his overcoat, and though Stryde and half-a-dozen others congratulated him, he started away home self-condemned, angry and desperate.

When he came to the corner where he should turn towards his apartments, the unrest which had possessed him, the sense of defeat, of the sacrifice of his crude ideal of sturdy manhood, the feeling that he was a sinner without the courage which had once made his sins seem almost respectable; but chiefly a sickening realization that he had played the part of a hypocrite without avail, made it impossible for him to think of going quietly home. While his conduct had met with the approval of Dell Browning, the falsity of his motives had not obtruded themselves; her acceptance of his good intentions had seemed to sanctify them. His sacrifice during the short hours when she had smiled approvingly upon him had seemed the sacrifice of Abel, but now in disgust she had refused to hear him sing, and the disdained incense which rose from his altar was from the offering of Cain.

He hurried on through the frosty air. Never before had the impossibility of winning Dell's love suggested itself. To his ambitious and egotistical soul but few things had ever seemed beyond his reach, and now to have this particular one in which his pride, his infrequent sacrifice, more, even his heart interested in vain, made him grind his teeth and mutter a reckless oath.

"Confound the girl, what is she to me that I should rush like a spanked school boy through the streets sulking and sore, simply because she didn't come to see me make a fool of myself? She despises me, and I can't blame her; I despise myself. It is just as well this nonsense were ended at once and I return to the even tenor of my wicked ways. By gad, if I had someone with me I would go down to the club and have a bottle of wine."

The minions of his Satanic Majesty are said to be on the watch for reckless men, and though it may seem more reasonable to imagine that reckless men are apt to be seeking opportunities of folly, it came to pass at this moment that Mr. George Veil, whose name barely suggests the immaturity and flabbiness of the youth almost collided with the angry Mr. Tully.

"By Jowve, is it weally you, Tu'ly? I thought you were singing at the Pavillon for the er—er—welligious people?"

"So I was, Veally, my boy, but I am taking a walk now to get the taste of it out of my mouth."

"Come down to the kleb and have a dwink. It'll weally do you good, you know!"

At any other time Tully would have scorned the society of

"Veally," but now anyone's company seemed preferable to his own.

At the door of the smoking-room, almost concealed from him by a cloud of tobacco smoke, a half a dozen of his old chums but recently returned from the Pavilion, were greeting with roars of laughter Jimmy Errett's account of his interview with Tully. Jimmy's fervid imagination was picturing for them the solemn and impressive words of which Tully had delivered himself when he had called to congratulate him on his conversion. That Errett was half tipsy did not make his cynical but humorous recital any more bearable to the angry man who heard it.

"He said to me, 'Jimmy, I am a different man. I have had a change of heart, and while there is time to-day, I want you to repent and join the church with me,'" cried Jimmy, in an excellent imitation of Tully's tone.

At this point, Tully's hand grasped Errett's shoulder and gave him a shake.

"Errett," said he, with his old, careless laugh, "you ought to be High Priest of the Ancient Order of Liars. You know I said nothing of the kind. It will just cost you a bottle of Pommery to straighten out the frightful yarns you have been spinning about me."

Errett's face, already flushed by drink, turned yet a deeper red. "Sit down, Steve," he blurted out awkwardly, "I guess I am caught right in the act this time. Boys, he didn't say anything of the kind. He told me he supposed I was trying to get material for a story, and I assured him I was sincere, and what is more, gentlemen, I was, but I felt so affected to night by the services at the Pavilion that I either had to join the church or get full, and like the fool I am, you know which I did."

"Never mind, Jimmy, it is all right; touch the bell!"

Errett rang the bell, but looked quizzically at Tully.

"So you are on the old racket, too," said he. "I thought you were straight."

"So I am," retorted Tully. "I think I can sing for the gospel people and take a glass of wine with my friends, notwithstanding the halo which probably still shines around my head! I haven't joined the church or tried anything of that sort, so where is the harm?"

"All I can say is," muttered Errett, "I wish you had been converted. Confound me if it don't make me feel ashamed of myself—and you—after the talk we had, to be sitting here boozing like a couple of sots. Damn me if I'll do it," and with an angry fling he threw his glass into the grate and left the room.

This disagreeable episode made matters still worse for the

perplexed Tully, and he felt that it could only be forgotten in more wine, which was followed by more and still more until the little party broke up hardly fit to find their way home.

As they were leaving the room Tully was staggered by the sight of Chandler sitting at a little corner table over a glass of whisky and water, for he knew his adventure would surely be made public with the many lurid extras which from time to time Mrs. Chandler would see fit to add to the facts.

CHAPTER XVI.

PLEADING IN VAIN.

In Mrs. King's beautiful drawing-room, a week or so after the Gospel Rally in the Pavillion, Bee McKinley sat in earnest and confidential conversation with Dell Browning,

"There isn't any doubt about it, Bee, he went straight from the Pavillion and got tipsy at the club. It is the most disgraceful exhibition of callous hypocrisy I ever heard of."

"But Dell, there must be another side to it. You know how much Mrs. Chandler makes out of a very little, and you really ought to give the poor fellow a chance. His companions may have joked and sneered until, to quiet them, he went to the club, and there influenced by his surroundings took more than was good for him."

"But what circumstances should influence a man when he has started out to do right and has made what was really a public profession, and then brings all his friends into disgrace as Tully has?"

"Really, Dell, I can't say, but something tells me that he will be able to explain it. Now you needn't try to hide it from me, I know you like Steve Tully and I know he likes you, and if he goes to the bad I'll always believe more or less that it is your fault, because you are exactly the kind of a woman who could save him if you tried. What he needs are good surroundings and he would be a great deal better than the ordinary husband. Now, if I had been Steve Tully, and was trying to be a good man, worthy of you, and you had pointedly stayed away as you did that night, I would have just gone and got as drunk as a lord. It was the meanest trick I ever saw you play on anybody."

"I don't think it was mean at all. He wasn't singing for me. There were plenty of people there to encourage him, and Madge said it was the most enthusiastic audience she ever saw."

"But you weren't there, and unless I am very much mistaken you were the audience that Tully wanted. I could see him looking for you."

"If he hasn't more strength of character than would take him through one night and over one disappointment—though, mind, I don't believe my being away was a disappointment—he is unworthy the name of a man."

"Now, Dell, what makes you preach so much? You didn't use to be so exacting. You know where there is much love there is great weakness."

"Yes, but if so much weakness goes with much love I would rather have less. Steve Tully's weaknesses go ahead of his love a long way, and are not caused by it. He is ready to fall in love with anybody who will encourage him, and he proceeds to fall out again with just as much ease."

Bee sat silent for a moment with her little gloved hands clasped over her knee. "Well, I don't remember any time he has ever fallen in love with me, and I have given him most outrageous chances, for I have been in love with him at least a dozen times and sister Kit has had one continuous spasm of devotion to him, lasting over two years, and in fact all the girls in our set are "gone" on him and he has done nothing more than joke and flirt with them in the most distinctly cavalier fashion, so no one could make a mistake. It was quite a revelation to me the other evening to see how he acted with you. I couldn't imagine him so serious."

"Oh, come, Bee, don't be so absurd. He is as incapable of feeling as that chair."

"I don't think so. I believe he was describing his own feelings when he said the most sensitive people are the ones who clothe themselves with some haughty or egotistical manner so as to protect themselves from the hard knocks people would give them if they became familiar."

"It is all very well for you to talk, but I have seen so many exhibitions of Tully's cold selfishness that I can't and won't believe in him."

"But, Dell, do you understand him? The very fact that he has betrayed all these qualities ought to convince you that he is natural and disdains to conceal anything. More than that, he is ashamed to betray the best side of him for fear you might think him a hypocrite. If he were as gay a deceiver as you seem to think him he could play his part much better than he has with you."

"I think he has played his part sufficiently well to deceive

you, but one of the worst features of his character is, that he considers himself so irresistible that he doesn't need to conceal his true nature. He imagines that with everyone 'to know him is to love him,' bad as he is, but I for one detest him except at sufficiently rare intervals to permit his life and mine to come into collision."

"You are too deep for me, Dell, I must confess," said Bee, looking up with serio-comic gravity. "I don't follow your metaphysics."

"What I mean is, that there is an attraction about Tully which at times is sufficient to overcome one's impulses to fight with him, and after one gets used to seeing him one feels almost inclined to like him——"

"—Oh, I knew you did. You needn't think it is any rare confidence to own up to it," exclaimed Bee.

"—But I am not owning up to it except in the most general way. You always like him, I can't endure him nine times out of ten."

"But the tenth time, Dell! Don't you think he is just sweet then?"

"No, you goose, I do not, I never get farther than owning that I dare like him."

"Then you are in love, Dell Browning. I know it. When anyone tries to like any person it always ends in failure; but if one is afraid to, the very danger of it makes it delightful, and what is fascinating always wins."

"I suppose you ought to know," said Dell, drily, "you have had such a large experience."

"Now, Dell, you are getting meaner every day. It was just reserved for you to sneer because I never had one real, actual fellow. Everybody else has nagged me about it. I can't even criticize Kit's hair without being told I know nothing about it, and if I had better taste I would have more beaux, and the strongest tie which bound your soul and mine together was that you had never told me that I was cut out for a silly old maid, and that if I didn't use something my hair would be red."

"But you have had a worshipper, Bee, and I wasn't denying it. What about Teddy Grigsby?"

"That is the last straw, Dell! If you want to stir up the bitterness of my soul, first refer to my failure to excite the admiration of young men, and then inquire about Teddy Grigsby. That Grigsby person is really to blame for spoiling my chances of marrying. Poor old thing, isn't he absurd?"

"But he is not old, Bee—not over thirty."

"But the looks of it! six feet six, if it were straightened out, though I have never seen Teddy standing upright but once—when he was yawning. I was singing, and he thought I couldn't see him, and he reached out his full length and nearly touched the ceiling. He fell down in the parlor the other day; he is so near-sighted he thought the conversation chair was a foot-stool and tried to step over it and fell right in mamma's lap. She screamed, and brought in father and Kit and all the rest of the girls, and poor Teddy was afraid to get up lest he should break something. I have asked him twenty times as a personal favor to me never to speak my praises in public or in private for that matter, and if he must come to the house always to inquire for sister Kit."

Dell laughed. "When did you make that arrangement?"

"Oh, just last time, when he fell down. Poor old thing, he roared and laughed, and thought it was the funniest thing that ever happened, but when I told him to ask for sister Kit, he really blushed—with confusion to think I was ashamed of him, I suppose. Poor Teddy! I want some man people don't laugh at even if he is grim and stern—someone I'll be scared of. When I have a lover he'll be the most frightful person, only he mustn't be jealous. I don't believe I could stand jealousy in a man; it is such a mean trick; it makes a man look so small, and as if he had no opinion of himself. That would be one good thing about Tully—I don't think he would ever be jealous."

"No, Bee, I don't think he would; but his wife—she would either have to be blind to facts or the green-eyed monster would surely mark her for his own."

Bee lifted her eyebrows curiously as she asked, "What makes you think so?"

Dell noticed Bee's odd look and blushed violently. "Nothing in particular," said she, "except it is the nature of the man to make love to every woman he sees."

"Even if it is, what difference would it make, because I am just as sure as I am alive, that he is the kind of a man who could only love one woman, and she shouldn't mind if he smiles on more."

"Well, I certainly would mind. My pride, if nothing else, would rebel if my husband made no greater effort to please me than to charm every woman he met."

"I must go, Dell; it is getting late," said Bee, rising from her seat and clasping her pretty little hands behind Dell's neck, who had also risen and stood four or five inches taller than the happy little woman who was more than two years her senior.

The level bars of the bright winter sun-light streamed in through the half open blinds, touching with brilliant beauty two faces which any man might love, though any man looking upon them for the first time would feel no perplexity in choosing. They were so unlike they could never be rivals. One woman could never take the lover from the other. A man who would first fancy Dell would never choose Bee, and the few who might prefer Bee would never think of Dell. It is in these unlikenesses that the truest friendships are found, and as little Bee looked wistfully up at the lovely face of her companion, tears gathered in her brown eyes.

"Oh, Dell, Dell, I feel like hawling! I know some trouble is gathering over you and it is about Steve Tully. I haven't much sense, mamma says, I haven't any; Kit says, if I would only quit at the right place I would be very nice for a reception afternoon, but after all I believe I have an instinct which keeps me out of trouble as surely as other people's smartness, and whatever it is, it tells me that you ought to be kinder to poor Tully, both for your own good and his."

Dell's arm was thrown around Bee's neck, and she gave her little friend a couple of hasty kisses before she answered.

"Bee, I'll agree with your mother, that you haven't the least little bit of sense, if you ever say another word to me about Tully. You are taking this matter too much to heart. When I have taken it to heart at all it will be time enough for your kind little soul to interest itself. You busy yourself getting Teddy Grigsby to transfer his affections to Kit, and then I will help you to hunt up someone suitable for yourself."

"Well," sighed Bee, "I guess I am to be always considered a miserable little giggler without any sense, but, Dell, you will remember what I have now told you some day when you are sorry."

Dell's face clouded. "I may have to be sorry," said she, "for him—for others—but while things remain as they are I sha'n't have any reason to be sorry for myself; so if your sympathy is for me don't waste it, my sweet little Bee."

Before she reached the next corner, absorbed by her thoughts, Bee was hurrying past Stephen Tully when he grasped both her hands, exclaiming: "Now, Bee, I didn't think this of you. Though all men turn against me, I felt sure that you would still find some excuses for the prodigal."

"Why, Steve Tully," she ejaculated breathlessly.

"And didn't you see me before? I thought you were hurrying past and trying to give me the dead cut."

"You think that because you deserve it, you silly and unaccountable man. I have just been trying to make excuses for you to Dell, and yet you suspect me of trying to get past without seeing you.

"I really didn't suspect you, Bee, but what did Dell say?"

"Not very much; still she likes you, Tully, and if you would only behave yourself—but I suppose that is impossible."

"I suppose it is. If she would only be as kind to me as you are, I think almost anything would be possible."

"Tell her so," whispered Bee, "right now. I have prepared her by saying that very thing. Good night."

"Good night," he answered, still holding her hands for a moment and wondering why fate had denied him the happiness of falling in love with such a sweet little woman as Bee. When he rang the bell at 25 Mowburn Street, he was trembling with anxiety and confusion. The maid showed him at once into the drawing-room, and there he discovered the quiet and self-possessed Miss Browning, who, expecting no more callers that afternoon, was half-reclining on a sofa, her face buried in the cushions.

"I am afraid I intrude," he stammered.

"Not at all," she answered, coldly, though even in the deepening twilight he could see that her eyes were wet.

"Nothing but important business would have brought me here, Miss Browning, for I feel like the prodigal son who has sinned against God and in thy sight."

"Never mind any excuses, Mr. Tully. I have no right to ask them, and I assure you it would be quite unnecessary for you to offer them."

"I didn't intend to trouble you," he answered, stiffly, "with excuses; these papers are relative to your estate. If you will permit me, I will explain them and witness your signature. There would have been no necessity for this interview, only I—er—had signed my name as witness, and it is—er—necessary for me to—er—er—witness both signatures."

"I will have the gas lit, Mr. Tully."

"Oh, never mind," said he, with his most professional air, "there is still light enough at the window."

Seating himself he read the papers very ceremoniously, explaining the technical terms and the intention of the indenture, which meant the investment of some twenty thousand dollars in the guaranteed stocks of a loan society which was supposed to be prosperous.

"You will notice," said he, as the maid brought pen and ink, "that Mr. Stryde has already signed this document."

She glanced at the signature, remarking, "Then it must be all right."

"Ah, Miss Browning, I think that was an unnecessary stab," said he, reproachfully. "I have tried to see that it was all right. Please continue to give me credit for professional rectitude, if for no other."

"I did not intend to question it," she answered quietly, returning the pen to its rest.

"Miss Browning," began Tully, hurriedly, "you have always told me that I seek to lay my sins on the shoulders of others. I am not trying to excuse myself for the faults I have been guilty of since I was here last. They have at least brought me to a sense of my own unworthiness and shown me how futile it is for me to attempt to be better unless I have some good influence leading me on, some surroundings to protect me, and some hope that, if ever I do better, you will think more kindly of me than you do now. I feel ashamed, desperate——"

"Mr. Tully, don't imagine that you can do good or be good if you have no more worthy object in view than pleasing me or any human being. Unless you do it for a higher purpose and look for divine help, all your attempts will be as great failures as the last."

"But, Dell," he cried, desperately, "help me to start. Until I learn to appreciate a higher power, lend me your aid. It would be enough to get me out of the miserable mire in which I am sinking deeper every day."

Had it not been for his abrupt entrance and the position in which he had found her, she would have relented. Now, though pride forbade her to be gentle, a sudden impulse to trust him, to love him, threatened to overpower her, and she sought safety in the simple answer, "I cannot trust you if you cannot trust yourself."

At that moment of self-abnegation Stephen Tully felt the rebuff most keenly, and his bitterness found resentful expression.

"Had you been in the Pavilion to encourage me even by one wintry smile, my first attempt to behave myself would not have resulted as it did, but you so obviously impressed your distrust upon me that I could not trust myself. Now you reiterate it; I presume you are right. It would be folly for me to make any more attempts."

His voice was broken and husky. Ashamed of his weakness he hastily muttered "Good night" and hurried to the door. In another moment she would have stopped him, but it was one of the moments which sometimes eternally separate men and women from happiness—ay! even from salvation.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETURN OF A MATURE PRODIGAL.

During the time Tully had been devoting himself to repentance, reformation and recklessness, he had been very remiss in his attention to his office duties, and Mr. Killick took advantage of the opportunity and possessed himself of what remaining business his partner had retained in his hands. The further loan of Miss Browning's money to the Savings and Investment Company had been negotiated by him, though he was perfectly aware that the concern was not solvent, and would not be in existence six months later. But while he had been successful in laying the ground work of his revengeful scheme, in other matters he had not been so fortunate. Many times a day Cora Burnham had been summoned to his room for dictation or instruction, and each time he had endeavored to impress the handsome girl with his passion for her. Always respectful, cheerful, considerate, with frequent inquiries as to her health and how her mother was succeeding in business, he by degrees was overcoming her feeling of repulsion which was experienced by everyone on first acquaintance with Mr. Killick. He raised her salary to fifteen dollars a week, bought the store in which her mother lived and reduced the rent, besides placing carpenters and painters and decorators at their disposal to make their shop and dwelling as attractive as they desired. Plate glass front, new counters, shelving, linocrusta walton dadoes, and all sorts of things, bore witness to the fact that Mrs. Burnham had not been slow in accepting his kindness. In private she had counselled Cora to be discreet but attentive; to preserve her dignity, but not to give offence, and when the poor girl wept in her mother's arms as she did very often, Mrs. Burnham counselled her to banish sentiment and wait for the demise of Mrs. Killick. The signs of prosperity attracted custom, the moving tide of business was finding their establishment in the very centre of trade. Fashionable customers suggested a stock of high-priced goods, and Mr. Killick was eager to secure it. Defeated in her ambition, Cora's mind turned entirely to money-making, and her shrewd advice and correct taste did much to establish and continue a fashionable business. Their books were well kept; the young women in the workroom sharply disciplined, and Mrs. Burnham and daughter were on the high

road to wealth. The sinister motive of obtaining as much money as possible from Killick, and involving him as deeply as possible in their debts, lent Cora a new object in life, and her sharp attention to the details of the office, together with her dignified and almost affectionate treatment of Killick, delighted the old man beyond measure. She would even let him take her hand, and two or three times she permitted him to pat her cheek in a fatherly sort of way, but for the life of him he could not become any more familiar.

Over the prosperity and opposing schemes of Killick and Cora Burnham there came a cloud, and the shadow in each case was caused by a different substance.

It was late one Saturday night some three or four weeks after the events described in previous chapters and the last over-worked sewing girl had left the Burnham establishment, when a very old and very seedy stranger, still retaining the erect carriage and over-bearing manner of one who had known better days, opened the shop door and strolled towards the work-room. He was met by Cora Burnham, who sharply demanded his errand.

"I didn't call to see you, young woman. My visit is to Mrs. Burnham."

"I am her daughter. What do you want?"

"Ah! you are her daughter? I am delighted to meet you, Miss Burnham. Have you any sisters?"

"No, sir," said Cora, retreating nervously from the old man's strange inspection.

"Are you quite sure that you are Mrs. Burnham's daughter?"

"Yes, sir," a tone of respect somehow creeping into her voice. "I am her only daughter."

"Then come to my e , I am your only father," exclaimed the old man with tragic bitterness. "After many years I have come to gaze upon thee again, and to hear thy mother's gentle voice bid me begone."

Without a word of answer Cora turned and fled through the door into the workroom, followed by the decayed gentleman who quietly turned the knob and pushed the door open after her.

Mrs. Burnham was descending the stairs as he entered and deposited his much-worn beaver on the table.

"Ah, my dear wife, this unexpected pleasure overcomes me with delight. Embrace me, Margaret, embrace me once again."

With a shrill scream Mrs. Burnham clasped her heart and stood like one petrified.

"Ralph Moore," she muttered almost inarticulately. "Great God, I thought you were dead."

"And wished it, I have no doubt," chuckled the old man, apparently enjoying the sensation he had caused, "but wishes don't kill anyone my dear Margaret, or I had been dead years ago. I am seventy-six, and, my charming wife, I can assure you I am good for at least another ten or fifteen years. The blood of the Moores runs coldly as it grows old, but the Moores grow old slowly, and attracted by your thriving establishment I called to tell you that I intend to spend the evening of my life with you. Gambling has become a poor business for me. I lack the modern tricks and attractive gaiety of youth, and surrounded by the comforts I can see that you have prepared for me, I picture a delightful rest from the worries of my profession."

Cora stood on the side of the table opposite the saturnine intruder. "Mother," cried she turning sharply to the trembling woman at the door, "is this father?"

"Yes," whispered the mother.

"Yes, my dear girl, I am your father. I have really forgotten your name, but in all these years of wandering, hardship and neglect I have carried the image of your baby face pictured in the most sacred niche of my inmost heart. Let me see, Margaret, what was it we christened our daughter?"

"Cora," gasped the poor woman, sinking into a chair.

"And is our name Moore, not Burnham?" demanded Cora, still addressing her remarks to her trembling mother.

"Yes child, my name was Burnham, his was Moore."

"It is immaterial, wife; it is immaterial, Cora dear. I am willing to take the name of Burnham if it is necessary to uphold the respectability of the family. I am too old to quarrel over trifles. Give me money enough to go out and buy a new suit of clothes. We will go to church and be a happy family to-morrow. Don't be afraid Margaret, the saloons are shut. I am much more temperate and discreet than I used to be."

"Give it to him mother," said Cora, quickly. "He is my father, he will have to look respectable no matter what he is."

When he had gone Cora clasped the wrist of the almost hysterical woman who had been so kind to her, and with tightly drawn lips demanded an explanation.

"Cora, child, don't blame me. If I have concealed it from you it has been for your own good, that a knowledge of the suffering and the shame through which I have passed when you were a baby, might not cloud your life. I have kept it all these years locked up in my heart, and if I have been anxious for you to marry, it has been that you might wear a name that belonged to you. Twenty-five years ago I married Ralph Moore who repre-

sented himself to me as a gentleman of means. Our honeymoon was not over before I discovered him to be a gambler. For five years I lived a most wretched life with him and he deserted me here. For some reason he was anxious not to be known, but he registered at the hotel as Capt. Burnham. He went out in the evening to visit someone he knew, and two hours after he returned in a frightful passion, took his valise, and said he would be back in a couple of days and left me. I did not see him again until to-night. His desertion caused some comment, and after it had appeared in the newspapers it was impossible for me to take any other name than the one I had borne at the hotel. For that reason, and no other, I have been Mrs. Burnham."

"Mother, is this story true? There is nothing worse than you have told me?"

"Is it not bad enough, Cora?" sobbed the poor woman. "Indeed, there is nothing worse than having a gambler, a drunkard, and a deadbeat for a father or for a husband."

When, after an hour's absence, he returned a suit of ready-made clothing and new silk hat, and, in fact, new outfit, together with a shave and a bath, had very much changed his appearance. His hair and mustache had been dyed, and few would have thought this man, approaching four score years, was more than fifty, he bore himself so jauntily.

Even her mother's recital of wrongs did not keep Cora from being half-glad of her father's return. She had supposed him dead, but this aristocratic-looking stranger, now too old to be a serious encumbrance, seemed to her to rather add to the family dignity. Ralph Moore was tall and magnificently proportioned, having one of those rare physiques which seem to perpetuate itself in every feature. With the assistance of a little hair dye his still abundant locks bore no traces of age. Even his teeth though some of them had been artificially filled, were more than half his own. His somewhat florid face had but few wrinkles except about the eyes and corners of the mouth, and the skin, that which generally betrays old age, had not the hard parchment look which comes to so many at three score. His arrogant, over-bearing manner, flashing eyes and military bearing had carried him through many a confidence game, secured him many a loan, and enabled him to sit at cards with gentlemen even after he had gained a reputation of never losing money and being suspected of not always winning it fairly.

"I have been thinking it over, and have decided that it would be better for you and better for me, better for us all, if I adopt the name of Burnham. In fact," said he, "I haven't been wearing the

name of Moore for the past twenty years and it is not necessary for me to adopt it now, particularly as it would involve you in unpleasant explanations. I will open an office as broker. I see you evidently have funds which need investment, and I will be able to add to the eclat of the millinery business by seeming superior to it. Upon my soul—er—Mary, Sara—what did you say her name was—Margaret?"

"Cora," corrected the dumbfounded woman.

"Yes,—Cora,—how did I forget it? you are a fine looking girl. I'll be able to arrange a proper marriage for you—yes indeed, Cora, you are a devilish handsome woman and you have the bearing of the Moores; you were born to be a lady and I'll see that you are one, too. I suppose you look after the finances of this concern?"

"No," answered Cora slowly and with a certain awe of this pretentious father who had so suddenly developed himself, "I am stenographer and bookkeeper for Killick & Tully."

"Heavens! not Killick the lawyer?"

"Yes, he is a lawyer. How did you come to know him?"

"To tell you the truth Cora; I was born in this city. My father was the wealthiest man in it and I have always suspected the scoundrel Killick of having been involved with my brother in a conspiracy to keep me out of a share of my father's property. However, it wasn't the fault of Killick so much as that of his partner, and I don't know that it was anyone's fault, but I always had an idea that there was something wrong."

"Is Col. Moore your brother," inquired Cora.

"No, he is probably my nephew. My brother died three or four months ago. I saw it in the papers. Is the young fellow a client of yours?"

"No, but he borrowed some money from one of our clients, and he was in the office quite frequently for a few days. He has the reputation of being a very rich man."

"Don't say anything to him about me but watch all the deals he makes. I intend to fasten myself on him yet and see if I can't borrow some of his wealth. Come Margaret, look a little more pleased at the return of your loving husband. You sit there as if you had been struck with a club. I won't embarrass you, don't be afraid of that. Very little will do me, I am getting too old to take many chances and I am going to play a safe game from this time out."

Mr. Killick also had an unexpected visitor. Theodore Kahn the diamond merchant met him by special appointment on Sun-

day evening, effectually disguised by a gray wig, powdered eyebrows, and a clean shaven face.

"Ah, mine friend," he exclaimed, grasping Killick's unwilling hand between both of his own, "I am back again; mine brother who brought me here, he is in trouble, and looks to you and to me for help."

"I have no interest in either you or your brother," answered Killick viciously, "and I don't see what in the devil's name made you take chances of twenty years in the penitentiary by coming back here."

"Oh, but you know it will be *both* of us, mine friend. If I go you will go. You are too smart to be put in prison, you must be too smart to have me go there."

"You are mistaken, Kahn. I have effectually protected myself from any possibility of getting into trouble over your affair."

"Oh, did you? I did not break down a wall for nothing. When I was in your vault I took a few things with me that I thought might be of value if you played me false. I have them yet."

Killick's face paled. "I missed nothing of value," said he. "You can't blackmail me. You are taking too big chances."

"Don't make any mistake with me, Mr. Killick. You robbed me of everything I had, scarcely leaving me enough to get out of the country. My brother has a little job on, he will need some help. We do not ask any money. If we do not get through it we will be arrested and sent to prison. I will have nothing to lose and can afford to make it hot for you, so we count on your help, on your assistance."

Killick was lying back in his chair, studying the crack in the ceiling, his fingers in a pyramid before him. "Oh, it is merely professional assistance you want?"

"Yes, it is merely professional. My brother is going to fail, and he wants to do it right. I am staying at his house and getting rid of the stuff we take out of his stock. You will only have to arrange the legal details; we may count on you to do it right."

"Of course, of course," answered Killick more cheerfully. "I will do my best; I always do that for a client. It is a godsend that your brother and you don't wear the same name or this affair would excite unpleasant recollections of the other trouble. When is the suspension to take place?"

"Oh! not for four or five weeks yet. He is only making his bad debts and getting rid of his stock. Who has my old room now?"

"It is just as you left it," answered Killick sharply.

"Well, my friend, let us visit it."

Together they entered the inner room and for an hour conspired

together as to how Stillberg & Co. could best defraud their creditors. As Kahn said good-night to the lawyer, he whispered confidentially, "When we get this thing through we shall both go to Australia, and you will have no more trouble with us."

When Killick was alone he drew an odd little pass book from its hiding place in the vault door, and for another hour was engrossed in calculations from which he rose with a fierce twitching of his coarse lips and a still more villainous look in his ugly face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS.

"I feel quite certain about it, Tully, Stillburg & Co., are getting ready to fall and will have to be watched."

"What makes you think so, Grigsby?"

"I got a painter from a young fellow to whom I was of service once, that they are making away with their stock. Will you have the matter looked into; we are their largest creditors and if there is anything wrong put the sheriff in without the loss of an hour."

"I will see to it, Teddy; good-bye."

"Say, Tully," half whispered Grigsby, as he leaned over the back of a chair, "I want to ask you about another matter, of course this isn't professional you know, but you know the girl so well that I feel sure your opinion will be worth a great deal more than mine."

Tully frowned in anticipation of some disagreeable question. "I am a poor authority on such questions, Grigsby. I haven't had so much luck myself that I can feel at all certain in giving advice to others."

Grigsby laughed awkwardly. "Success with you means a good deal, Tully. You think you are in bad luck if all the girls you know are not in love with you. I would think myself in the greatest luck on earth or in heaven if I could get one girl to like me—"

"And that one, Teddy?"

"You know well enough, Tully, it is Bee McKinley. Have I any show? I have made a laughing-stock of myself now so long that I am determined to stop it somehow or other."

"Why of course you have a 'show,' Teddy. I don't see how any woman could refuse you."

"Come, now, none of that, Tully!"

"It is a fact, Teddy. If I had a sister—and I wish to God I had one—I couldn't think of a man I would rather see her married to than to you, you great big, good-natured, soft-hearted old baby. I often wonder how you ever got far enough along in business to be able to put a sheriff in anybody's place; but in your business is business, and outside of it you are one of the most gentle creatures God ever made."

"Tut, tut, Tully, don't give me any taffy."

"I am not giving you taffy, Teddy; I am telling you the truth."

"Well, if you are, Steve, I wish it were a truth more generally acknowledged. Socially, I think I am as absurd a figure as there is in the city. I am the errand-boy of the whole McKinley family, and do chores for the rest of the young ladies who want an ice or an escort. None of the girls seems to have the slightest idea that I was born for any other use than to take them to the theater when they can't get anybody else or dance with them when the flowers crowd the wall."

"That is because you have always been infatuated with the one girl. If it had not been so serious, or if they had imagined there was any chance for them—"

"But to come back to the question, Tully. Have I any chance to get Bee to marry me? Don't be afraid to tell me the truth, because after all these years I have got used to looking discouragement in the face."

"Teddy," answered Tully, leaning forward and putting his kindly hand on the knee of his companion, "I don't believe that your chances are first-class—in fact, I think you had better give it up."

"I believe you're right, Tully. What you say simply strengthens my own opinion, in fact I have been trying to transfer my attentions to Kitty."

"Well, how did it seem to take?"

"First-rate, and I have an idea she would make a better wife for me than the other one. She is stronger-minded, and at Waring's dance last night I put myself in her charge, and didn't make an ass of myself once. She seems to know how to make me do the right thing, and doesn't make fun of me. We had a really splendid time."

"Do you imagine she knows what you mean, Teddy?"

Grigsby blushed. "Oh, I am sure she does. Kit McKinley is smart. I squeezed her hand—don't laugh now, Tully, because I am telling you little details—when I left her, and she looked straight at me and asked if that was intended for her, or if she was to deliver it to Bee."

"What did you say?"

"I said it was for her."

"Then what did she say?"

"She looked straight at me, held out her hand, and when I took it she said, 'You are awfully good, Teddy!'"

"You are in luck, Grigsby; she will make you an 'awfully' good wife, just the kind, for you, I'm sure."

"Do you think so, Steve? By gad! I feel happy; only I was afraid that after all this time maybe Bee wouldn't like it, but I guess she won't mind."

"No, no, old boy, I don't think she'll mind," answered Tully, with that whole-heartedness and cheerful sympathy which made everyone his friend who confided in him.

Grigsby rose to go, tall, ungainly, yet with a slow smile and dignity which after all out-weighed his awkwardness. His was not an unlovely face, with his blue eyes, light brown curls and scant mustache.

"Who are Stillburg's lawyers, do you know?" he inquired, the shrewd business look coming back into his face.

"No, I don't know. I'll find out for you though."

After Grigsby had gone Tully went into his partner's office, stated the case and asked, "Do you know who is acting for Stillburg & Co.?"

Killick was writing, and as he looked up his face betrayed no sign of either interest or intelligence. "In what matter, Tully?"

"In no matter particularly, but Teddy Grigsby tells me that they are secreting their stock and wants the sheriff put in."

"What evidence has he that they are crooked?"

Tully went on to explain, concluding by the suggestion that some one should be sent to Stillburg & Co.'s store to observe the situation.

"I wouldn't take that trouble, Tully. If they look shaky I'll have Dooley make out the papers and have the sheriff in at once; it's a great deal better to take no chances. I didn't know Grigsby was a client of yours."

"He was with our firm when I came into it, but he has very little litigation. Clumsy as he looks he is one of the shrewdest business men in the city and takes very few chances."

"Give Dooley your statement of claim, Tully, and get the thing in shape."

"Grigsby didn't give it to me."

"Then send Dooley after it."

Dooley was sent after it, but somehow didn't reach the wholesale house of Grigsby & Johnson for two hours after he had left

the office. Oddly enough, too, he had been watching the office door of Grigsby & Johnson for over an hour, observing those who went in and out, from the window of a saloon nearly opposite. When he called he found Mr. Grigsby and Mr. Johnson and the bookkeeper all out. He left his message in a careless sort of a way, as if it were not pressing, and went back to the office reporting to Mr. Tully that he had been unable to see any of the principals though he had called three times, which was the fact, but the three calls were made within fifteen minutes. When the office was closed that evening the statement of claim had not arrived and the matter was left to go till the next day. After a hasty dinner Mr. Killick returned to his office and was closeted with Mr. Theodore Kahn for half an hour.

"Have you everything ready, Kahn?"

"Yes—at least we will have by ten o'clock."

"Stuff all packed up?"

"It will be, but then we daren't take the stock out of the show-cases before we closed. That gorilla Grigsby has been watching us, and I could have sworn the sheriff would have been in there this afternoon."

"So he would have been if Grigsby hadn't been our client."

"Oh, is that so?" muttered Kahn significantly.

"Yes, that is so, and I only give you to-night to get out of the place. Have a man ready to travel with the trunks, and go yourself by carriage to Hamilton. Tell your brother to stop, but not to open the store in the morning. He can spend till noon making an assignment and then he must skip too. If you haven't brains enough to get your stuff out of sight before he reaches you, it is your own lookout."

"Killick, you are doing the square thing by us," cried Kahn rapturously. "We have had only two weeks, but we won't leave two hundred dollars' worth in the shop."

"Go," said Killick, "and for God's sake never let me see your ugly mug again."

The plan would have worked excellently, but Teddy Grigsby had arranged otherwise. Two hours before the departure of the train he had learned that Theodore Kahn was in the city, and unable to find Tully, he swore out a *capias*, had him arrested, detained the baggage and had both of the brothers in jail before midnight.

Next morning there was great excitement in the office of Killick & Tully. The senior partner was the first to arrive, though he had been out much of the night endeavoring to get bail for Kahn and his brother. Tully came later and was at once sent for and closeted with his partner.

"Why, how in — could you do it, Killick? You knew we were acting for Grigsby."

"Now don't harp on that, Tully. I was acting for Kahn before you received instructions from Grigsby & Johnson."

"And why the devil didn't you tell me yesterday," demanded Tully, angrily.

"Because I thought it would make no difference as I expected the Kahns would be out of the country before this time," answered Killick, slipping down in his chair and assuming his usual attitude when engaged in deep thought.

"Then you knew that they intended to abscond?"

"Yes, I knew that they intended to change their place of business, but I didn't let it interfere with your plans for protecting Grigsby. Didn't I send Dooley down there to watch around two hours yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, but with instructions not to find them, I suppose. I don't know how in thunder we are going to fix this thing so as to make it look right. You can't act for the Kahns and I for the prosecution."

"Easy enough my dear boy. I'll say I didn't know you were acting for Grigsby & Johnson and you will say you didn't know I was acting for Stillburg & Co., and in that way neither of us will be to blame. Grigsby will have to go to somebody else."

"Indeed he won't. He is an old client of ours, my personal friend, and so intimate with me socially that it would be impossible to throw him overboard for the sake of a couple of thieving Jews who perhaps will spend the next five years of their life in jail."

"I tell you, Tully, that you can't act for Grigsby. There are reasons which are none the less strong because I do not divulge them, why we cannot be with the prosecution in this affair. The easiest way is for us to refuse both clients under the circumstances and occupy a neutral position. Grigsby will come back to you with his next case."

Tully bit his mustache viciously as he stood with his hands deep in his trousers pockets, glaring at the ugly face which at that moment was upturned towards the ceiling, as expressionless as the crack in the plaster which the old man seemed so fond of studying. "I suppose," said Tully, "this man Kahn had some hold on you. The exceedingly odd manner in which he stole his papers from your vault is still fresh in public memory and it would have been in better taste if you had made yourself less prominent in trying to obtain bail for him last night, particularly when you knew that you were acting against our own clients."

"If I knew that, Tully, it doesn't follow that other people know

it. Be good enough to make no reference to our conversation. I have a good excuse for getting rid of Stillburg & Co., and of relieving you of the prosecution. Have sense enough to know that I wouldn't do it without reason. Retain, too, in your brilliant mind the fact that I don't propose to be taught my business by you."

"Nor I to receive any impertinence from you."

"Come now, Tully, get off your high horse. Since you have been with me you have made more mistakes than any partner or clerk I ever had. In investigating that Moore title, I find that you passed over an important point which makes the loan of Miss Browning's money an absolute loss to your client."

"What's that you say?" cried Tully, starting forward and grasping his partner roughly by the shoulder.

Killick straightened himself up in his chair, turned his dull, meaty eyes on the excited man before him and explained, with a significant tightening of his coarse lips: "I say that you, by your carelessness, have lost your client thirty thousand dollars. Perhaps Moore doesn't know the circumstances, and I may help you to realize on it, but I don't want any of your pretentious airs around me. Go back to your office and do as I tell you."

As he concluded, Killick rose from his chair, shook Tully's hand from his shoulder and grasped the knob of the door, as if to prepare for the exit. Tully was as white as a ghost. Big drops of perspiration stood on his forehead as he asked unsteadily: "Killick, is this the truth, or are you trying to frighten me?"

The old man, leaning towards him, whispered: "It is the truth, Stephen Tully, and another little section of the truth may be of use to you—that you are entirely in my power and must do as I say!"

Killick led the way towards Tully's room, stopping at Cora Burnham's desk to speak to Dooley, who was checking some accounts. With a lack of caution, foreign to the astute old lawyer, Killick began to explain to his senior clerk—with the idea of convincing Tully of the truth of what he had just told him—that there was something wrong with the Moore title, and the matter had better be looked into. Dooley asked a few questions, one leading one:

"If the memorial in the registry office doesn't contain the facts of the deed, where is the deed itself?"

Tully had left them and entered his room. Killick with a leer pointed with his thumb over his shoulder towards his vault.

Cora heard all this, saw the motion made with the big fat thumb and, remembering what her father had said, turned her face away lest her flushed cheeks might betray the fact that she

had been an eager listener. At lunch time she repeated the story, and her father listened with rapt attention.

"Watch everything, Cora!" he exclaimed. "I'll have this thing looked into. Find out where he keeps the will, and get to see it."

"That is useless, father. I haven't the keys of his vaults, and they are never out of his own hand."

"But, girl, you must get them—a fortune may depend on it. Have you no influence with the old scoundrel?" demanded her father, giving her a look which made her cast down her eyes in shame.

"I might have," she answered, "if—if—if I chose."

"Then, Cora, you must choose. There need be nothing wrong, but you must lend yourself to whatever plan I devise for getting a look at that will—and lose no time, Cora. If you get a chance, use it, but if he asks for an appointment"—the aristocratic and soldierly looking old man leaned across the corner of the table as he spoke—"grant it, grant it, but it must be in his office. I will attend to the rest."

Cora's flaming face, the trembling hands and shamed look of the mother were a silent protest against the suggestion, but Ralph Moore paid no attention; he was acquainted with neither shame nor scruple.

An opportunity occurred that afternoon for Cora to enter Mr. Killick's office. A heavy safe had been moved, and its weight had so depressed the floor that the lock no longer fastened the door on which the legend "Engaged," intimated that no trespassers were allowed. The door stood ajar, and though Cora knew that Theodore Kahn who was out on bail was closeted with Mr. Killick, as she knocked no voices could be heard. As she stood waiting for a response a draught from the outer entrance swung the private door still further open, and she felt emboldened to look in. The vault door stood ajar, and she caught a glimpse of the inner room, and then she could hear the low murmur of voices inside. Drawing the door as nearly shut as she could, she rapped loudly, and at length Mr. Killick responded. When he saw the door unlocked he demanded angrily how she entered. Something in her eye arrested his further speech. She entered the room and with the simple apology:

"In moving the safe across the room its weight where it now stands made your lock so that it doesn't fasten. I knew you were engaged, and fearing that someone might intrude I simply wanted to call your attention to it."

"Cora," he said gratefully, "you are a smart girl and a trusty one. If I weren't such an old man I would give you a kiss."

She did not flinch from him as usual, and when he put his warty hand under her chin, he succeeded in touching her smooth cheek with his repulsive lips. Cora shuddered, but with as much dignity as possible opened the door and returned to her desk.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VERY DIFFICULT POSITION.

Miss Brownlee, who for some reason had been very dull and listless, following Mrs. King's advice and example had been out of the city for a week visiting some friends. When she returned little Jack was overjoyed and insisted on monopolising her entire attention for a couple of days.

"Aunty Dell," said he in one of those boyish bursts of confidence which are so exceedingly dangerous to everyone who has been under observation, "what did mamma mean when she asked me if I would like to have a new papa?" "I am sure I don't know, Jack. Perhaps you were lonesome, and she was thinking how she could make you happy," answered Dell, almost startled out of her self-possession.

"But how could I have another papa? My papa is dead. Supposing she wanted to get one for me, how could she?"

"She could get married again, Jack, and the man she married would be your papa."

"He could not be, Aunty Dell; I would not have him," cried Jack angrily.

"I don't think there is any danger, Jack, don't speak about such things," answered Dell quietly, as she stroked the boy's hair and wondered within herself how Mrs. King could have been so thoughtless, so heartless, as even to make such a suggestion to the lad, little thinking that the astute woman had done it for the purpose of having it repeated to her.

"It can't be wrong for me to speak about it if it isn't for mamma. She came into my room last night after Mr. Tully had gone and asked me?"

The end Mrs. King had in view was accomplished and the innocent boy left in Dell's mind the impression that Stephen Tully had been talking love to the widow, even suggesting marriage.

"You haven't spoken of this to anyone else, Jack?" she inquired, earnestly.

"No, aunty Dell, only to you. I never tell anything to anyone

but you, and," said he, closely watching her face as he whispered, "I won't tell—I would be ashamed to."

He was resting on the broad arm of a rocking chair in which she was sitting. After a long silence he whispered to her, "Aunty Dell, if mamma marries Mr. Tully, then you'll marry me, won't you?"

Her pale, thoughtful face was instantly lighted by a bright smile which would have been a laugh if she had not observed his intense earnestness.

"Oh, you could not marry me, Jack, you are only a little boy. You will have to be twice as old as you are now before you can think of such things. But I will always stick to you, Jack, no matter what happens you will always have aunty Dell."

"Then you won't marry anyone, aunty Dell, till I get old enough, till I am a man and can have a great big, big house and a carriage and everything lovely for you."

"Don't talk about it, Jack, I love you as you are now and always will while you are a good boy, so don't be anxious to be a man; you are much happier now, Jack, than you will be then."

"But I am not happy now, aunty Dell, only when I have you. I wish I were a man, I would be so happy! I would have you all the time, and you wouldn't go away to balls or sit in the drawing-room and talk to people while I have to stay upstairs in the nursery."

"Ah, Jack, things will change very often and very much before you are a man and nothing will change as much as you will yourself. I will be growing into an old woman then, and life will look very different to you, Jack, you will have a great many sorrows and troubles that you have no idea of now."

The entrance of the governess to take Jack away to his studies put an opportune end to the little fellow's love making.

Alone in her own room Dell Browning could hardly restrain her tears. In spite of everything she had cherished a hope that Tully would reform and be worthy of her confidence. While she had been able to reject his advances it had been impossible to forget the handsome face and fascinating voice of her gay suitor. She would not confess even to herself that she loved him, but no other man had so shared her thoughts, and this fresh evidence that she had no sooner turned him away than he had begun love-making to Mrs. King, pained and shamed her. It was not only that Tully had not been faithful to her, but that Mrs. King had been so faithless to the memory of her noble husband. At first she thought she would speak to Mrs. King of the impropriety of encouraging attentions so early in her widowhood, but then she would have to betray Jack's

confidence and—the thought stung her—be open to the suspicion of being jealous. The latter thought made her exclaim, "Never. She may make a fool of herself without any protest from me." And then came the memory of John King's deathbed when she had pledged the dying man to be good to Madge.

"Why," thought she, "must Stephen Tully wreck the happiness of everyone with whom he comes in contact? Why don't I hate him as I ought? Hereafter he shall make no mistake as far as I am concerned, and if I can save Madge I will."

Even in her resolution to protect Mrs. King from Stephen Tully, there was a heart pang which brought the tears as she decided that rather than permit any scandal over the impropriety of an intimacy between Mrs. King and Mr. Tully, she would encourage them to marry at once if no other remedy could be found.

"Why, Dell, what are you doing," cried Mrs. King, glancing into Dell's room, bright and radiant after her walk. "You look as tragic as if you had just made up your mind to sacrifice yourself and all your friends."

"Do I," said Dell shortly. "Have you had a pleasant walk?"

"Lovely," cried Mrs. King ecstatically. "You know I went down town to see Mr. Tully about some business affairs. He insisted on my coming when he was up here last night. By the way, I have seen considerable of him during your absence. He seems out of sorts, poor man, and doesn't know where to go. The papers were not ready and I am to go down again to-morrow. He walked part of the way up with me. Isn't he just delightful company? I don't wonder that half the girls are ready to make fools of themselves over Steve Tully, I believe I could almost do it myself."

Dell's look of contemptuous attention had not the slightest effect on Mrs. King who seemed determined to relate her experiences in spite of all discouragement. "He told me, do you know, Dell, that he had given up any hope of winning you, and thought it was, perhaps, just as well. You are too good and he too bad, so he said. Even if he did succeed, no doubt you would fight like cats and dogs after you were married."

"He needn't have wasted his time, Madge, in any such suppositions. There never was any danger of my marrying him. I haven't quite taken leave of my senses and"—added Dell slowly, with cutting emphasis—"I hope you haven't."

Dell was sorry she had spoken; she had done exactly what she had decided to avoid. Mrs. King looked up mockingly. "I never had any senses to take leave of, or like you, perhaps, I have always had just enough sense not to want what I couldn't get."

The last shot went home, but Dell ignored the innuendo and replied with hauteur, intended to close the conversation. "It would be well if we all had sense enough to refuse what we want and can get if it is something we should not have, or that would bring shame and scandal on those we ought to love."

"I'll be honest with you, Dell, though not so much perhaps that honesty is a part of my nature as to avoid any further lectures from one young enough to be my daughter. I intend having just as good a time in this world as I can, and I am not going to mope and mourn; it would do no good to anyone either dead or alive. I am not like you, I can't afford to wait. I like Stephen Tully; if I could marry him to-morrow, no matter how much it would paralyze society, I would do it. I think, Dell, it is a case of a heart caught in the rebound, and if you know just how I feel you can make the best of it. I know he likes me, because he has told me so."

"Madge," cried Dell, in horror, "you talk as if you had already said good-bye to every sense of propriety. If you have no impulse to protect your husband's memory, think of Jack, think of yourself, and how you would be scorned by every good woman and decent man in the whole circle of your acquaintance."

"I have thought of it all, Dell, and I have made up my mind. Of course I don't propose to marry him right off, but I intend to be engaged to him at once if," she added with a great affectation of modesty and candor, "enough has not passed between us to be considered an engagement."

"Come now, Dell," she whispered coaxingly, as she tried to be affectionate, "don't look so horrified. Let me be happy if you can't."

"Happy, Madge! This is not the way to be happy. You are laying up stores of misery for yourself and all the rest of us. I cannot kiss you. Go away and leave me alone. The very thought of such conduct as you suggest makes me feel sick."

"Very well, you'll get used to it. So will everybody else, but," she added with a last fling, "don't blame me, if I have taken Steve away from you. I didn't suppose you would care or I shouldn't have done it."

"That remark, at least, is entirely unnecessary, Madge," retorted Dell, her lips white with disgust and anger.

"Perhaps; but one thing that is necessary, Dell, is an understanding between us. I am not prepared to accept anyone as my guardian and though I know you have very good sense, in this particular case if you offer either advice or opposition I give you notice I will suspect it of being caused by jealousy. You may not have cared for Mr. Tully; I don't suppose you did or you would have

treated him differently, but I never knew a woman yet who could endure to see even a discarded lover attached to anybody else. You know," continued the unruffled Mrs. King, "how vain all of us women are. We imagine if we refuse a man he should pine away and die or at least remain single all his days moping over one's old letters or a lock of hair. But Stephen Tully isn't that kind of a fellow, and I might just as well have him as anybody else."

"Madge, for heaven's sake don't go on like this to me. Stephen Tully was never my lover. If he had been I could hear of his marriage to anyone whose future did not interest me with out a solitary pang. I am thinking of you, not of him, and it is both unjust and cruel of you to insist upon putting me in a false position. If I did not think that you are talking as you are to prevent me from remonstrating with you I would willingly vow never to mention the matter again, but I promised your dying husband to be true to you, and I will, even though you accuse me of the basest motives."

"Very well, Dell, you can talk as much as you like, but it won't make the slightest difference to me. I shall do as I please and probably detest you for interfering. Good bye, dear."

With a rippling laugh Mrs. King tripped airily away to her own room, leaving Dell in a misery of astonishment and humiliation.

It was indeed a difficult position. Almost buried in an easy chair Dell endeavored to decide upon some plan of action whereby she could preserve her own dignity and yet defend Madge from that "wretch Tully." He had made her miserable and now he was inflicting on her the shame of Madge's folly. She understood Mrs. King well enough to know that no mere social restraint would prevent her from letting the world see her infatuation for the handsome scapegrace. Once she thought of seeking an interview with Tully and begging him for the sake of his old partner and the many favors he had received from him, to abandon his intention of marrying the widow, but her pride, the fear that he too might think her jealous, forbade. Nothing so incensed her even in her angriest moments as the feeling that she did really care for him a little, and the fear that this might influence her resulted in the primary resolve that she would do nothing to prevent the marriage. The sense that she was making a personal sacrifice of the lurking tenderness for the reckless man comforted her a little. It seemed as if she were doing something to requite John King's tender care. "All I can do," she thought, "is to keep Madge from making an immediate fool of herself. If she will only wait a year it won't be so noticeable, but her infatuation—with Stephen Tully as her intimate tempter—the very thought of it makes me shudder."

Mrs. King was unusually gay at dinner. She felt she had accomplished her purpose, for Dell had refused to see Mr. Tully and the coast would be left clear for her. Nor did she make any mistake, for when later in the evening Mr. Tully was announced Miss Browning retired from the drawing-room with a frigid "good evening" and a haughty bow. Returning, however, half an hour later to meet some one in the reception-room, she was forced to overhear some scraps of conversation from across the hall. Mrs. King was chaffing him on his downcast looks and his answer startled her.

"Yes, I am down-hearted, I have every reason to be? To-night, for the first time in my life, I wished I were dead. I am shaken and rattled till I don't know what to do."

Softly whispered words followed, Mrs. King was trying to comfort him and while Dell was talking to the poor woman who had sought help from her she could hear Mrs. King telling the maid to bring up a bottle of wine and some biscuit.

Back in her room again, Dell wondered what folly might be expected next. The clink of the glasses in the dining-room frightened her; she knew Madge was not discreet, that Tully was reckless! Was she doing her duty in thus abandoning her task? Trembling with nervousness she walked up and down her room viewing the situation from every conceivable standpoint. She could not appeal to Tully; he would suspect her of jealousy or meet her with scoffing and sneers. She had lost her hold on him and Madge at the same time. How could she regain it in either case? With Mrs. King she knew she could do nothing except by encouraging her fancy and endeavoring to keep the scandal from assuming too rapid and public proportions. With Tully what could she do? As she walked up and down her face flushed! Yes, it might be possible by appearing sorry for him and willing to encourage his advances, to regain her influence over him! But at what cost? Madge would hate her and at last she must refuse him and then the trouble would begin again! Perhaps, thought she, it would be possible to so separate them that no reconciliation would be possible. At any rate it would be better than this weak flight from her post.

No sooner did she decide, than after bathing her face she ran down-stairs, glanced in the parlor and then in the dining-room.

"Good evening, Mr. Tully, I failed to find you in the drawing-room, so I came here. I hope I am not intruding!" she inquired,

with a surprised look at the champagne bottle and the glasses.

"Not at all; delighted to see you," stammered Tully, starting from his chair with unprecedented awkwardness.

"Of course, Dell, you are not intruding," added Mrs. King with

her most finished smile. "I wondered what took you away in such unceremonious haste!"

"I wanted to ask your opinion, Mr. Tully; a poor woman was just in to see me; her husband was killed on the railway, and she is left in want with a large family depending on her for support. She has been told that the railway company can be made to pay large damages, but she has no means to undertake a law suit. Will you undertake it for her if there is any chance, and I will pay the expenses?"

The chance to go into professional particulars relieved Tully of his embarrassment, and soon he was chatting gaily with Dell, and she was joking and laughing as she did in the days before John King died. What had wrought the change? With man's presumption he felt inclined to believe her jealous of Madge, and inwardly decided not to be too easily won back by the capricious beauty, yet he was too much in love not to make evident his willingness to capitulate.

"I will send Mrs. Berdan to your office to-morrow, and after hearing what she has to say you can come up and let me know the result," said Dell with an astonishing display of confidence in her voice. "Even if her case isn't very good, perhaps by using your influence you might get a reasonable settlement for her—poor woman she needs it."

"You may be sure I'll do my best," answered Tully impressively, as he rose to go, "and if you will be at home I'll let you know what I think of the case to-morrow night."

"Oh, yes, I'll be home and Bee McKinley will be here. Good night."

Mrs. King tried to get an opportunity for a whisper, or some tender passage, but Mr. Tully carefully avoided it, and Dell did not try to make it any easier.

"You seem to have changed your mind, Dell," snapped the widow, when Tully had gone. "I thought you weren't going to speak to him!"

"You need not complain of the opportunities of pressing *your* suit, and"—answered Dell, glancing significantly at the table—"you did not neglect any of them."

"Dell!" cried Madge, her tone changing to one of passionate entreaty, "Don't interfere with me. If I am married to Steve, I will be happy and safe; if you prevent it I can't tell what may happen! Leave him to me, Dell. You don't want him, and can get anyone; I love him, I love him; leave him to me."

Dell could hardly tell whether Madge's tears and entreaties were more disgusting than her confident coquetries, but rejecting the

proffered embrace she bade her good-night and fled to her room, ashamed of both Mrs. King and herself.

CHAPTER XX.

TEMPTATION AND DECEPTION.

The morning after Cora Burnham's discovery of the inner office, a carpenter was brought to reset the lock, but found the floor had sagged so much owing to the weight of the safe that a new lock would be necessary. He was instructed to procure one and after he had fixed it, Mr. Killick being out, he handed the three little Yale keys to Miss Burnham. Quickly untying the string she slipped one of them into her pocket knowing that there were only two with the other lock and that Killick would not expect more. She handed them to him in his private room in the afternoon and he asked no questions, his whole attention being concentrated on an effort to please his fair stenographer.

"Kahn is coming down to-night to make a statement which is exceedingly important and I am anxious to have it taken down in full, but everything depends on the knowledge of what he says being kept secret. I can't trust anyone but you and Dooley, and unfortunately Dooley cannot write shorthand and the statement is likely to be a very long one and—for that matter—Dooley will be out of town. Would it be asking too much of you, Miss Burnham, to come down this evening about eight and work for a couple of hours?"

"Not at all," answered Cora huskily, her agitation almost overcoming her. "Where shall I work?"

"It will have to be in my private office, my sanctum sanctorum as it were, Miss Burnham, for fear some of the clerks may come back and overhear what is going on. As you are the only one of my staff who knows of the existence of that inner room—not even Dooley has ever been there—come in and see it, Miss Burnham, and I will tell you a very odd story about it," suggested the old man sweetly, thinking it well to make her acquainted with the premises so that she would not be frightened when coming in the evening. He opened the door which first displayed the empty vault from which the shelves had been taken, leaving only the two upright planks which had supported them. On the other side of these supports was considerable vacant space and the thought suggested itself to Cora that a man might easily conceal himself there. Pushing aside the portiere he ushered her into the room. The heavy

curtains falling behind her startled her with a sense of seclusion and fear. Turning to look at him, in her quick brain the plan was suggested that almost anyone could follow her in the evening and have ample opportunity of hiding in the empty vault, screened from observation by the heavy curtains. The definiteness of her purpose gave her steadiness of nerve to resist the impulse to either scream or fly, and she permitted old Killick to take her hand and bend over it as gracefully as his obese figure would permit and plant a kiss on her knuckles. Seeming not to notice the salutation she avoided him, not only by endeavoring to keep a chair or table between them, but by a distance of manner, which he found insurmountable, though her sweet smiles and bright eyes suggested that she merely considered it an inopportune time for receiving caresses. With an affectation of curiosity she peered into all the corners of the room, opened a cabinet—at which point she had to refuse a glass of wine—and finally exclaimed, "Why, this is the real vault then, is it, Mr. Killick?"

"Yes, my dear, this is the real one. The other was evacuated after the burglary, of which I told you. I have never had it repaired since."

"It doesn't look like an ordinary vault, it is more like a safe."

"So it is," he answered, anxious to detain her. "Look at it. It was made to keep jewelry rather than law papers, but it answers my purpose very well. Most of the papers, you know, are kept in the big vault outside in the office, I only keep my private ones in here."

"Why, you haven't any secrets have you, Mr. Killick," smiled Cora, alluringly. He placed his flat fore-finger on his coarse lips whispering, "H-u-s-h, I have lots of secrets, my dear Cora, but some day I don't intend to have any from you."

"It wouldn't be safe to tell them to me, Mr. Killick," she smiled over his shoulder as he showed her the vault. "Women can't keep secrets you know."

"Yes, but I believe *you* can," he cried admiringly, at the same time trying to put his arm around her, a motion which she eluded without appearing to notice it. By this time she had formed a coherent plan by which she might obtain possession of the vault key for her father, and with growing confidence in her own ability to keep Killick at a distance she became more confiding and less reserved in her manner.

"Where is the key of the lock?" said she.

"There is none," he answered with a laugh, "it is opened by a few dexterous turns of the wrist like this."

"How strong your wrist must be to throw a great big bar like that so easily."

"You could do it quite as easily my dear, just try it. See, turn it three times round to thirty, twice back to fifty, once around to seventy, and then, presto, it opens."

She tried it and was successful, and—with the numbers graven on her mind as if on tablets of granite—to divert any suspicion she tried it again, turning it once to thirty, twice to fifty, and three times to seventy. It wouldn't work. As she knelt before the safe apparently determined to open it again, he laughed at her ineffectual efforts and the beads of perspiration caused by fear lest he might suspect her, he mistook for excitement and laughed still more heartily. At last bending quickly over her shapely head he succeeded in kissing her, and as she sprang up half in anger he simply patted her hand and said, "Never mind, Cora, I will show you how to open it to-night."

When Ralph Moore heard Cora's adventures he at once made up his mind that he would go with her to Killick's office. For a time it was almost decided that Mrs. Burnham should accompany Cora to do propriety and keep the old lawyer off the scent. Mrs. Burnham, however, decidedly objected to sitting in the outer office for an hour or two, and understanding that her father would be concealed in the vault, Cora at last decided she had better go alone. At eight o'clock she pushed open the outer door of the darkened office, tapped at Mr. Killick's door and was at once admitted. The spring-lock snapped behind her but her father had the key and she knew he could follow, but when the lawyer was showing her into the inner room her blood almost turned cold as he carefully closed the vault door after them.

"Oh, don't," she cried, "that frightful door might get closed and no one be able to get it open."

"Oh, no, it isn't locked. See, turn the handle a little to one side and it pushes open."

"Oh, please leave it a little way open, I am so frightened of being smothered to death or something."

"All right," laughed Killick; but as the door was slightly ajar he took more pains to draw the curtains, and three minutes afterwards Ralph Moore quietly slipped through the door into the vault and crept behind the beam.

"You got here quite early, Miss Cora," chirped Mr. Killick. "Kahn may be half an hour late, and while we are waiting for him I suppose we might as well talk. Aha," he laughed somewhat awkwardly, "I say we might as well talk, I really told him not to come before half-past eight so that I might have a talk with you. Have a glass of wine, Miss Burnham, it won't do you any harm. It is beautiful wine. You know I am a temperance man,

still in my private life I permit myself a few luxuries in which I never indulge before the world for fear my example might be bad. There is nothing like affording a good example, Miss Cora, even if one's inner life is a little bit contradictory. You know if people all kept themselves carefully guarded from evil appearances, we should at least have no glaring vices, and the trouble of concealment would prevent the great majority from intrigues which, very often you know, Miss Burnham, are unsatisfactory things. But then," said he, unconsciously slipping down in his chair and putting the tips of his fingers together and looking at the ceiling, "what is life without an excitement of some sort? What is the hum-drum of law, of medicine—yes, my dear, even of the pulpit—unless there is a variety in life to lend spice to the burdensome days? Well, you have already found out that I am not exactly what I seem. The homely and fat old man who has to wear spectacles is nothing but a boy after all—Do take a glass of wine, Miss Burnham."

Cora touched her lips to the glass and bowed her acknowledgment.

"Nothing but a boy after all, full of pranks and capers; yes, my dear, and full of sentiment, love—yes, I am, my dear, just as full of sentiment as I was when I was twenty years old; a perfect boy, making ballads to my mistress' eyebrow; and you know, my dear, that it is your eyebrow——"

"My eyebrow, Mr. Killick; why how absurd."

"I know it is quite absurd—ha! ha! ha!--awfully absurd, that a repulsive old fellow like me should have dreams of a pretty face and a divine form. Drink your wine, Miss Burnham, really it won't hurt you. Yes, it is very absurd. I recognize the fact myself, and facts are the things that we must recognize in this world; not dreams, not what we would wish, not romantic reveries—facts, facts; hard, cold facts; stern, uncompromising facts; sentimentally, absurd facts—anything that is a fact must be taken into account; we must reckon with it as if it were fate. I don't know any other fate than the facts of everyday life. The fact is you are poor, the fact is I am rich; a further fact and what is more, there exists the fact that you can be rich, even if I have to be poor, if you will be kind to me. I suppose you think I have no other ambition than wealth. Men about town laugh and say Mammon is old Killick's god—he cares for nothing but gold. They are wrong, my dear—very, very wrong, my dear Cora. Money is nothing to me except for what it will buy—I don't mean *who* it will buy, but the comforts it will procure for those I love. Now, I love you! Don't be startled, Miss Burnham, don't be startled! You have long known it; I am

a loveless old man. The men in my own profession hate me; I am too smart for them. My clients are no longer my friends after they get my bill. I am so ugly I am afraid to talk to a jury. My wife is a complaining invalid who seems never to have forgotten the favor she conferred on me by marrying me and turning herself over into the hands of a doctor. She never has a kind word for me. Her whole dream is of some handsome lover who had jilted her before she accepted me. Well, there is no love lost. She likes me as well as I like her. If I dared I would give her a spoonful of poison to-morrow. If you will be my wife," continued the old man, coolly, not removing his eyes from the point of observation on the ceiling, "I will see that she doesn't interfere with the ceremony. When I say to-morrow I don't mean the day after this, but later on. What do you think about it?"

As he spoke the old man straightened up in his chair and sat gazing fixedly at the dumfounded Cora.

"What do you think of it, Miss Burnham? Don't be startled, because as I told you before, this is a world of cold and unsentimental facts. If you are willing to marry me I will see that you have a chance to do it. You will be a lady. I will give you all the wealth you want. I am one of the richest men in the city. There is nothing between us but a feeble life that the doctors have been expecting to go out every day. What think you?"

"Mr. Killick, how dare you suggest such a thing to me; I would be the accessory to a murder?"

"Tut, tut, girl, don't put it that way. I could do it by leaving a window open, by a draught in the room. It would be a mercy to her and a godsend to me if she were in the other world. I am an old man; it won't be many years before you will be left to your own devices, to do as you like with my money and with your own. I will settle a hundred thousand dollars on you and I will make you heiress to a hundred and fifty thousand more."

"It is a very tempting offer, Mr. Killick," said Cora cautiously, "but then you know offers of this kind are rather dangerous things. I have no doubt that you have that much money, but after we were married I might not get it."

"I'll make a settlement on you of a hundred thousand dollars which will be delivered into your hands before the ceremony, and more than that, I will make you heiress to the other money at once. Yes, my dear, at once. I am not afraid of the result. I will show you how I can put you in possession of one of the largest fortunes held by any woman in the Dominion."

Killick stopped for a moment. He wondered to himself if he were not going too far, but the infatuation of his passion was so

great he was blinded to the brightly cold and calculating eyes which were hidden by the drooping eyelids of his fair auditor. "You remember that loan we made of Miss Browning's money the other day to Col. Moore?"

A flush crept slowly up into Cora's face, but she nodded as unconcernedly as possible, "Yes, I remember."

"Well, that property does not belong to Col. Moore any more than it does to me; not so much, for I have some title and he has none. All I have to do is to produce an heir or an heiress and the whole amount will revert to him or her. I have already frightened him so that he is willing to give me almost any amount I ask, by alleging that I know where the proper heir is to be found. Of course that is a professional fiction. There is no heir. The property is his certainly enough unless I invent some personage. I have all the family documents in my possession. There is no reason that you should not assume the position and obtain possession. How would you like to appear as a Canadian Roger Tichborne, the fair claimant of the Moore estates?"

"Oh, I think it would be lovely," exclaimed Cora, her dark eyes flashing with excitement. She sat facing the portiere while Killick had his back to it, and a glimpse of her father's face peering through the aperture had given her a great reinforcement of strength which Killick mistook for the bursting into life of the flame of avarice he had been fostering.

"Well, I can fix it for you, Cora, and between us we shall be one of the richest couple that ever went journeying. We will do London," cried the old man, smacking his lips and clapping his hands together, then forming them into the usual pyramid, "then to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, spend the winter in Italy. Oh, won't it be lovely spending a winter under the blue skies of Italy, wandering about the ruins of Rome? And Venice, Cora. Wouldn't it be glorious these winter evenings, to be floating in a gondola, between stately palaces in Venice?"

Cora laughed, intending her voice to express an ecstasy of delight, but somehow it sounded differently, and Killick started angrily. "You laugh at me, Miss Burnham. I doubtless make an ass of myself. Ha! ha! ha! I suppose I should look too funny in a gondola, beside a pretty woman like you. Don't laugh at me, though; that is one thing I won't permit. I can love you well enough to endow you with my fortune; but if you laugh at me, I would hate you to the point of doing what I expressed my willingness to do for Mrs. Killick."

"You mistake me, Mr. Killick; I laughed with delight at the pictures you were painting of a winter in Italy. If there is any-

thing I have dreamed about, it has been Italy. When mamma and I have talked about traveling, it has always been Italy I have wanted to go to. You don't know how strong a temptation you were offering me when you spoke of Italy. You must excuse my silly laugh, Mr. Killick; it was really one of those hysterical sounds which make one seem silly, and it had the misfortune in this case of making you angry." As she spoke, Cora moved from her chair, and for the first time in the history of their odd courtship, placed her hand on Mr. Killick's shoulder. "Will you forgive me?" she asked.

Killick was entirely overcome.

"Forgive you!" he cried, reaching up and grasping the hand resting on his shoulder. "I am glad it made me angry, so that this reconciliation could be brought about. Cora, you are my weakness. I am your fool, and I know it. I have never been this way before. I know I am clay in your hands. I try to resist and cannot, it doesn't seem worth while resisting. All my other ambitions fade away when you are near me. I think that you will betray, that you will lead me an awful life, that you will accept me for my money only, that you may even dishonor my name (if I can ever give it to you), and yet I would give everything I have for one moment of possession. You seem to me to be a lady, to have honorable feelings; you never tell anything that happens in the office. You seem to be one of those rare women who can be trusted. I think of these things to console myself, when I know that every passion and weakness in me has resolved my nature to trust you, right or wrong. Take a hundred of my hardest law cases and I have not searched for evidence, for precedents, as I have searched in you and in myself for reasons why I could trust you. I have thought of those rare instances where old men have had the good fortune to win the confidence and affection of young women. I have read biography, history, everything, to find some reason why I dare trust you and make you the absolute mistress of my heart, and secrets and everything else. Cora," Killick's voice trembled and there were tears in his big meaty eyes, eyes which, no matter how ugly they were, did not express in their dull ugliness the bright and masterful mind within, "I have found very little. It all comes back to the point where I ask myself may not you be the first one, may not I be one of the few who win such treasure? Happiness is a rare gem. Why after all these years of toil, cunning, yes, conspiracy—Cora, I might almost say crime—should I not have one glimpse of happiness? It hasn't come to me yet. These wines when they fell to my lot with this room, I tried them thinking perchance there might be something in their liquid depths which would

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an hour's satisfaction; something—something, anything except the bitterness and grasping that had so far filled my life. There is nothing. Even if you refuse me, now, if you are false to me afterwards, your face, the dreams I have had of your beauty, of the possibility of having it for mine, outweigh any other happiness I have ever had. You can see, Cora, how after this dream has been revived by my coming and finding you in Tully's office, I have pursued the phantom, and just now your laugh—one which I confess I didn't understand—brought me to myself with an almost electric shock. Can you really think of rambles in Rome and Venice and Florence, fair Florence of which Dante sang:

"Ungrateful Florence!
Dante wanders far."

Can you think of this thing without laughing, without going into a perfect paroxysm of laughing at my presumption in thinking that in my old days my wealth could hope for intelligent loveliness, loveliness like yours, to share what would be left for me of life?"

There was something in the old man's face and in his voice which had lured so many people to a belief in him which now fascinated the young girl in the midst of her plan to win his confidence and betray it. The genuine feeling he had displayed, the answering emotion it had excited in her, were those occasional exhibitions of genuineness which in the most artful and heartless schemings almost make the participators believe their pretences are realities. The most oily and the most insinuating and seductive appeals poured into the private or the public ear are unavailing unless there is a heart voice that can occasionally be heard. The success of extraordinary ventures of this kind depends upon the power of the adventurer to feel for the moment a genuine impulse and to answer the genuine appeals of others as if his whole heart were laid bare before them. These two plotters as they talked to one another each felt convinced of the other's sincerity, and, as they pictured the future, drifted into real nearness of spirit. We wonder sometimes how people can be misled; how an artful man can mislead a woman, how a designing woman can mislead a man; we must always take into account the quality of sex, and that with contiguity there is a response excited which is momentarily genuine. It is sometimes really strong in magnetic people, and where magnetism of this kind meets a similar quality both are almost sure to be misled, each believing in its own triumph. At any rate, this was true of both Cora and Killeck. At the point, however, when her admirer began to be too fervid, with an idea not only of testing the combination of the vault but seeing the Moore documents themselves, she at an opportune moment, when modesty

could be alleged as the reason for changing the subject of conversation, wondered if she could open the vault.

"Try it," smiled Killick, waddling beside her and attempting to put his arm around her as she bent over the door. Of course she didn't know the combination, couldn't think of it. She could get thirty and fifty and seventy in any conceivable shape except the proper ones. Then he showed her, his fat hand enveloping her slender fingers several times during the operation. And yet the next time she could not get it, though she was well aware that her father during these lessons was marking down in his memorandum book the three times around to thirty, twice back to fifty, once around to seventy. At last she was able to accomplish the task, and Killick showed her the deeds and papers to which he referred, took them out, read the will to her, pausing at the beginning with this explanation:

"You know, of course, Miss Burnham, you are expecting Kahn up here to-night. Well, as a matter of fact, the Kahn part of this programme is mythical. You will pardon me for that, won't you?" he whispered, in an attempt to be playful. "What I really wanted you for was to arrange a partnership between you and me, and now we are here and have got along so famously, I will read you a little slip I have in my book which shows what will be necessary to prove the heir or heiress of the Moore estate. There it is; here is the will. Let us read the will first." He read it over, explained the points of law and put it back in the box. Then he read a minute description, in his own handwriting, of the elder brother, Ralph Moore, of the third brother, some time deceased; went through a lot of papers relating to an estate which was about to come into the possession of the Moores from an old relative in England. "This," he explained, "is one of the principal things."

Cora was thoroughly interested, and it may be supposed the listener behind the curtain was not unmindful of these developments.

"Really, I was never so excited in my life, Mr. Killick. What a romance it would be for me to assume the *role* of claimant! Would you mind giving me a glass of wine, I really tremble so at the thought of it." This time she drank it all. Killick took two half tumblers of brandy. She stood beside a table, her hand nestling confidently at his arm. What a spectacle it would have been for the old lawyers, money shavers, brokers and commercial pirates, who looked upon Killick as the personification of money getting, had they been able to see him in that room with the young girl, leading him such a dangerous dance! His eyes began to gleam through their meaty surface, and Cora, with the fear that

there might be some slip between the getting of this paper and the plan she had laid, was resolving in her mind whether it would be better to slip the will into her pocket; no, she knew it would not fit. She tried to think of some place she could conceal it. She took it out and looked at it. Killick was pouring another glass of brandy. It fell on the floor. He did not notice the quick motion of her foot as she kicked it towards her father, and the hand reached down through the aperture. But Moore's head was shaken ominously; she knew she had made a mistake, but the knowledge of a protector near at hand made her bold, and she dared to taste another glass of wine, persuading Killick to take another brandy; then she piled the papers in the box, and together they put them away. She glanced at her watch: it was after ten.

"Why, Mr. Killick, it is after ten. I must go home."

"Not before you give me one real, genuine kiss."

"Oh, it must be before that, Mr. Killick. I should not until things are different," she answered, significantly.

"It doesn't matter, we must sign and seal the bargain now."

"Well, if you must," she murmured, and she kissed him.

"I will see you home, Cora." He put out the lights and they went out together. The sound of their footsteps had not died away on the stairs when the portières were parted and the light of a dark lantern gleamed on the combination of the vault. "Thirty and three times around," whispered the eager voice, "fifty twice and once around to seventy." The vault door yielded, the Moore family papers were buttoned into the bulging pocket of the old gamester, but he did not go. Pulling a screw-driver from his pocket he changed the combination. He knew that Killick dared not bring a locksmith to repair it for fear it would make public the existence of the room. He wanted a few days for preparation.

His calculations were correct. The combination of the vault was not repaired for several weeks.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT CROSS-PURPOSES.

"What do I think of it, Dell? I think it is the meanest thing I ever heard you propose. I didn't think you could be so cruel."

This was Bee McKinley's answer when Dell asked her what she thought of her plan for protecting Mrs. King from her own folly and Tully's mercenary advances. The longer Dell had considered the matter the more fixed her intentions became of fighting Mr.

Tully with his own weapons. With mature thought the plan did not grow less distasteful to her honest nature, but that some such course was an absolute necessity and within the line of her duty, made her determined without making her brave. She felt she had courage enough to undertake it, and that when she had once begun, she would be able to carry it through, but she wanted a *confidante*, someone to whom she could explain the real meaning of her conduct; someone who, should she fail, would know that her efforts had been prompted by a good motive; someone with whom she could consult, and who would assist her in carrying out what she proposed. When at last she decided on having Bee McKinley her mind felt easier. She would insist on having Bee always with her when Mr. Tully was likely to be about, and in this way would be able to encourage him without giving him an opportunity for a definite declaration. Counting on Bee's intense love of fun, it had never entered her mind that she would object to joining in such a partnership. A note from Dell had brought Bee over early in the evening, and they were closeted together in Dell's pretty dressing-room.

"'Mean!' 'Cruel!'" exclaimed Dell indignantly. "What is there mean or cruel about it?"

"There is nothing about it that isn't mean or cruel, Dell Browning," retorted Bee. "There are plenty of ways to make him stop his folly with Mrs. King without leading him to believe that you love him. Why, it will break his heart and send him to the dogs. Poor Tully, you don't seem to think that he has any feelings."

"Now, Bee, do have some sense. A man can't have all the feelings, or enough heart to be broken, if he makes desperate love to half-a-dozen women in as many months, and if there is any other way to stop him I wish you would propose it."

"Why, tell him right to his face what you think of his conduct and say that he must quit. I am just as sure as I am alive he would," cried Bee earnestly.

"'Would' what? Quit his attentions to Madge? I am just as sure as I am alive he would do nothing of the sort. He is eaten up by vanity, and would think I was jealous and would try to put his arm around me and coax me to make it up. Bah! I know him too well to have any confidence in the possibility of driving him out of his egotism. I would humiliate myself for nothing—for worse than nothing. He would go on making more desperate love than ever to Mrs. King, with the idea of making me so jealous that I could stand it no longer, and then he would feel sure of my rushing into his arms without more ado."

"Well, let me tell him, then. I am not afraid of him, and he couldn't think me jealous."

"But where would you tell him that you had obtained your information? Thank goodness this matter hasn't become public yet. He would suspect at once that I had sent you, and that would be worse than if I told him myself. Don't you dare to speak to him about it, Bee. I know of nothing that would humble me so much as being suspected of employing a go-between."

Little Bee sat in the low rocking-chair, her hands clasped around her knee, as was her wont in moments of abandonment. For a few minutes she was silent, attentively studying Dell's face.

"Dell," she exclaimed, as if she had suddenly arrived at a decision, "I will do as you bid me, but remember one thing, I am not doing it to keep Mrs. King from making a fool of herself, but because I believe you like Tully yet, and if I encourage you and give him a chance to show how much in earnest he is, everything will come out all right yet."

"I don't care what you think, little silly. I shall be able to prove that you are very far astray, and more than that, you will get to see so much of Tully's true character that you won't champion him again. You promise not to run away and leave me alone with him, not for a single moment!"

"You needn't be afraid, Dell, I will stay in sight, but I won't always promise to be with'n hearing," answered Bee, still looking quizzically at her friend.

When, later in the evening, Mr. Tully arrived, Dell took possession of him before Mrs. King had a chance to make a move. Mrs. Flambert came in later, then Mr. Stryde, but Dell's kindness to Mr. Tully was so marked, the banker did not stay long. Mrs. Flambert was delighted, and with a very shrewd suspicion that Mrs. King was anything but pleased, attached herself to that lady and became exceedingly enthusiastic in speaking of her pleasure at seeing that Dell had at last made up her mind to marry Mr. Tully.

"It does look almost like it—whether he is willing or not," observed Mrs. King with great acidity.

Mrs. Flambert was now certain of her ground.

"He is 'willing' enough. I told him one day he was spoiling his chances by being over-anxious, and lately the artful rascal has been flirting with others, just to make her jealous."

"He seems to have succeeded," answered Mrs. King, with a yawn and a malicious glance towards the conversation chair in which Tully and Dell were seated.

They were almost facing each other. Dell's face was brighter and more vivacious than it had been for many a day. Tully's intense, eager look was very unlike the serene smile with which he ordi-

narily concealed his feelings. He was speaking rapidly, now and then making a quick, graceful sweep with his arm, as if illustrating some irresistible or violent circumstance. The astute little Bee sat strumming on the piano, as she afterwards described it playing "incidental music" for the love scene in the conversation chair, and pretty and suitable music it was—a bar or two from one well-known song after another—plaintive minors, sweet refrains repeating and repeating themselves, interspersed with gay movements and snatches from bright operatic airs. The music effectually prevented Mrs. King and Mrs. Flambert from overhearing what was being said, and when Bee's sharp ears detected a lull in the Flambert-King conversation, the music grew much louder.

"Now, Mr. Tully," said Dell, laughingly, "don't make explanations. I always understood that men of the world never make them—they are so apt to explain themselves into a worse situation than the one they are trying to get out of."

"Pardon me, Miss Browning, but I am not speaking as a man of the world now. I *must* explain. You may not understand, you may not believe me, but for Heaven's sake let me put the best construction I can on my conduct."

"Don't bother constructing it, Mr. Tully. It would be easier to reconstruct yourself."

"But I want to make you believe that there is a possibility of my reconstructing myself. You have treated me so coldly of late that I have been in the deepest depths of despair lest I had committed the unpardonable sin, and was to be forever shut out from the light of your countenance—"

"Now, now, Mr. Tully, don't ask me to stretch my imagination too far. I can't conceive of you being in despair, and certainly you haven't shown any symptoms of dejection. I am afraid you are trying to impose on my credulity," retorted Dell.

"But you know, Miss Browning, people are sometimes very sick without showing it. No matter what you may think of my behavior that night after the service at the Pavilion, or of the bad taste I showed in accepting the invitation, I don't want you to believe me a hypocrite or imagine that I would go about in sack cloth and ashes so that people might think me repentant; nevertheless, I am sorry. The cynical way you laugh at my explanation is much harder for me to bear than the sharp reproofs and candid criticism—er—, and candid criticism in which you used to indulge."

"Well, I won't indulge in it any more, Mr. Tully; I think I must have got to taking life too seriously, so you see I am trying to reconstruct myself. Let us agree to be frivolous."

"But I don't want to, I never felt more serious in my life, and you can't be frivolous. You may be cynical—"

"Well, then, why not cynical, Mr. Tully?" interrupted Dell. "Is that a *role* that you wish to monopolize?"

"It is certainly a *role* that I don't desire to see you adopt. I meet enough of it in the world to make me anxious to find someone who is sincere. I always liked you—I say 'liked' because I dare not use a stronger word—because you are restful. After one fights in the courts with business men who are willing to adopt any *role* to gain their ends, with criminals who will make any plea to escape justice, I have looked with admiration—yes, adoration—at you because you are always the same. You had the ring of purity in your voice, the stamp of sincerity in your face. To-night you seem different. The change frightens me. Have I fallen so low that you feel you can no longer treat me as you do other people?"

"You flatter yourself, Mr. Tully," answered Dell, with a hardening of her voice, "when you imagine I would study a particular *role* for your especial benefit."

"Believe me, Miss Browning, I am not accusing you of studying any part, only arming yourself against me with a cynicism which I know you do not feel towards others—it is a doubting of my motives, and wounds me as disbelief in my individual self."

"Oh, you vain man, you apply everything to yourself. I really suspect you of imagining that the world was created for you and the rest of us were put here to amuse you."

"Yes, I know that is what you believe," answered Tully, dejectedly, "but if you knew how out of humor I am with the world and myself you would find no reason for your suspicion. I have tried to take life as a joke, I thought it easier to laugh at my own misfortunes than those of other people, or to fight with rather than try to change what I did not create, but now my miseries are past the joking point. You do not know," he whispered earnestly, "how utterly miserable I am, how I hate myself, or what insurmountable reasons I have for my deadly disgust of what I have done and what I am. Do you remember once my telling you that I believed a man could stand on one foot in the hot sun all day and rest himself by just looking at you? You are so gentle, so cheerful, your presence in a room seems to quiet every disturbance, the touch of your hand to set everything straight. I long for the privilege of being near you and feeling the quiet and contentment you seem to bring. I have been too thoughtless, selfish and careless to shape my life towards the possibility of such happiness, yet after all it wasn't selfishness alone. There always

seemed to be a gulf fixed between us. Now it is wider than ever, never so wide as to-night, though for the first time in months I am permitted to be near you. Your presence is a reproach. I know your distrust of me is so well-deserved it tortures me, and yet," he cried, leaning towards her, "Dives, in the agony of his lost state, didn't look up to heaven with greater longing, with more bitter remorse, than I look at you, and wish to God I had died before I met you."

"Why, Mr. Tully," exclaimed Dell, involuntarily moving further away from him, impressed in spite of herself by his despairing voice and pale face and the brilliancy of his eyes under which were dark circles that she attributed to recent dissipation. As she moved from him he threw himself back against the circling arm of the chair. She laughed somewhat nervously.

"Really you can't expect me to be serious when you talk in this very melodramatic strain."

Mrs. King and Mrs. Flambert had observed the very striking passage in the dialogue and had found it impossible to restrain their curiosity sufficiently to continue their conversation. Bee at the piano had also noticed from the corners of her bright eyes that Tully was growing excited and the music took a very loud and merry turn which startled the widow into an effort to appear unobservant.

"I suppose you thought you were addressing the jury, didn't you, Tully," cried Mrs. Flambert, raising her voice.

"Yes, I was giving Miss Browning a sample of my ornate and persuasive style," Tully answered with a forced laugh, but the music was too loud to permit a conversation at such long range, and Mrs. Flambert did not attempt to continue it.

After the awkward pause Tully and Dell seemed unable to renew their dialogue, and Mrs. Flambert suggested a visit to the conservatory to Mrs. King who very unwillingly abandoned the field to her rival. Bee very unwisely made a movement as if to follow them and Dell took alarm.

"Bee, take Mr. Tully out to the conservatory, I must pay my good-night visit to Jack if you will excuse me for a few minutes, Mr. Tully."

Jack was not asleep, but too angry to forgive Dell for having preferred Mr. Tully's society to his. "Jack, you are real cross," she whispered coaxingly, as she clasped his face between her hands, "and I am going to kiss you good night and leave you."

He still refused to speak, but after she had gone he turned his face to the wall and cried himself to sleep. A little before ten Kate McKinley and Teddy Grigsby called for Bee and at once became the butt of Mrs. Flambert's rather inconsiderate wit.

"Come over here, Teddy, and sit down by me."

"Really, Mrs. Flambert, I am afraid of you," answered the blushing Teddy as he pushed his spectacles closer to his eyes, "you ask such very direct questions. Shall I go over to her, Kitty; do you think it would be safe?" he inquired, turning his kindly face towards Miss McKinley with that faltering and uncertain look one may notice in the countenance of a blind man when trying to find his way.

"Of course, Teddy," laughed Kitty with exceeding pleasure in her face that she should be asked, "if she asks you any leading questions don't answer."

"Now, Teddy," began Mrs. Flambert when she had got her victim in the seat beside her, "what is this I hear about you and Kitty?"

"I—I—I recall—you had better ask Kitty herself."

"Come here, Catherine," cried Mrs. Flambert authoritatively, "are you and Teddy really engaged?"

"No," answered the matter-of-fact Miss McKinley, "we are not."

"Why, Kitty," interrupted Teddy, "I thought we were."

"Well, I should like to know what made you think so, Mr. Grigsby," answered Kate, sharply,

"Well, really, I—of course I am wrong. It was presumption in me to think so; I ought to have said that I hoped so."

Mrs. King and Bee were at the piano, where Dell was preparing to play an accompaniment for Mr. Tully, so the indefatigable match-maker seeing they were unobserved, placed one of her arms affectionately around Kitty McKinley's waist and the other she passed through the long and awkward arm of Mr. Grigsby. As she drew them together she whispered, "Kitty, why don't you have pity on Teddy? The great big goose will never have courage enough to ask you any more directly than he has already. Let me be the witness of your engagement."

There was a little pause just long enough to make Kitty feel that she had not betrayed too much eagerness when she answered, "Well, if Teddy wants it to be so."

"Want it, Kitty," stammered Teddy, "you know I want you, Kitty, I have been trying to say so for a month and I thought I had made myself clear —"

"Well, you have now any way, Teddy, and I want you to do something for me, both of you, mind, I must have your united help."

"What is it," demanded straightforward Kitty.

"I want you to help Tully to make his peace with Dell."

"I am sure I shall help you with the greatest pleasure," whispered Kitty, but Teddy with a sudden jerk which straightened up his tall form seemed inclined to object.

"I can count on you too, can't I, Teddy?" inquired Mrs. Flambert.

"It isn't any of my business you know, Mrs. Flambert, I should be awfully obliged if you wouldn't ask me, and at best I should be sure to do more harm than good."

"You would, indeed," answered Mrs. Flambert, "if I left you to do your own planning. All I want is for Kitty to do as I tell her, and for you to do as Kitty says. My heart is set on making this match, and I don't care what anyone thinks, Tully only needs half a chance and he will be a good man. Now don't throw back your head, Teddy, like that, an old married woman like me knows more about these things than a clumsy, near-sighted, overgrown boy like you. You hear things without seeing them, and suspect Tully of being much worse than he really is."

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, Mrs. Flambert, I like Steve Tully. For many years we have been intimate friends, I haven't a word to say against him, only I really can't dip into anybody else's business without feeling that I ought to be kicked."

"But you won't have to 'dip,' Teddy, I shall do the 'dipping,' but you must act under Kitty's instructions."

"Of course, of course," exclaimed Teddy, pushing his spectacles up close to his eyes that he might better find his way around the chair to where Kitty stood, "I shall do anything that Kitty says."

"Kitty," said Mrs. Flambert tenderly, her bright eyes filling with tears, "you have found a treasure in Teddy. There are few like him; few, very few men who hate to interfere in other people's business. If you aren't good to him you will deserve to be miserable all the rest of your life."

Teddy had found Kitty's hand resting on the back of the chair, and as he held it tightly in his own, he answered: "I am not afraid of her, but of myself; I am so clumsy and stupid! Do you think I can make you happy, Kitty?"

"Yes, Teddy."

"How like a pair of babies you talk! Come home at once; you are too young to be out after dark," cried Mrs. Flambert, with a desperate but ineffectual attempt to get them out of the room long enough for Tully to have another word with Dell.

"May I come to-morrow night?" Tully implored, as he was about to take his leave. "I have something I must tell you. I could not to-night, for we were not alone."

"You may come if you wish," answered Dell, as she caught Bee's arm and detained her long enough to prevent Tully from saying more; "and Bee," she whispered, "you must come to-morrow night. *He* is coming again." Bee nodded and was gone, leaving Dell alone with Mrs. King.

"You made a very pretty exhibition of yourself, Dell," began the widow, fiercely. "I never before saw anyone throw herself at a man's head quite so distinctly as you did to-night."

"I am becoming like you, Madge, and begin to think I have no time to lose. Good-night!"

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE NATURE OF A CRISIS.

Once at least in his history there comes to every man an affliction, a disaster, a great love or a great hate, which turns the whole tide of his life. The condition he is in, the surroundings he has, the means of escape, relief or peace which first offer to him are more pregnant with greatness of result than the direct physical or mental effect of the crucial trial itself. We are often told about affliction purifying the heart, but after all it is nothing but a bewilderment which makes us look for a new path, any path which happens to offer. Of course it depends partly on the person, but no one at such a time, no matter how strong, pauses to hew an avenue of escape through rocks or over high mountains or through the tangled forest. The strong nature may refuse the first thing that offers, or on trying the first path may return to its misery rather than pursue it, but bearing in mind these conditions, one can understand that portion of the fatalist's creed which declares that one's life is mapped out by the gods at our birth, and struggle as we may, we cannot escape from their decrees. The strongest evidence opposed to this idea is supposed to be furnished by the sudden changes in men's lives when to the onlooker their course seems to have been suddenly diverted and made to run in an almost opposite direction. To those who do not understand the motives which impelled the first half of such a life or the circumstances which change it, the fact of so great a change being made excites admiration for the strength of character which could accomplish it, and makes one believe that fate is entirely in one's own hands.

The impulses which caused Dell Browning's change of conduct

were partially known to Tully, but even that which he saw he misinterpreted, though its effect upon him was not perhaps reduced thereby. He thought she loved him, and vaguely imagined that his attentions to Mrs. Kling had perhaps had the effect of convincing her that she cared for him. He supposed that until she imagined she was about to lose him she had not known her own heart; that she had betrayed the weakness of womankind in loving most that which seems least accessible, yet this did not make her less lovely in his eyes. Some men have a wonderful affinity with bad women. In the hands of women who are not good nor altogether wicked, and as to the control of men are strong, weak men are taught occasionally to approach greatness. Again women are not really lovable to certain men until they betray femininity, Stephen Tully, by what seemed a sudden revelation of Dell's liking for him and a womanly weakness which could forgive what she could not excuse in him, and a tenderness which at the moment of decision pleaded and won his case, was lifted from the depths of despair to a sight of the heaven he thought he had lost. In the old days when he exulted in his strength, it would have brought a smile of self-conceit and heartless satisfaction, but now love had been denied him so long, he had suffered so much, he had abandoned the cynical path where his self-love could not be injured, and he had partially separated himself from his old companions because their raillery was so bitter, and he had been in such a maze of perplexity, that the brightness of her smile was heaven to him it seemed so great in comparison with her past treatment of him that, at once, like a storm-tossed ship, he felt with gratitude that he was riding in smooth water, though the thought that his happiness and security were but momentary brought a crowning bitterness. If what Killick told him were true, his carelessness had been the cause of the loss of a considerable portion of Dell's fortune. He did not think so meanly of her as to imagine that the loss of a few thousands of dollars could estrange them, but he feared that his dereliction of duty would frighten her. He knew, too, that Killick was at the bottom of the fraud, and that he had not yet revealed the strongest and most strangling meshes he had woven.

As Tully walked rapidly away from 25 Mowburn Street, the first joy of his reconciliation with Dell slipped rapidly away from him, and he began to feel Killick's coarse fingers encircling his throat. And Cora! He could not but think of her. Would Dell's love for him be strong enough to forgive his misadventures with his handsome bookkeeper? How much would Cora dare attempt in order to separate them?

He was in the breakers again; the brightness was behind him, everything beyond him gloom.

Yet, what had he to fear? Had not Dell at last relented, and did not her apparent forgiveness include everything? Truly, the loss of her money, which was the only one of his recent sins unknown or unsuspected by her, would not appear so heinous as many others which had not proven unpardonable.

He had resolved to tell her what Killick had said; to ask her forgiveness. He had already made two ineffectual attempts, but she had skilfully turned the subject. In spite of everything he began to be hopeful again, and strength came to him in the shape of a resolution to discover just how far Killick had ensnared him and what Dell's losses would be. This determination involved something within the line of his experience. Professionally he knew himself to be clever; as a worker, when he liked, he was indefatigable, and now that he had set himself a task he undertook it with alacrity, and determined that the morning of the morrow would see him bearding the lion in his den, demanding from Killick what proofs he had, denouncing him as a conspirator and daring him to go an inch further.

In the morning Tully hardly felt so brave, but he had love's eagerness in his heart and could not bear to defer the conflict which was to decide where he stood in the firm of Killick & Tully and in his love-making with Dell.

Killick came down late. The brandy he drank the night before in his private room, when Cora had obtained possession of the Moore will, together with the excitement, had made him oversleep himself, and when at half-past ten he reached the office he was not in the sweetest of humors. Though he had walked most of the way, when in the car completing his journey he was alone and had opportunity for reflection and self-examination. He knew he had made an utter ass of himself, and yet it made no difference; he had calculated to act just as he did. Killick was the sort of a man who was willing to make a fool of himself with avidity if he could find pleasure in that direction. That he had almost been free from folly was simply because he had been able to see no pleasure in it. There are plenty of men who live and die staid and virtuous, because they have never been able to find amusement in forbidden paths, fear and inexperience having made their initiatory attempts anything but delightful. Custom and social and religious surroundings seemed so much preferable after some escapade in a strange city that they had returned to the fold wiser from their little coltish pranks in forbidden fields, but perchance if some experienced tempter, a man of the world and

intimate friend of vice, had led these men by the hand to the allurements where danger and detection need not have been feared, and hilarity and reckless disregard for the morrow had prevailed, they had been forevermore enamored of the ways of wickedness.

Killick's experiences of this sort had begun when wealth had been accumulated, and were not of such a flattering description that he dared either trust himself or those with whom he might mingle in a career of folly, yet he had formed a taste for a life which he had not hitherto enjoyed, and his idea was that with the beautiful Cora, he could spend the rest of his days in delightful dallings and visions of loveliness and travels in which he would be the envied but watchful husband. He was wretched, embittered, and anything that offered him a change, a pleasure, was temptation enough. He was thoroughly convinced that he was making a fool of himself, and that if he did not make a fool of himself, Cora would make a fool of him; but he had set apart a portion of his life for that sort of thing and calculated that he was now ready to enter in upon it.

Twinges of neuralgia and a disordered digestion made him sulky. A recollection that he had some old scores to settle before he flitted to Europe with his fair mistress, made his crackling lips settle themselves into a fierce and curveless line. He must get rid of Tully and complete the financial ruin of the daughter of his old enemy. Col. Moore, too, must be dispossessed and humiliated before he could feel that the firm of Moore & Killick—though it had not existed for thirty years—had been properly dissolved. The thought that all his revenges had been so astutely prepared and that his enemies were within his hand, made him smack his lips, a disgusting sight, for their fevered surfaces adhered to one another, and he seemed to tear them apart with a crackling noise. What a revolting spectacle he was, as he sat alone in the downtown car, his hands clasped over the head of his umbrella, his meaty eyes dulled as his soul looked in upon himself with thoughts which deepened the lines of villainy about his eyes, and nose, and mouth.

"I will attend to Tully first! I shall give him his walking ticket this morning," he thought, "and before my notice expires I shall have him tangled so fast that he cannot resist. Next week I will pull the props from under that loan society and see it come down and crush that haughty old aristocrat, Kingsville. Yes, and bring down some of Digby Browning's wealth, too, and Col. Moore will have to walk the plank the week after! I shall start the suit against him just before I sail. Yes, my fine fellows, you can call me

warty Killick,' but I shall make you all sorry! Yes, you will all curse the day I was born, and with Cora I will be having a delightful excursion in the land of eternal summer."

Killick looked up and observed the conductor of the car watching him through the window. He frowned; the conductor grinned. "I will complain of that rascal," he muttered, "as soon as I get the street car offices." Then his thoughts turned in upon himself again. "Pshaw! Cora is all right. She is like all women—Money—money will catch her. Yes, and she likes me well enough to kiss me. As far as a woman is concerned a man is a man and if she is handsome and ambitious, any kind of a man if he has money will answer, and if I can win her I'll have a power over her that she doesn't imagine. No, my dainty Cora, you won't be an old man's darling altogether, I will mix a little of the young man's slave with it so that you will respect me and be careful of yourself."

When Killick entered his office Tully was sitting at Cora's desk opening the letters.

"Where is Miss Burnham this morning?" inquired Killick gruffly.

"I don't know," answered Tully, with corresponding impoliteness. "She is evidently not here."

"Dooley," demanded Killick sharply, "go down to Miss Burnham's and see why she is not at her desk this morning."

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Tully, holding a large sheet of blue letter paper towards Killick. "What is the matter with the loan company? You told me it was all right the other day when Stryde and I were consulting with you as to investing Miss Browning's money in it."

"Come into my room," snarled Killick; "you are old enough," he whispered, "not to discuss our private business before the clerks."

"Certainly," answered Tully quietly. "I want to have a little talk with you anyway, and now is as good a time as any."

"Yes," hissed Killick; "now is the proper time. I have made up my mind to settle accounts with you to-day, and our conversation has very opportunely led up to it."

When the door had snapped after them, and Killick had tossed his overcoat on a pile of books and placed his hat on the desk, he seated himself in his chair and began. "Now, Stephen Tully, state your grievances, and do it d—d quick, for I am going to begin mine."

Tully's left hand was shoved deep into his trousers pocket, while in his right hand he held the handful of letters, the blue sheet, a fluttering reflex of the agitation which consumed him. "I see by this letter, which corroborates the villainy of the state-

ment you made the other day regarding the title of the Moore estate, that you have been leading me to invest my client's money in worthless securities. I want to know right now exactly what this means. It seems not only a conspiracy against me, but against Miss Browning. You claim to have me in your power. You can do with me as you please, but this whole matter must come to a head now. I am tired of concealment and of being the partner of an infernal scoundrel. I am bad enough myself, but the devil himself wouldn't accept the blame of half of your villainies."

Killick slipped down in his chair to his customary attitude, his fingers in a pyramid over his vest, and his eyes turned up to the ceiling.

"I am glad," said he, "you have opened the conversation with such elegant directness. What you have said will assist me to say that I am sick of being in partnership with a scatter-brain fool and drunken imbecile, whose next office will probably be in the Kingston penitentiary. If you get yourself out of here quietly you can be gone to-morrow, and go to the devil for all I care. If you make a kick, I will make one which will be considerably stronger. As far as Miss Browning is concerned, I am free to inform you that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see her earning an honest living by scrubbing down the stairs and cleaning the door-steps of the poor-house. I hate her as I hated her father before her, and her mother before her. The Moore title isn't worth a continental. The property was left by will to the second son, but not to his heirs, and as it was registered before the new Act came in force, it reverts to the heirs of the eldest son. Those heirs I intend to put in possession at once. The Trust & Loan Co. is bankrupt, or will be, as soon as my claims are satisfied, and as far as the outside public is concerned, I will inform them that you were aware of the defect in the Moore title and of the rottenness of the Trust & Loan, before you invested Miss Browning's funds, and that you accepted large commissions for betraying your trust."

Tully with a hissing curse threw the letters into a corner of the room, and seizing Killick by the throat shook him as a ferrier would shake a rat. "You white-livered scoundrel, if you do as you say, you won't live another hour," but in his fierce rage Tully bethought himself of the sweet face of the woman he loved, and with a savage push he threw the old man into his chair and stood towering before him.

"Killick, I ought to kill you, but I won't. Go on and do your worst. If you pull me down you will come down with me. I refuse to dissolve partnership with you until these things are

straightened. I will take other means at once if you refuse, and the benchers shall decide between us." He swung around, opened the door, and stood face to face with Miss Cora Burnham, who was looking exceedingly pretty in a sealskin sacque and handsome bonnet.

"Good morning, Mr. Tully," she exclaimed with unusual sweetness. "Good morning, Mr. Killick; I am glad to meet you together, as I came in this morning to resign my position, and to ask to be relieved from my duties at once."

Killick's collar had been torn by Tully's fierce fingers, and his necktie so badly disarranged that it had lodged under his ears. He was making a desperate effort to adjust it when Cora Burnham's unexpected resignation brought him to his feet.

"What is that you say," he demanded, "want to leave?"

"Yes, I would like to leave this morning. My mother and I have determined to sell out our business and leave the city."

Killick's face turned an ashy hue, and his dull eyes had in them a look of hateful threatening, but with a voice as sweet as honey he begged Cora to sit down and give him a few words in private after Mr. Tully had gone.

"I am in a very great hurry, Mr. Killick, I shall see you later," she answered nervously, at the same time keeping by Tully's side. "Nothing could persuade me to remain another hour, so any discussion of the matter would be useless."

"It wouldn't be useless, Miss Burnham, it is a matter of the very greatest importance to you, as well as to me, that you should hear what I have to say.

"I will remain if Mr. Tully stays, if not I must go."

Killick lost his self-possession and grasped at the girl's wrist as if to detain her by force, but Tully took him by the coat collar and led him to his chair. "I won't let you bully her. If you lay a hand on her I will shake the life out of you. Miss Burnham, come to your desk, and I will pay you your salary. You are well out of this old reprobate's clutches." Then holding the door open for her to pass out, with a defiant look at the shaken and disordered figure in the chair, he followed.

CHAPTER XXIII

ALMOST PERSUADED.

In the few days that followed Tully was almost heart-broken. The impossibility of finding out the truth of what Killick had said left him wandering in the dark and magnified his fears. Killick, too, was continually in a vicious temper, and never seemed so thoroughly villainous before. He was buried in his office all day, accessible to no one, and when he came out was flushed, and walked as if thoroughly exhausted. These signs rather encouraged Tully to believe that his partner was treading on dangerous ground and felt that a volcano was likely to burst forth beneath his feet; but he thought in vain for the immediate reason of his partner's agitated ugliness.

After making many ineffectual efforts to become possessed of the facts, and fearful lest the delay might bring the denouement before he had made his confession to Dell Browning, he resolved to state the case to her as far as he knew it and thus protect himself from later developments, but with this determination to tell her all, again came the sickening fear that she would despise him for his weakness and neglect, but Stephen Tully had at last achieved a victory over himself and his fondness for delay; he was in fighting humor, and determined to face his mistakes and misfortunes, whatever they might be, consoling himself with the thought of Dell's love and his faith that it would not falter. He had written her a note partially explaining his difficult position and confessing much of his personal guilt in the matter, but he could not send it; he must appeal to her personally; he could not trust his case to a few cold lines which might be fatal to his future.

When he called in the evening the maid ushered him into the reception room, and convinced by the silver dollar he left in her hand that his mission was important, hurried upstairs and told Miss Browning that Mr. Tully wished to see her, "particular and alone."

Dell was not lacking in courage and the spirit of adventure, but the prospect of this interview frightened her.

"Wait a moment, Sarah," said she, nervously. "I want this note sent over to Miss Bee McKinley at once. Send James over with it."

"James is h'out, mum!" answered Sarah. "Drivin' the missus, mum!"

"Then take it yourself, and tell cook to answer the door if anyone rings."

"Cook is h'out too, mum!"

"Take the note anyway. I'll answer the bell myself if anyone comes. Hurry!"

"Yes, mum, I'll fly, I will indeed, mum!" cried Sarah, assuringly, but the memory of Tully's dollar and a chat with a friend on the street made her absence much longer than Dell expected.

She lingered in her room as long as she dared, putting a few finishing touches to her toilet, and never did mirror reflect a fairer face or prettier dress than did hers. She wore a soft clinging silk, dark in color, and semi-transparent in texture, which revealed her white throat and shapely arms and graceful figure, while retaining to her the half nun-like look which made her seem so inaccessible to Stephen Tully, when at last she stood before him and extended a white, slender hand which gave no response to his eager pressure.

"I have one preliminary request to make to-night, Miss Browning," said Tully gravely, as he stood beside her chair in the bright drawing room. "That you will listen to something about myself without thinking me either a fool or an egotist for insisting on telling it. What I came to say concerns you so vitally that I dare not tell you at once. Will you be patient while I make some excuses."

"Certainly," laughed Dell, anxious to make the explanatory portion of the interview last until *Boo* arrived. "Go into them as fully as you like; I know they will be lengthy if you intend to cover all your misdemeanors, but I hope you won't treat me as a father confessor, and tell me what I shouldn't hear."

"You needn't fear, Miss Browning," answered Tully, drawing a chair near her, "I shall take no advantage of your indulgence. You and I have been separated by my indirectness—no, that is not the word—my folly, my wrongdoing, my vain and stupid endeavor to conceal my real self from you, I—I don't know how to phrase it, and hardly dare speak of it as a separation lest you may rebel and say we were never in such a relation that 'separation' becomes a justifiable term or one at all applicable to the case in point, but I must trust to your promise to hear me until you understand. I believe, Miss Browning, you would have been kinder to me if you had known the troubles and temptations through which I was passing, but I cannot complain for I didn't understand myself. Now, when I am face to face with ruin, I begin to comprehend the amazing folly of my life and wonder that I have a friend or dare hope for forgiveness. At any rate the end has come, and what I am forced to tell you to-night, if you are good enough to listen,

while it may drive me from you forever, will be at least some defence against the evil you will think and have thought of me, and I shall feel happier that I have been able to tell you how much more of a fool than a villain I am."

"Really, Mr. Tully, do you think this necessary or advantageous? Let me play an accompaniment while you sing some of your penitential hymns. I think it would answer the purpose equally well and save time and—and unpleasant reminiscences." Dell was thoroughly frightened by Tully's despondent seriousness and determined to escape the ordeal if possible, but when she left her chair to go to the piano Tully stopped her.

"Miss Browning, for Heaven's sake do not sneer. I was never more serious—desparingly serious—in my life, and I implore you to be seated and listen."

"If you insist, Mr. Tully, I must yield, but I really can't see why I should be chosen to hear your confession. It seems painful for you to speak, and I should much prefer not to listen. Why not let everything alone and bury your past if you are not proud of it?"

"My past—at least that portion of it which concerns you—is like Banquo's ghost, it will not down. I would to God, Miss Browning, I could bury my past and begin anew. Please sit down and hear me, and then you will understand."

Dell sank wearily into a deep, easy chair and bade him begin.

As he again drew his chair nearer to her, she could see a burning flush on his cheeks, but his lips were tightly closed, and in his eyes there gleamed the light of a resolve she had never seen there before. His refusal to be restrained, and the spirit of the man, as it flashed down on her, brought back the old feeling of liking, and she recalled with a little inaudible sob the days when, in spite of many rebuffs, he had persisted in being so kind and attentive to her.

"You expect to be bored. You won't be; much of what I have to tell interests you, and if I leave it until the last, it will be to retain you as an unprejudiced judge and—" after a painful pause he continued, "because I am ashamed—frightened to begin where I should. Oh, Miss Browning, believe me, I am miserable—utterly wretched and humiliated; and at this moment, if I were not at last sustained by an unalterable determination to do what is right, no matter what happens, I would burst into tears while I sit here and watch the sweet good face which, had I not behaved like a fool and a villain, might not now look so coldly on my misery! Try just a little bit to help me through the confusion and bitterness of what I must say! Give me a look, now and then, of encouragement—pity, even, that I may finish without breaking down!"

Tully leaned over the broad, pillowed arm of Dell's chair as he spoke, his voice trembling, and all the force of his stalwart manhood engaged in the supreme effort of enlisting her sympathy.

"Go on," she said, with a gentle uplifting of her glorious eyes, "and may you never have a harsher judge than I."

"Thank you, thank you, a thousand times thank you for that one ray of your old self which shone from your eyes just now. I can begin and see my way through by the light of that one kindly glance. My first trouble as you so often told me in the old days, was the absence of some fixed principle of right and wrong."

"I used to tell you that, but yet I hoped that after all you had some standard, undefined perhaps, but something by which you measured your life and tried to keep yourself right. Had you really nothing?" enquired Dell with awakening interest.

"Yes and no," answered Tully slowly, "I had a general impulse to give as much pleasure and as little pain as possible, and many, many times I have congratulated myself, and criticized others who had a more arbitrary rule, that I was doing more to make the world happy than they were. I don't believe I was ever intentionally cruel or malicious, even my follies and vices were tempered by a sort of determination to leave no one less happy than I found them. Right now when I feel my life to be a miserable and worthless thing, I can look back without finding either man or woman who has been wrecked by me, or even started on the road to ruin—as far as I know or can judge—by any word or act of mine. But as to adhering to any absolute rule of right and wrong, I never did; I thought such rules made for weaklings, incapable of judging for themselves. As for me I imagined anything and everything proper which could be carried through without detection as to myself or evident injury to others. I never thought of consequences or how results must accumulate until I would be inextricably involved in intrigues and devious paths, from which I should be unable to find a road that I could travel with safety. Such a time has come to me at last. I can still argue that had everybody acted as I acted, I would, perhaps, be free from entanglements. But others who may plead as I do that no harm was intended beset and threatened me, and now I am forced to flight or a choice of the strait path, though it leads over mountains of trouble for myself and those who have been foolish enough to trust to me for guidance. I still contend that had everyone done to me as I did to them I would not be where I am—stay," cried Tully, his face flushing painfully, "I am wrong. There flashes on my mind the first cause of my worst trouble and it was a violation of my own

rule, a reckless disregard of where the course I chose might lead me. I can find little comfort in blaming others and as I try to excuse myself I can see that my one hope of escape was that others would do right though I did wrong. This hope was groundless, and bad as I am I fell into the hands of two ruthless scoundrels, Henn the broker and J. J. Killick, now my partner, then the broker's solicitor. This was while King was alive, and if ever a man went through purgatory I did. My first venture in wheat speculation was in the mad hope that I might suddenly make some money to pay up interest due on real estate, in which I was concerned. I never was a hard drinker, that is to say a drunkard, though in the whirl of making money in land, I began to drink far too much and once when too exhilarated to have good judgment, I went beyond my depth and got swamped. It was while trying to save myself that I borrowed a client's money to keep up my margin, then I went to Henn and tried wheat, using without permission King & Tully's check. Do not turn away from me, Miss Browning, believe, oh! for God's sake believe, that I dare tell you all this because I have repented and am determined to make everything right and henceforward prove myself a man! Speak to me as I prostrate myself before you in my shame! Do not cast me out unforgiven and heartbroken!"

Tully had never realized the shame, the crime of that hour until looking in the sweet face before him, he saw mirrored there the horror his narrative excited. Down on his knees beside the chair his face buried in his arms he implored her not to turn away from him and when at last her hand gently touched his head he raised his face, deeply seamed by the torture of humiliation and penitence, poor Dell could hardly restrain her tears.

"Please, Mr. Tully, don't feel so badly. I shall not chide you when your own conscience is so bitter an accuser."

"Dell," cried Tully staggering to his feet, his hands upon his throbbing forehead, "your kindness unmans me more than your censure could. I could grovel in the dust at your feet and still fear that you had not understood what it costs me to tell you this!"

"Compose yourself, Mr. Tully," said Dell soothingly, as she rose from her chair. "Some other night you may tell me the rest; your agitation affects me very much, I can stand no more!"

"Yes, you must, you must hear the rest; I can never nerve myself to begin again! Please do. Please, please, for my sake and your own, hear me out. I will be calmer, and when I have done I shall go—go forever, unless you send for me!"

Dell dropped back into her chair, and Tully, after a few hurried

turns up and down the room, recovered enough self-possession to begin again:

"By sacrificing every dollar I had in the world I was able to return our client's money without my folly, my sin, my crime being discovered by anyone except our bookkeeper, of whom you may have heard. Miss Cora Burnham suspected what I was doing, and in a pinch I had to take her into my confidence. But the firm's check had not been redeemed, my credit was gone, and I was about to ask John King for a loan with which to cover it, when Cora Burnham came unexpectedly to my rescue."

The sound of a woman's name mixed up with his confession turned Dell's sympathy into something akin to anger, and the eyes which had been soft with pitiful tears grew cold and distrustful.

"Spare me, Mr. Tully, any description of your love affairs," said she with sudden *hauteur*. "It would be an unwarrantable confidence and one exceedingly unpleasant for me to share."

"It was no love affair, Miss Browning, I assure you. Miss Burnham had received favors from me, and she and her mother advanced me money enough to free me from my shameful predicament. In the first burst of gratitude, I offered her my hand and she accepted it. This new folly upset me worse than the one from which I had just escaped. Cora Burnham and her mother had long been trying to marry me—not for love, but for ambition. They were anxious to get into an assured social position, and simply chose me as the means of achieving it. I could endure the daughter, for she is an honest woman and above reproach; but the artful, scheming old mother was unutterably repugnant to me. I delayed the marriage, repaid the money, sought by every means in my power to escape the hateful alliance into which I had rushed, but without avail. Cora was determined I should fulfill my contract, and every time I went near the mother I had to endure her reproaches and upbraidings. I did not dare to abruptly break off the engagement for fear of exposure, and my life was made miserable by the nagging of those two women. Then Killick, immediately after King's death, forced me into a partnership with him, under threats of having my gown taken from me for using a client's money in speculation. He had surrounded me with every conceivable danger, and to gain time I plunged deeper into the toils. Cora Burnham, the day I sang at the Gospel rally in the Pavilion, taunted me with my past, and told me if I did not fulfill my promise she would publish me as an embezzler. I was wild with thoughts of my past and fearful lest I might lose you, but still hopeful until I looked

over the hundreds of faces and missed yours. Then I lost courage, and feeling that everything was gone plunged again into the dissipation I had intended to forsake. Can you understand my position or excuse my folly? I know you hate deceit, but candor is but a small virtue compared with my vices. Yet I have hoped that when you found yourself able to help a lost soul like mine you would be merciful. Have I hoped in vain? Can you offer me a spark of hope, give me a word to show that all is not yet lost?"

"Poor fellow," whispered Dell, sadly. "If you have sinned surely you have suffered. So far you have been weak, but no one has been wronged, if, as you say, your—your book-keeper did not really love you! Your life is still ahead of you and can be made what you will!"

"God bless you for that, God bless you! Sinful as my life has been I have never yet told a woman I loved her. I have not desecrated the word or the sentiment, and if it would not seem like Satan professing godliness I would tell you how much I adore you and adore what I have done," cried Tully, stopping in his excited walk before Dell and holding out his hands in an outburst of gratitude. "When I have completed this task, if you do not thrust me from you, if you do not laugh at my penitence and scorn my vows of a better life, I shall try to prove that you, to-night, have saved a man's soul. Oh, Dell! Dell!" he sobbed, covering his face with his hands. "Never since my mother kissed me good night and touched my face with her soft hands as she tucked me in my crib, have I felt the power of a good woman's love. Never until my love for you awoke in me the good which was so nearly dead did I care if there was a heaven or fear lest there might be a hell. But," stammered he, as he pressed his handkerchief to his eyes, "I must finish; forgive my weakness, and do not suspect me of trying to win your pardon by shedding unmanly tears."

Dell was greatly moved. His fierce denunciation of himself, and despairing tears were intensified by the graceful dignity with which he bore himself. Stephen Tully in his passion of grief and repentance was still every inch a man; in him tears did not denote weakness or fear; they were but signs of desperation.

"Then when Killick came into the business," he began, seating himself again, "he at once laid himself out to tie me hand and foot. His creature, Dooley, and Cora Burnham made it an easy task, and in a month he had his hands on every scrap of my business, and knew the details of it as well if not better than I did. You can see how, in my reckless mood, despairing of ever being able to assert my independent manhood again and convinced that you were lost to me forever, I did not watch myself nor him as I should—"

The sound of footsteps in the porch and the faint ringing of the bell in the kitchen startled Dell. Relief had come at last! She sprang from the chair, explaining that the housemaid was out, and ran to open the door.

"Why were you so long, Bee?" whispered Dell.

"I just got your note and ran for my life," Bee replied, with a queer smile. "I hope he hasn't been hard to entertain. You don't look half glad that I came so soon. Oh, you deluded girl! I believe you are sorry I came at all; I can see it in your eyes."

"Hus-s-sh, Bee! If you had been five minutes later, I should have sent for Jack to come down stairs."

Bee only laughed and gave Dell another quizzical smile.

Tully was standing with his hands in his pockets, looking at a picture, when they entered the drawing-room; and when he saw who it was he took Bee's hand, and with a half frown told her she was a most unwelcome guest.

"Bee, I was trying to tell Miss Browning what I had suffered and what I will do if she says there is anything in me worth saving. You are her friend; persuade her that in the language of the old revival hymn:

"While the lamp holds out to burn
The vilest sinner may return."

Good-night, Miss Browning, good-night. I have trespassed so much on your time, I hardly dare ask if I may come back to-morrow evening and finish what I was telling you, but desperation makes one bold as well as miserable, and I beg of you not to refuse?"

"Not to-morrow night, Mr. Tully, I shall be out, but on Saturday evening if you desire," answered Dell kindly.

"It will only be an extra day of misery, but I can stand it. Perhaps afterwards I shall be glad that sentence was deferred. Good night, Bee; good night, Miss Browning."—and after he was alone with Dell in the hall—"tell me you do not despise me, that you can understand my temptations and will be merciful!"

"I will try," she answered, but her eyes said more, and Tully's heart leaped within him. Surely the evil days were passing and he would yet be happy.

Up in her dressing-room Dell sobbed in Bee's arms for half an hour.

"It is my first attempt at deceit, Bee; it shall be my last."

"Yes," answered Bee solemnly, "I think your next performance will be marrying him. I knew how it would end, and just as long as you live I'll be everlastingly telling you it turned out just as I expected."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONVENTIONALITIES.

Mrs. Flambert, in pursuance of her match-making project, called on Rev. Dr. Strong, her favorite clergyman, and insisted that he should visit Dell and indirectly urge Tully's suit.

"Doctor, you know Tully well enough to understand him and no one can do as much to quiet Dell Browning's scruples as you can. Poor Tully, he is nearly mad and going down hill for no other reason than his failure to get Dell to forgive his follies."

"But, my dear Mrs. Flambert, it is none of my business, and if you will pardon my bluntness—none of yours. Suppose now we succeeded in persuading her to marry Tully and he turned out badly, would we be able to forgive ourselves for the part we had in wrecking her life while trying to save his?"

"I am willing to take my share of the risk and yours, too. I'm sure of him! Poor boy, how generous he has always been! The poor in your parish and you yourself have reason to remember him! Beside I don't want you to say a word about Tully. Give her a lecture on something that will lead up to it and make the way easy for him. Tell her all men are wild and foolish sometimes, and those who are brave and sincere are the ones who get most blame because they are not hypocritical enough to try and conceal their conduct. I know you believe this, for I've heard you say so—yes, and preach so, too, only not so boldly as you talk when you are alone in your study. You ask me for charities, and I give you the money without a question because I think you know who needs help better than I do. When I'm sick I go to a doctor, because I think he knows better than I do what will cure me. When I'm feeling sinful and selfish, and want to be good I come to you because you know what I should do. Now in this matter I come to tell you what to do, because I as a woman—an experienced woman—know better than you do what is good for Stephen Tully and Dell Browning, but if you refuse I'll lose confidence in you and when you ask me for Mrs. Fay's next quarter's rent I'll say, 'No, Doctor Strong, it's none of my business, and pardon me, none of yours.' Now then!"

"Now, my dear Mrs. Flambert, if you will rest your excited conversational powers long enough for me to get in a word edge-ways, I'll say what I would have said five minutes ago. I have no objection to calling on Miss Browning and casually letting her

know that so called bad men often have the best hearts and with proper influences make the best churchmen and most desirable husbands. If you had not gone off into one of your fits of enthusiasm I would have volunteered everything you ask me to do! I would indeed!" laughed the doctor in his easy and indolent good nature. "I visit the sick and dying to give them counsel and comfort and I suppose it is within my province to offer advice to young people on marriage and baking bread and all that sort of thing."

"Doctor, you are a dear, good man, and if you will hand me your check book I'll give you Mrs. Fay's rent and twenty dollars for extras. But," exclaimed Mrs. Flambert, picking up the pen to sign her name, "put it strong! She's awfully conventional and thinks people ought to be sent to misery at once if they kick over the traces."

"I'll do my best, Mrs. Flambert, though I'd rather go and sit up all night with a smallpox patient than mix in your matrimonial schemes. But that you are such an incorrigible match-maker and the most persevering scold in the church I would refuse. By the way, has your husband found work for poor old Tomkins?"

"No, but he shall this very day if we have to take him ourselves. Now put on your hat and see Dell. On your way back you can drop in and see Flam. He was asking me why you had not been around for so long."

"Tell him if he hadn't sent me that case of wine I wouldn't have staid away—now I can have a decent glass at home."

The Rev. Dr. Strong, rector of St. Titus', was a large, stout man, lazy and big-hearted and steeped in the fumes of tobacco, but he was an omnivorous reader and one of the most lovely characters in the city; the friend of the poor, the victim of every itinerant fraud, and the confidential adviser of the erring. His influence was nevertheless all for good, and there were men as well as women in his parish who could not speak of him without tears, a choking of their voice, and a fervent "God bless him."

He asked for Miss Browning and when she stood before him, her hand in his, he began by telling her how she reminded him of her father. His kindly face was full of sympathy and somehow she wanted to cry.

"Ah! he was a good friend of mine, Miss Browning, and of the poor. By the way, if you can spare time will you go over and see poor old Mrs. Tomkins. They are frightfully poor, and the poor body told me she hadn't had a drop of tea for a week."

Then they drifted into a discussion of the difficulty of making

the rich appreciate their duty to the poor, and how many professing Christians were satisfied with a form of religion and never sought for the spirit of Christ's teaching.

"Yet these," said he, in his easy, indifferent way, "are the ones who demand most of others. For instance, I asked Mrs. Chandler the other day to look after a poor woman who was too sick to work, and she inquired how much my cigars cost me a year; and asked if I denied myself a glass of wine at dinner if it wouldn't keep a cot in the Children's Hospital. I told her probably it would, but she would have thought me impudent if I had asked her to sell her carriage and give it to the poor."

"How mean of her," exclaimed Dell, who knew that the doctor would at any time take the coat from his back and give it to a shivering beggar.

"Oh, not at all," answered the doctor, placidly. "I know I waste money in tobacco; we all waste it in something. My dear Miss Browning," said he, taking a sudden tack, "we would all be happier if we were satisfied with less for ourselves and demanded less from other people—not only in material things. You know we make ourselves miserable trying to observe the conventionalities ourselves, and—with singular perversity—in struggling to be uncharitable enough to hate those who are bold enough to defy the social laws which chafe us, and against which our souls are in perpetual rebellion. Without taking the pains to examine either ourselves or the customs which we insist upon other people observing, and which outwardly we ourselves observe, we go through life with the harness of useless duties rubbing into our flesh until we are as galled and sore as an abused cart-horse tugging his load of coal or refuse, with his collar sinking into the raw of his shoulders."

Dell was interested. She liked to hear the doctor talk, and took pains to lead him on. "What is the cause of it?" she asked.

"The evening of the nineteenth century seems to show the most complete reaction from the noon of chivalry, when the best men were proud of but little except physical courage and courtesy. The lower classes cared little for the latter, but were natural and—to a great extent—brutal. Nowadays men have learned to be courteously brutal to their equals—brutal without courtesy to the poor—and have eliminated courage from the requisites of their knighthood. This is the most appallingly cowardly age! So much so that I am beginning to esteem the prize-fighter and the rollicking dare-devil fellows who good-naturedly despise all conventionalities! Don't look so incredulous; what I say of

cowardice is true in every walk of life. Let me begin with my own cloth: Clergymen are afraid to smoke or take a glass of wine lest the church-going Mrs. Grundy may say it is a bad example or an extravagance, worse still, they dare not teach what they believe, and are too cowardly to deny what they are expected to affirm. Look at the creeds; they remain practically unchanged, and when the candidates for the ministry are being examined they have to accept the doctrines that even the most old-fashioned never preach, and which those in the pews do not believe and have not believed for many years, except in the comfortably vague sense that they hold to their church and, in a general way, to all its dogmas. Some of us parsons try to quiet our consciences by loud professions, others by cunning sophisms and evasions. When we preach on delicate topics and approach points which both clergy and laity profess and disbelieve with singular unanimity we switch off just before we reach the ticklish place, and the congregations give a sigh of relief; first, for their own sake, lest in a fanatical moment we may insist on something they are not prepared to openly reject, and yet would be very uncomfortable to have held up as essential; secondly, for our own sake, lest we dare speak out in meeting and deny a doctrine and get into trouble by so doing. In this way we have to do things which we know are shams, assume pious airs, for instance, just as heartless mourners cry at funerals, because people are looking and expecting certain things. These conventionalities are keeping honest men out of the pulpits and driving the sincere and thoughtful out of the churches."

"You couple yourself with those you criticize. Why don't you put your theory into practice, and act as you feel and believe?" asked Dell, with an unpleasant feeling that Dr. Strong was robbing her of some favorite illusions.

"Because I am too cowardly," he answered with a sigh; "because I am incapable of self-sacrifice; because the age in which we live teaches us that orthodoxy is infinitely preferable to martyrdom. If I lived up to my convictions—or down to them—the people would think me godless; if I preached as I think, I would be bounced by the bishop, would lose my living and my friends, even though the latter agreed with me; I would get my family into trouble, be miserable myself and accomplish nothing in trying to stem the torrent of organized humbug. I quiet my conscience by talking to prudent people as I am talking to you, and in this way am doing my share to prepare the world for the revolt which cannot be much longer delayed. If I were brilliant enough to amuse people and be a leader, I might dare; but I

am only praised as a preacher because I am not always too lazy to prepare my sermons nor too imprudent to keep my parishioners from their dinner."

"Doctor, you shock me by your cynicism and lack of—of—"

"Courage—go on and say it. I admit it, and should not be too thin skinned to hear it said. But examine yourself and your actions and see if you are not almost as bad. I accept the conventionalities of a religious organization, you accept those of society—those to which you hold are without even the traditions which make it really an awful thing for one of us to break away from a doctrine. Many of the most unjust things we uphold are forced upon us by the laity—at least you force us to retain them. Even if I proved you wrong you would not dare to rebel. With you the fops and dudes, the noodles and nobodies, the butter-fies and scandal-mongers are the first to be pleased, or the sham called "society" is wrecked. For instance, if a woman is detected in a social sin, she is consigned to outer darkness, and as far as this world can make it so, everlasting punishment is inflicted on her. We preach the doctrine of eternal punishment for the same result—fear. It is a good thing for weak people. You dare not reach down and try to lift a branded woman out of her misery. I dare not reach out the arms of my human pity and express a belief that a man dying in his sins can ever escape hell. Why? Because we are afraid of getting our hands burned, and so, while you persist in trying to keep society good by making frightful examples of those who sin, we continue to misrepresent God as one who inflicts infinitely more barbarous punishments. What is the result? Both of us drive people into the hell we have prepared for them. Ostracism is the remedy provided for sinners alike by fashionable churches and fashionable society. Our sinner is told of a hell he can't believe in, or from which he feels he can't escape; your place of torment is filled in the same way. We both inflict all these horrors without reducing the number of evil doers or cleansing by the fire of fear the minds of evil-thinkers."

"Doctor," asked Dell, appalled by the picture he had drawn, "what then if we were without these conventionalities?"

"The new order of things would bring new restraints—nobler and purer ones, I hope. The maiden is pure because she loves purity and her pure home. The wife is now true to her husband because she loves him, not because she is afraid of exposure and ruin; take away the penalties and the true woman will be true still; leave the penalties and the false wife will be false still. The Christian is a Christian because he loves God and His Blessed Son, and tries to act as much like Christ as he can; I don't

believe there will be a single soul in heaven that took refuge in Christianity to escape brimstone. When love is the law there will be no unjust punishment for sinners here or talk of eternal punishment for them hereafter, and there will be no solemn warnings needed except the sight of those who are suffering the unavoidable consequences of wrong doing. There will always be a hell for the vicious but, my dear, we need have no hand in lighting the fires, nor should we try to preach that God is preparing them."

"What—what then is our duty, Doctor?" faltered Dell.

"To save every perishing soul within reach; if that soul calls out to you bend down and touch it with your pure hand and show it the way to salvation; don't pass it by on the other side as people generally do in traveling the Jericho road of to-day."

"But might we not imperil our own soul in seeking to reclaim another?" she asked with a half-guilty feeling that she was thinking of Tully.

"If our motive is right there is little or no danger. You at least should not fear. Your face is the mirror of a pure heart," answered the clergyman tenderly, as he rose to go. "If you do God's will, He will take care of you and give you strength to endure to the end."

"Did I do wrong?" Doctor Strong asked of himself as he walked homeward, "was I preaching evil that good might come? Why should I try to wed that sweet, innocent girl to a man like Stephen Tully? Yet she would save him! But at what cost? I must watch him and if I have been wrong—and why do I feel ashamed if I have not been— I will yet try and guide her right."

As he went on his way, there went up from his heart to the infinite heart of God, a fervent prayer for guidance, and who shall say it was not heard?

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

When Killick was left alone in his room after receiving Cora Burnham's notice of departure, he sat shaking his fist in useless fury at the door and muttering curses which had she heard them would have frightened the fair object of his wrath.

"Yes, curse her and him; a few soft words have won her back to be Tully's fool. Why did she pretend attachment for me? Did I tell her anything?" he thought to himself in quick alarm—

"nothing but that Moore business. I wonder if those papers are all right."

Hurriedly trying to unlock the vault door which led into the room he was surprised to find it already unfastened (Ralph Moore had allipped the bolt from the inside). He hurriedly examined the lock which was uninjured, and then ran to the safe in which his precious papers were stored. He tried the door. "Ah," he muttered to himself, "this is locked at any rate. I wasn't quite crazy last night though I must have been very near it to have left that outer door open." He knelt, still trembling, and tried the combination, but the ponderous door did not answer to his touch.

Again he tried it, with even greater exactness, still the door refused to move.

"Great Heaven, what is the matter with the door?" he gasped.

Perspiration stood in great beads on his face. "I can't be wrong about that combination! I wouldn't be likely to forget it after using it a hundred times."

Still again he tried it, and the failure made him attempt other arrangements of the numbers, his throbbing brain eager to believe that in a moment of excitement he had started it wrong. Still there was no yielding of the door. Then he hunted in his cabinet where he had hidden the hastily scrawled memorandum of the combination in a cipher which was as familiar to him as his A B C's. He seated himself on the floor before the safe, mopping away the perspiration which was now trickling in streams over his purplish and warty face. Carefully beginning with the three times around to thirty, he followed the written directions and turned the knob forward and back and pulled. No use. His one hand dropped on the carpet beside him. He felt dizzy, unbuttoned his collar and staggering to his feet took a glass of brandy. Standing there with the empty glass on the table before him, gazing at the vault, his brows knitted, his teeth clinched, his lips twitching spasmodically, he was a picture of satanic rage and fear.

Refusing still to believe that anything could have gone wrong with the combination, he tried it again and again, between each attempt squatting on the floor like a fierce beast in a cage. Then he tried to think what he should do. He dare not send for the makers of the safe, it would disclose the existence of the room and his occupancy of it, and for many reasons he did not desire to have that made public at the present crisis, with Theodore Kahn under arrest and a revival of the old suspicions against him likely to be aroused by the coming trial. He decided at last, and rising from the floor with many fierce oaths, he ar-

ranged his disordered apparel and, putting on his overcoat and hat, went out. A few minutes later he was closeted with the maker of the safe, smoothly telling him that a client had been accused of attempting to rob his own safe in order to account for a failure to settle with his creditors and to successfully defend him, he desired to be instructed in methods which would be employed by a skilled cracksmen, also to be shown how an amateur would likely go to work. When he left the foundry he thoroughly understood the *modus operandi* of safe blowing, and had several cartridges in his pocket together with a full set of tools. The rest of the day he spent in drilling, and that night had there been anyone in the outer office, an explosion could have been heard. The ruined combination yielded easily and in another moment he had the empty box, which had held the Moore papers, in his hand. Then it dropped to the floor, to be crushed a moment afterwards by his heavy form as he fell in a fit.

The first rays of the winter morning were streaming through the window when he recovered consciousness. Chilled and stiff he could barely rise to a sitting position, and then was unable to understand his surroundings. The open door of the safe, the broken wood of the box, seemed like something seen in a dream, but with his slowly returning mental powers came a realization of his loss, a comprehension of the trap into which he had been led, and the fear that other documents might be missing urged him to a desperate effort. At last he succeeded in struggling to his feet; but the room swam about him, it grew dark, and only by clinging to the safe was he able to save himself from falling.

Again his brain seemed to regain its power when in the bright sunlight. The cut glass brandy decanter suggested something which would perhaps enable him to recover himself, but as he tried to move, that awful and sickening dizziness came back. He slowly reached out with one hand and could touch the table, and when the swirling blood again seemed to recede from his brain he pulled himself over and again stood in sick dizziness waiting until he dare venture another movement. At last he had the brandy in his hand; he could scarcely swallow, but the stimulants revived him, and though he lurched forward like a drunk man he was able to close the safe door, put the brandy back in the cabinet, hide the tools with which he had been working and then staggering out to his private office, locked the door behind him telephoned for a carriage and was driven home, fearful to remain any longer lest the dizziness against which he fought should overpower him.

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While Killick had been trying to open his safe, Ralph Moore had been closeted with Lawyer Chandler, who, after examining the papers taken from Killick's safe, declared there would be no trouble in obtaining possession of the property.

The old gambler insisted that proceedings should be begun at once.

"I am getting to be an old man," said he, "and I have been poor long enough, while my rascally relations have enjoyed what should have been mine."

"Don't you think it would be wiser to for send your nephew and try and arrange a compromise? If you allowed him a small amount I have no doubt he would rather accept it than take the chances of a lawsuit."

"Not a cent. I want it all, and I want it quick. If you don't take right hold of it and rattle it along, I'll go to someone who will."

"Now take my advice, Mr. Moore, and don't be too rash. Get the proofs of your birth. If possible hunt up someone who can identify you so that we will have such a strong case that the Colonel will yield at once. You tell me he knows of the existence of this will. If so, we can threaten him with prosecution for fraud in mortgaging property which he knew did not belong to him. You can do all I suggest to-day, and we shall begin to-morrow. If you need any financial assistance in the meantime, I will be able to advance you enough to keep you going."

"Well, you might give me a couple of hundred right now," said Moore eagerly. "I confess I am pretty short."

Chandler gave him a check, and as Moore put it in his pocket he repeated the question which had been about the first one he had asked: "You are certain Killick won't proceed against me for robbing his safe?"

"Yes, I am positive of it. He can't honestly account for the possession of that will. He was no doubt a partner in the fraud perpetrated on Miss Browning, and will keep quiet. You need have no fear of him."

"At any rate," suggested Moore, "my daughter can swear that he gave it to her, if it is ever necessary, can't she?"

"Of course, of course," answered Chandler, "there are a dozen ways of getting out of it. Don't let that trouble you."

It did trouble him, however.

As his old companions had long said, he was losing his nerve. Recognizing that he was growing old, a constant fear beset him that he would end his life in prison, and this had stayed his hand in many a crooked game. It was at the beginning of the period

when he first began to lose his reckless confidence in himself that he had married, with the resolution to be cautious and begin the process of saving dimes enough to make him comfortable when too old to be any longer attractive as a companion or a partner. The resolution to resume respectability had been ruined by his brother's scornful refusal to advance him money enough to start him in business, and after the failure to establish himself in some reputable way of living came the desertion of his wife and child. After that his luck had been bad. He had not courage enough to attempt desperate things, and a gambler who is not desperate is of necessity a failure. During the few years before he returned to his wife, and appears as a minor character in this story, he had subsisted on the friends with whom he had lavishly spent his money in other days, and had become little better than a sporting tramp.

One can easily realize the pleasure it was for him to find a comfortable home and immunity from the danger he had been continually running by frequently transgressing the law and mentally feeling its clutches. It had been a flashing up of his old spirit which had led to his operations in Killick's private room and the seizure of the documents in the safe, but now that the long-coveted fortune was within his grasp the fear of prison haunted him unceasingly.

Cora had quickly recognized this and determined that it should in her hand be the means of forcing her father to act as she dictated. Now that wealth had come to her, the old bitterness against Tully died away, and in its place came a spirit of proud hopelessness which, while it did not add to her happiness, made her more gentle and forgiving. She knew when her father proved his claim to the family property it would establish her sociality, if it did not in the meantime transpire that her father had been forced to adopt the role of a burglar, and she the part of an adventuress, to secure what belonged to them. Thus, after Ralph Moore's first interview with Chandler, the control of the case fell into Cora's hands, and she conducted it with an energy and secrecy which had the double object of establishing their rights and in the hope of again saving Tully and bringing him back to her—of involving Killick deeply in the fraud which had begun in the registration of the false memorial and ended in the loan of Miss Browning's money to her uncle. On the afternoon of the day that Killick had been driven home from his office, in the wintry dawn, Lawyer Chandler called upon him to confront him with the evidence which had been obtained, but was informed that Mr. Killick was ill at his house and would probably not be

back at his office for a week. Chandler could not lose the opportunity of settling some of his old scores with Tully by bullying him a little with vague threats of what he proposed to do.

"I have evidence in my pocket," said he, as he sat in Tully's private room, "which will make your partner a sicker man than he is now, when I get a chance to show it to him."

"Indeed," said Tully scornfully, "I am not responsible for Mr. Killick's conduct and I am very doubtful if you are smart enough a lawyer to catch him tripping."

"It is not a question of my smartness, Mr. Tully, but of his rascality, and I am afraid your firm will present a very sorry appearance when this matter gets into court."

"Mr. Chandler," answered Tully with dignity, "if there is a matter you desire me to look into, present your case at once. If you are simply amusing yourself by a little loud talk go to someone you can frighten. As for me I am entirely indifferent to anything you can do or say, and the consciousness that I have done nothing of which I need be afraid, emboldens me to request you to go to the devil." Mr. Chandler retired in a rage and would have taken proceedings at once, but Cora restrained him. "Go up and see Mr. Killick at his house," she suggested, "perhaps he is only shamming."

Chandler went, but the doctor met him in the hall and forbade any intrusion upon his patient.

"He is a very sick man, Mr. Chandler," whispered the doctor in the tone of oily importance which fashionable physicians are so fond of assuming, "and I doubt very much if he ever leaves his bed. Apoplexy, my dear fellow, and symptoms of brain softening. Came home this morning after being absent all night, in a terrible condition; must have had a violent shock. Absolute quiet is the only thing that can save him. I have forbidden anyone to be admitted to his room except the nurse. I will walk down street with you, Mr. Chandler, if you don't mind. Not going my way? No? Good morning, sir."

Chandler's report of Killick's condition alarmed Cora, and after a lengthy consultation with her father it was decided that nothing should be done until he either recovered, or until they could be sure he would never act as prosecutor.

Nor did Cora feel free from personal responsibility. The thought that she had been justified in acting as she did, did not relieve her from a horrible fear that she was, indirectly at least, the cause of Killick's condition. "Mother," said she bitterly, "how often we have talked about wealth and position. Now we have them both within our reach and yet we are more

miserable than ever. I feel as if I had murdered that old man, and there is no telling what happened in his room or how the affair would look if he died and an inquest were held. Likely enough both father and I would be implicated and disgraced."

Mrs. Burnham could give her but little comfort; the same fear had been passing through her mind as for hours she had sat bolt-upright in the squeaking rocking-chair, picturing the most dire disasters.

"I feel," said she, "like running away."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THEIR TROUBLES ARE NOT YET OVER.

Dell's relations with Mrs. King had, day by day, grown more embarrassing. The widow lost no opportunity of being sarcastic and disagreeable, while Dell had ignored even positive rudeness, in her efforts to conciliate the angry woman. As long as Dell felt she was doing her duty for duty's sake, her pride consented to be trampled upon, and she was not supremely miserable in the sacrifices she was making, but when her attitude towards Tully changed she felt that an actual rivalry existed between her and Mrs. King and her continued residence in the home of her late guardian would therefore be impossible. The thought of being accused, when the facts became known, of having pretended to be actuated by a sense of duty when in reality it would appear that her love for Tully had been the true reason for her conduct, was insupportable. Of course she had not told Mrs. King that duty instead of inclination had prompted her actions, but yet she had hoped the perverse woman would see it in that light, and in a dozen ways she had tried to prove that she had estranged Tully from her for her own good. Now that the moral support of an unselfish intention had been withdrawn, how could she meet Madge's sneers or endure the manner which, as plainly as words, reminded her, "you are a guest in my house; you know what would make me happy and are robbing me of it; how dare you stay under my roof and treat me thus?"

Tortured by these thoughts and her fear that Tully, though repentant and persuasive, was after all, a dangerous man, she was poorly fortified against the assault Mrs. King made upon her resolution. Dell was sitting in her dressing-room, feeling weak and nervous, when she heard a knock, and Madge with tear-stained face and heart-broken mien, hesitatingly opened the door

and asked if she might come in. Dell guessed what was coming and, with sinking heart, begged her tearful visitor to be seated.

"Dell! Dell!" sobbed Mrs. King, dropping upon her knees and burying her face in Dell's lap, "I can't stand this another hour, I'm going mad! I know I've treated you shamefully, but I couldn't help it, I love him so! Oh I do love him so, so much! You have no idea how my whole future is bound up in him, how I think of him every moment, dream of him, feel the touch of his hand, see the look in his eyes, and long for just one word from him, but now you have taken him from me, and he never even looks at me. Oh, Dell! Dell! do please give him up to me. You don't love him and I do—I love him better than all the world besides—better than my soul. Dell, please, oh please give him up to me! On my bended knees I beg—I implore you to let him love me!"

Dell's hand rested lightly and tenderly on Madge's bowed head, but her face was turned away from the humiliating sight, and a deathly sickness was creeping into her heart as she listened to the pitiful petition.

"Madge," she said, as the kneeling woman became more vehement, "get up, you degrade yourself by acting in this way."

But Madge clung to Dell's knees and refused to rise. "Take pity on me," she begged, while Dell, with both hands, sought to gently push the uplifted weeping face from her.

"Pity me!" she cried. "For God's sake, pity me. For the sake of the years we have spent together, for what I have tried to do for you, pity me, Dell, and let me have him. For John's sake, if you loved him, g—"

"Madge, how dare you breathe your husband's name!" exclaimed Dell, in horror, struggling, but ineffectually, to release herself from the embrace of Mrs. King's arms. "How dare you profane the name of your noble husband by urging my love and respect for him as a reason why I should consent to you marrying another!"

"I dare do anything, say anything, to win Steve Tully! I care for nothing and nobody in the wide world but him! I don't care what sacrifice I make!"

"Madge," cried Dell, impatiently, "you at least are sacrificing my respect by going on in this way. I could not have thought it possible for a woman to so far forget every sense of dignity and common sense."

"I tell you I don't care for anything or any one but him," cried Mrs. King, trembling with excitement. "Even if he were your husband I would love him still, and if he asked me I would go to the ends of the earth with him. You talk of forgetting! I

have forgotten everything but him. You will never know what it is to love as I do. You don't know what you are doing in coming between us," she cried, growing still more hysterical. "For God's sake, promise me to cease playing the coquette. I know you are doing it because you think it is your duty; but it isn't your duty; it isn't for my good; it will be my ruin, for I intend to keep on loving him, no matter what happens."

Dell by a quick, angry movement escaped from Mrs. King's embrace and stood looking scornfully at the kneeling woman who, with her hands clasped before her, seemed utterly regardless of her distraught appearance,

"Madge," answered Dell, scornfully, "you are acting like a crazy woman, and talking in a wicked way that you will be ashamed of in your calmer moments. Say no more, but get up and bathe your eyes."

As Dell reached down to assist her to rise, Mrs. King seized the proffered hand, and after struggling awkwardly to her feet, stood before her for a moment as if ashamed, and then began to cry. "I won't go," she sobbed, "till you promise that you won't come between us again. Promise me, Dell—how can you refuse? You know how I love him, and you know you don't like him a bit."

Dell made no answer.

"You don't like him, do you?" persisted Mrs. King, with a quick indrawing of her breath. "You don't love him?"

A flush had stolen into Dell's pale cheeks before she answered; "It should make no difference to you if I did not, it would not be at all different if I did."

Mrs. King's tears suddenly ceased, her eyes flashed, and with a fierce fling she threw Dell's hand from her. "Oh, I see, you do love him. If I had thought so I wouldn't have made such a fool of myself."

Dell's face paled, but she still made no answer.

"Well, I have made a fool of myself," sneered the widow, with a forced laugh, "in believing that you thought I ought not to marry him, and that it was a sense of *duty* which made you try to separate us. Oh, I see it all now," she cried with a short, harsh laugh, "you want him yourself. Well, you shan't have him, you little hypocrite. I have been a fool indeed, to beg of this fine saint that her *sense of duty* should give way to gratitude. I could lash myself for kneeling and imploring you—you—for anything."

"Have you done," inquired Dell, coldly.

"Yes, I have done with you, and the sooner you leave this house the better!"

"Madge," retorted Dell, hotly, "I have sought to do you no harm, and no matter what my motive may have been, you should thank anyone who tried to save you from your madness."

"You needn't try to save me from my madness any longer. I am quite competent to take care of myself,"—and with dignity—"when may I expect the pleasure of your absence?"

"Madge, you know as well as I do that your husband provided in his will that I might remain here until I came of age if I so desired, and though I realize that our relations hereafter can never be as they have been in the past, yet I do not propose to create a scandal by leaving until I can do so on some reasonable pretext."

"Then I will go and stay away until I know you have left. I won't live under the same roof with you, nor breathe the same air that you do." Mrs. King had worked herself into a towering passion and strode out of the room with as much outraged dignity as if she had discovered Dell purloining her spoons. Her carefully calculated tearfulness, the grovelling way in which she had implored Dell to abandon Tully, and her threats of the dreadful and shameful things she was willing to do if thwarted, had been a complete failure, and the humiliation of her defeat, intensified by the discovery that Dell was herself in love with Tully, left her no avenue of graceful retreat and, standing at bay, she made matters worse by flying into a fury. The moment she had slammed the door of Dell's dressing room she began to regret her hasty and insulting words, not that she was sorry for having wounded her companion, but she realized that if Dell left the house the probabilities were that Mr. Tully would cease to be a visitor. In her boudoir she sat down intending to write a note requesting Dell to remain with her, but instead scrawled a message saying that she proposed leaving the city for a few days and hoped that Miss Browning would look after the house until her return. With Sarah's help a trunk was soon packed and she hurried away, ashamed even to say good-bye to Dell. "Give that note to Miss Browning when she comes down to dinner," said Mrs. King at the door, "she has a bad headache and I won't disturb her."

Poor Dell, she had a headache indeed, and a heartache as well. Motherless almost from her childhood and bereaved of her father years ago, she had grown up self-reliant, but never before had she been called upon to face the world and trust to its tender mercies, without some strong hand to guide her and a luxurious home in which to find refuge. She thoroughly understood that even if Mrs. King recalled her offensive words, 25 Mowburn Street could be no longer, in any sense, her home. The sentiments which had

prompted the insult would remain, the rivalry between them, the hatred Mrs. King would feel towards her for having deprived her of Tully, would make it impossible for them to be friends. Where could she go? She must certainly leave the city, for if she remained, a change of residence would cause very disagreeable comment. It would be quite easy to pass the winter in the south with some friends who had gone to Florida for the season, but the thought of wandering from one hotel to another without any home brought upon her an agony of loneliness, and many and bitter were the tears she shed as she thought of her dead father, and the kind and considerate guardian who had striven to shield her from the woes of orphanage and bestowed upon her a love as pure and tender as a father's. After hours of mental torture she rang for some tea, and dressed to meet Mr. Tully.

When he came his kindly inquiries, excited by her pale face and despondent manner, made her grateful and gentle in her reception of him.

"You look lonely to-night," said he. "You are different from your usual self, and yet somehow, it makes the change easier for me. Something tells me what you have been suffering, and though I would lay down my life to save you from sorrow, yet I confess the thought helps me that perhaps something has happened which may assist you to understand how one may be misunderstood, may suffer and rebel, and still find it impossible to escape from the consequences of a mistake, or—as it has been with me—worse than mistakes."

As he spoke he caught sight of the tears which filled her eyes, and a great wave of pity seemed to sweep his ruder self away.

"Forgive me," he whispered bending towards her, "if I have recalled a painful thought or some trouble you have been seeking to forget. It is brutal of me to be glad that sorrow has touched your heart. I cannot hope that any fellow feeling could make you wondrous kind to me. My only hope is that the pure and gentle woman has within her heart mercy to forgive the sins which in my prayer I ask to have forgiven. But never, Dell, have you seemed so gentle, so saint-like, as to-night, when your heart is softened by some sadness which I dare not ask you to let me share."

She looked up at him so thankfully that his heart gave a great, joyous bound, and the impulse rose within him then and there to ask her if she loved him, if she would be his wife, but his condemnation of himself interposed, and he drew quickly back.

"I have no right to say what is in my heart, what was on my lips, until I have told you all—I have been the means of losing part of your fortune"—said he, impetuously—"do not start from me. I was innocent of evil design, but careless in not protecting

you professionally. The first mistake was in lending that money to Col. Moore. I have since found out that Killick sent Moore to Stryde, who in turn suggested the loan to me. If I had done my part—if I had heeded Stryde's warning to look into the title myself, I should have discovered the flaw which is likely to make the security worthless; but I didn't. I trusted Killick's creature, Dooley, and the title was passed. Then the Trust and Loan Company's bonds were bought, and again I find that Killick with fiendish malevolence, had led us to purchase worthless securities, though they were supposed, even by the banks, to be as good as gold. Killick has been engineering a scheme whereby hundreds of thousands of dollars have been loaned by the company on worthless lands and on farm property rated for twice what it is worth, and, now he is safe and his gains secure, he is exposing the frauds of the company which, I fear, will fall. The greater part of your money is thus invested, and though some will remain, the balance will likely be swept away. I have been a dupe, but that is no excuse—I have none! The shame of it makes me wish that I were dead."

Dell's countenance had been a curious study as with shamed, flushed face he told the story of her losses. Poor Tully could hardly finish, his voice trembled so, and when at last he had finished he dared not raise his eyes to hers lest there he might read his condemnation.

"It doesn't matter," she said slowly. "No doubt it is for the best. Don't feel so sorry; it is much less serious than if you had been dishonest or had injured someone who was unable to bear it. Money is a very small part of what is necessary to secure happiness. I believe I shall be happier without it."

"Don't! oh, don't speak so gently, so forgivingly!" exclaimed Tully, in great agitation, "I could bear reproaches, anything better than your kindness. I feel so covered with confusion and shame, I see myself in my true colors—the heartless, reckless fool, the dupe, the betrayer of a sacred trust—the—"

"Please, Mr. Tully, don't think of it again unless a memory of what you suffer now is ever necessary to keep you from future mistakes. I have been proud and idle, how can I reproach you if you have added thoughtlessness to your love of pleasure. Now I must turn towards a more useful life, and I shall sincerely thank God that this happened, if it is the means of starting you on a better career."

Her slender hand rested gently on his as she spoke, and the magnetism of the touch brought hope to his heart. He lifted his bowed head and looked into her eyes.

"God bless you! God bless you! and forgive me," he exclaimed,

chokingly. "I am not worthy of your kindness, but you have redeemed me and if the rest of my life can show my gratitude, my love, it shall be devoted to proving that you have saved a soul and made me a man."

"If so, what a trifle my loss will be compared with the gain to yourself and to the world!" said she, almost gaily. "I will always be glad that it happened, for if you try you can be a great man, and, what is ever so much better—a good one."

"Do you believe in me, Dell," he cried, eagerly. "Do you really think I can be as you say?"

"Yes, I am sure," she answered—then after a pause—"now."

"Then will you share my life with me, Dell? Will you help me to live as I ought?" he whispered. "Do not say no; give me some hope. Let me cling to these gentle hands, my love, and I will be anything, everything you would have me be!"

She did not withdraw her hands from his passionate grasp, but looking into his eager eyes as if to read his thoughts, she answered.

"Do not overrate my strength. I, too, am weak but together, with God's help, we may be kept from falling!"

She spoke with a solemnity which forbade a caress, and rising to her feet, they stood face to face, then raising his hand, before heaven he vowed that his life should be devoted to her.

"And to God, dear," whispered Dell.

"Yes and to God who has dealt with me in such infinite mercy," he added, and then he stooped reverently and kissed her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

KILLICK'S DEATH.

Killick grew worse instead of better. His mind wandered when he was quiet, and he muttered strange things about the suits in which he was engaged, and the trip to Europe which had so largely occupied his mind. Mrs. Killick was a hopeless invalid, constantly confined to her room, and had long ago ceased to expect either affection or fidelity from her husband; but had she heard him whispering tender things to his bookkeeper, and repeating over and over again the name of his false charmer, she would have found her revenge when the paroxysms were coming on, and with frothing mouth he cursed Cora and vowed the most fiendish vengeance. His "spells," as the nurse called them, were awful to witness, and after each attack he became weaker in body and more unsettled

mentally. Lawyer Chandler hearing these reports and anxious to force Tully into a defence of his partner's rascality, at last prevailed on Cora Burnham to bring the suit against her cousin, assuring her that at first there would be no publicity, and the probable success of their case would be largely enhanced by Killick's inability to assist in Col. Moore's defence. Her father insisted, and with sinking heart Cora yielded, but with the stipulation that nothing should be done without her consent.

Col. Moore was served with the writ and he at once repaired to Killick to demand an explanation, and in the absence of the senior partner and impelled by the report that Killick was dying, he finally confessed the whole matter to Tully.

"From your own explanation of the matter, Col. Moore," began Tully, fiercely, "I gather that you and Killick conspired to defraud my client. True she was, and is still, a client of our firm makes it a serious matter for me, and though, according to your own admission you are an unmitigated scoundrel, I am also bound to act for you as if I were convinced of your honesty. I wish you to understand my feelings in this matter and to know that I will do nothing for you except what is absolutely necessary to defend your title to your estate, in the hope of being able to save Miss Browning from loss. You tell me you saw the will in Killick's private vault and that he promised to give it to you when you paid him the money, and then refused. How do you suppose the will fell into the hands of your uncle Ralph? Do you imagine Killick gave it to him?"

"It would be just like him," answered the little Colonel, sullenly. "He would have given it to me if he had not intended to use it again. Isn't it possible that they haven't got the will at all and that this is a bluff? Can't you see if it is gone?"

Tully sat silently turning the matter over in his mind. Here was a good opportunity to get his hands on Killick's papers—papers, too, which were necessary to protect the firm's clients. Would he be justified in searching his partner's safe? Tully's code of honor had been an easy one, and a month ago he would not have hesitated an instant, but would Dell approve of it? Surely it would be in the interest of justice! Yet it would be taking advantage of Killick's sickness!

"Yes, I can search for it, but I must engage some one to act as Killick's attorney in the matter. Stay where you are for half an hour and I will send for Judge Rivers; we will follow his advice."

"Great Heavens," exclaimed the Colonel, "don't get old Rivers. If he finds out what it is all about I might as well give up my case. Get some lawyer whose mouth will be shut by the fact that he is acting for a client."

"Well, then, I'll get Donald Scott; he used to be Killick's counsel --will he suit you? I suppose I might do it myself, but I propose to take no chances, and would let the matter stand over till Killick is either well or dead, only that the honor of the firm is involved, and I am not prepared to shoulder any of Killick's rascallties."

As a further precaution, Tully sent for Stryde, and while waiting for Scott he told him how they had been swindled, and feared that the Loan Company's bonds were bad.

"If it is as you say," said Stryde, firmly, "I will replace every dollar she has lost by our mistakes. I am not rich enough to do this at once, but I will never rest till it is all paid. If you can help me it can be done instantly, and no matter whether we find this will or not, if it is in existence, we can do nothing but accept the facts as they are and make no attempt to defraud the genuine heirs in order to protect ourselves. However, I think it is quite within your duty under the circumstances to look for the will in the place Col. Moore specifies; it is doubly a firm matter as it concerns both your client and Killick's."

Donald Scott took the same view of the matter, and Dooley, who had been despatched for the keys, returning at the moment, they were quickly in Mr. Killick's room and had the vault door open. Neither Moore nor Tully had revealed their knowledge of the inner room, but waited to see the effect on their companions when the portiere instead of a row of shelves revealed itself.

"This is certainly a very odd revelation," exclaimed Scott, pushing aside the curtain and entering. "I—I am almost sorry I consented to this search, but we may as well continue it. Where did you say the document was kept?"

"In the safe yonder," answered Moore, "but I am afraid we can't open it."

Tully tried the lock, the door swung open and disclosed the ruined combination. Stryde at once exclaimed:

"The safe has been blown open. See, there is where it was drilled."

"There," cried Moore, pointing in consternation to the empty space, "is where the drawer was from which he took the will; it is gone!"

"Gentlemen," said the old counsel, "there is something wrong about this; there has evidently been foul play of some kind; the whole matter should be placed in the hands of the police."

"I agree with you," answered Tully, who was thankful beyond measure that he had been so cautious. "If you will remain here I will go down to headquarters and report the matter to the detectives."

As he hurried through the streets to the police station, he felt sick at the thought of the shameful publicity which would be sure to follow, but grateful that in his resolution to do right, no matter what might be the result, he had providentially saved himself by calling in so many witnesses.

The two detectives detailed to look into the matter searched the room and found the broken drawer and the drill and cartridges. Finding the name of the safe makers on one of the "bits," one of them went down to make inquiries, while Tully, with his companions, returned to his room for consultation. Stryde left them and Tully dismissed Moore with instructions to come back next day, and then Scott and Tully sat alone gazing oddly at each other.

"This is a queer business, Tully; tell me what it means!"

"It would take me a long time, Mr. Scott, but as you are acting for Killick in this will business you may as well know all about it. It is a rascally affair."

When Scott had heard him through and rose to go, he took Tully's hand and held it for a moment.

"Young man," said he, "you are in a difficult position, but you have begun right. Put the case concerning your partner's papers before one of the courts and be advised by the judge. I suppose all documents in the office not marked private are in the custody of the firm. In the morning I will come over and see that Killick's interests are not injured. In the meantime have one of the officers remain in charge. By-the way," added Scott, turning back as he was leaving, "why don't you go over and see Chandler, and get him to postpone action in the Moore matter for a few days, and by that time Killick will either be dead or able to talk."

Chandler was not only communicative, but abusive. "Your old flame, Miss Cora Burnham, will have a chance to get even with you, now that she is the heiress and you the beggar, and if she takes my advice, Killick and Tully will be in jail before many days."

"What has Cora Burnham to do with the case?" demanded Tully, swallowing his rage as best he could.

"Oh—ho—so you don't know that her right name is Moore, and it is her father who is the claimant. She will have very much more money than Miss Browning, and—my gay young man—less mercy."

"Chandler," cried Tully, furiously, "you are a cowardly whelp, and if I had you where I could do it decently, I'd give you the kicking you deserve. Understand one thing, however, that I have done nothing wrong in this matter, and would not touch it were it not for Killick's sickness. And," said Tully, threateningly, as an idea struck him, "you may have bigger work cut out for you in this case

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than you expect—something in the shape of burglary and murder, you know!"

"You daren't open it up?" retorted Chandler, incautiously. "You've too much to lose!"

"I have nothing to lose; Killick is a dying man, and dead men have nothing to conceal."

The blow was well aimed, and it brought Chandler to his senses. His private spite had carried him too far, and his sudden attempt to hedge laid him still more open to Tully's "bluff."

"Whatever accusation you may bring against my clients will fall to cover up *your* tracks, but we are not anxious for a fight; we would rather have a settlement. My client is old and wants his rights at once. I tell you this because you can make the Colonel abandon this suit and keep out of trouble yourselves—do you see?"

"Yes, I see. You want us to give Col. Moore the worst of it so as to save ourselves. If you were a younger man you'd get your nose pulled for an answer, but as you are too contemptible to touch, I'll tell you that you will get what the law gives you and *when* it gives it to you, and I am willing to take the worst you can give me!"

Stephen Tully as he glared defiance at Lawyer Chandler had in his face that unflinching determination and honest courage which can never be assumed, and Chandler, who was but a weakling, recognized it and asked himself if he had been mistaken in his theory? Had Ralph Moore and his daughter been imposing upon him? As he thought of the advances he had made to them he became thoroughly frightened and rushed to their house to convince himself that they had not gone.

The stock and business of "Mrs. Burnham, Fashionable Milliner," had been sold, and Cora and her mother, for the first time in many years, were idle. Anxiety and idleness together made them utterly miserable, and gave birth to fears and ill-temper which rendered the place so uncomfortable that the husband and father declared "he would rather be a boarder with Satan himself," and had gone to spend the afternoon in the little back room of his favorite saloon. Their evident alarm and distress, when Chandler hurriedly entered, made him still more suspicious, and before he left them they would have been willing to throw up the whole case and leave the city rather than face Tully's vague charges of "burglary and murder."

It is generally supposed by detectives that if those who commit murder, or, indeed, a minor crime, were to go about their business as usual and act as if nothing had happened, the arrest of culprits would decrease much more than fifty per cent. It is only the most artistic and practiced criminal who can by self-possession and long experience restrain himself from these peculiar preparations and

efforts at concealment which so generally mark the guilty. In other affairs the same impulse produces proportionately similar results. The anxiety which follows wrong-doing or conspiracy, becomes a consuming fire if in idleness or in a new occupation one has unusual opportunities for reflection. Even if one has done right, if the action is unprecedented or in violation of conventionality, the mind, dwelling on the public verdict which may follow publicity, is apt to get into a terribly morbid condition. Things known only to the one who is wondering what people will say, seem all at once to have become known to everybody, and the world and the people in it assume a new attitude. Thus one's past history seems to suddenly become a book open to everybody, and a desperate fearfulness as to one's ability to conduct himself with sufficient propriety to avoid being a conspicuous target of ridicule or criticism, becomes a question of grave doubt. This peculiar mental condition is more unusual with women than men, except in one relation. Men indifferently reared form habits and indulge in methods of expression which unfit them for refined society, and no amount of effort, after these habits have become fixed, will effect a change. Women, on the contrary, with few misgivings, will adjust themselves to a change of fortune, both in dress and conversation, and feel themselves quite competent to accept the responsibility of sudden riches and the social duties that wealth entails. But in the one relation of womankind to mankind they are always at a disadvantage, and are fearful lest some mistake or mad adventure in lowly life will rise up against them when their social horizon broadens. This was particularly true of Cora and her mother. Unexpectedly discovered in the position of wealthy women of good family, they talked to one another of their past, and wondered how people would regard what may be called the Tully episode. They had almost satisfied themselves that it was unknown outside their own limited circle and would be overlooked as one of the hardships of the struggle to obtain their rights, when Killick's illness and the necessity of pushing their claims to the Moore estate made them conscious that a wider publicity must be the result of the law suit, that their father might be imprisoned for burglary, and—worst of all—that an accusation might possibly be brought against her for being the cause of Killick's sickness, turned Cora cold with terror. She imagined all sorts of terrible things happening in Killick's office; the fear that perhaps her father had struck and injured the old lawyer, or that a coroner's inquiry might develop such a suspicion and the clerks might be examined as to her relations with Killick, and the fear that she might come out of the trial smirched by suspicion and damaged by what she would be forced to

admit, robbed the prospective wealth of any charm. Cora Burnham belonged to that class of women who are essentially selfish and passionless. The slightest temptation would cause her to deviate from right except in any way which might involve her reputation and future prospects. She was one of those dangerous women whose impulses are controlled by ambition rather than affection; a woman not perhaps dangerous to herself, but to men. Now when she saw a great social future as one of her possibilities, it seemed terrible that all might be ruined by disclosures which would appear much more damaging than the facts warranted.

Her father too had been drinking heavily, was irritable and impatient; her mother, also, was fretful, despondent, and continually inquiring of Cora if she thought they would all have to go to jail. When Mrs. Burnham asked this question of her husband he would very impolitely but forcibly tell her to go to a place never mentioned in polite society. The once well organized household was in a continual turmoil, and Lawyer Chandler was most unfavorably impressed by Cora's reticence when he questioned her as to what had taken place between her and Killick.

Tully, on the other hand, when he returned to his office was informed by the detective that there was little or no doubt that Killick had himself blown open the safe, and, as he sat in his room thinking over the strange occurrences, he guessed very correctly that Cora and her father had obtained possession of the papers and either changed or injured the combination so that the safe could not be opened, and as the detective suggested, the sight of the empty drawer after the labor of drilling through the steel had brought on the apopleptic fit in which Killick had fallen and smashed the box to atoms. He determined to go up to Killick's house and if his partner had a lucid interval to ask him what he should do with his private papers. When he got there the undertaker was fastening the flowing folds of crape on the door knob. At last the desperate schemer had closed his career and Tully need no longer fear the machinations of his wicked partner! The nurse met him in the hall; she was large and portly and had the sympathetic face and gentle manners of a lady.

"Yes, sir," she answered, when he questioned her, "his death was a truly awful one. He recovered consciousness about half an hour before he died, and asked the doctor if he were likely to recover. He told him no, it was impossible, and at once he demanded writing materials that he might make his will; but he had not written a line before he was taken with another spell and struggled in the most awful agony until he died. You had better go up and see Mrs. Killick, sir; she needs someone to advise her.

Poor woman, she is low enough herself, though I must say she takes the death of her husband much more quietly than I should have expected."

In a bright front room, Tully found Mrs. Killick propped up on many pillows, pale, hollow-eyed and patient, her thin white hands trembling on the coverlid; her wealth of brown hair but slightly silvered with gray, though over fifty winters had touched with their chill and sorrow the poor lady whose life had been particularly sad and loveless. Tully had never seen her before. It was not Killick's habit to introduce his business friends at his house, but when he made himself known, she expressed her pleasure that he had come.

"Dr. Strong," she said, "is making all the arrangements for the funeral. He has been such a good friend to me, and until I can advise with him, take charge of the business and do with it as you see fit. My husband has not been a good man," she said, her breath coming in short gasps, "I know he has wronged many people, and I am sorry he died without being able to make his peace with God. He was a rich man, wasn't he, Mr. Tully?" she asked, turning her thin face towards him.

"I always understood him to be a very wealthy man, but, of course, I do not know his private affairs."

"If he has left me power to do so, I desire to right every wrong he has perpetrated. I haven't many more days left, and I can assure you, Mr. Tully, I won't be sorry when the call comes for me. My life has been full of trouble, and the end of it, thank God, will be welcome. I have sent word for Dr. Strong to come, he will see you and tell you in what way you can serve me. Good-bye."

As he held out his hand to say adieu to her Tully's eyes filled with tears, and when the thin white hand clasped his and she looked up at him, he bent reverently down to hear what she had to say.

"You are a young man, Mr. Tully," said she; "your life is nearly all before you: don't make riches your god. Be true to yourself, take warning by my poor husband's life and awful death—and do not think me hard-hearted because I profess no sorrow at being left a widow. It would be impossible," she gasped, "after what I have suffered, not to feel a sense of the coming of the great and glorious dawn and of being relieved from a union which has been one of terrible trial. It seems almost like the first glimpse of Heaven to be free from him. I speak this way to you because I like your face; you are young and noble looking. Be worthy always of a woman's confidence. I know you will be, you couldn't be otherwise, and God will bless you by bestowing

on you, if you haven't it now, a good woman's love. Good-bye again, I will send for you soon."

It was a sad scene, and Tully hurried back to his office, wondering, when that pure woman had dared to be glad that she had been relieved from a partnership with Killick, if he, too, might not feel that Providence had intervened to save him.

On his desk lay a letter. The handwriting to him was strange, and yet there was a look of familiarity. Could it be—yes, it was Dell's. He opened it.

"My dear friend," it ran, "I have been mistaken, you too made a mistake, thinking that because you had lost my fortune you must offer me your hand and sacrifice your future and yourself in compensation as you did once before. I made the mistake of accepting; I am sure your motive was good and generous, but it is all another mistake. Now you think you are in love because you pity me and feel that you are responsible for some at least of my misfortunes. I used to charge you with being egotistical; I now feel certain that it was I whose vanity made your debonaire life seem so selfish, conceited and loveless. It is I who have been eaten up with conceit. When you asked me to love you, to be yours, I imagined that I yielded because I desired your moral and spiritual improvement, and accepted you as a part of my duty. I must go back to the first deceit I practiced on myself. When I thought there was a danger of your becoming reckless, and knowing that Mrs. King was fond of you, I feared that both would forget the duty you owed to my guardian who is gone, and for whom I had such a high appreciation and respect, and—and I somehow believed that you cared for me, and to save us from the scandal which a hasty marriage with Mrs. King would have occasioned, I tried to win you away from her. It was presumption, prompted by a false conception of my own feelings, and a feeble striving towards the path of duty which still appears clear, though it now seems to lie in a different direction. I have deceived myself. You will not think that this confession is easily made; you are too generous to think that it is made for effect. Now I know that through all those months I loved you, and I believe that when I endeavored to win you away from Mrs. King, in my inmost heart I did it because my selfish soul longed for your companionship. You confessed to me; I must confess to you. Bee McKinley was in my confidence; I told her that when I got you away from Mrs. King I would scorn the offer of marriage I believed you would make, and prove to her as well as to myself how shallow and heartless you were. Everything has turned out so differently. I feel now that I was weaker and more selfish than you were, that you generously made an offer which you did not mean. I can

clearly see that you offered me your hand because you thought it was your duty. Can you understand what I have written? I can hardly comprehend myself what it means. This separation from you, the abandonment of the hope which defined itself amidst the clouds of misunderstandings which had held us apart. One thing I see clearly—and believe me in this, I have made up my mind—I must retract my promise. I cannot be your wife. My atonement will be bitter as it is, but it would be still more bitter if I permitted you to make the sacrifice you have offered. Before this letter reaches you, I shall have joined some friends who are leaving for the South, where we will spend the winter together. Do not ask me to change my mind. I cannot—I must not. Let your future be guided by the impulses which have proven you so manly, while I have been so self-deluded and weak. Achieve the great possibilities in store for you. Be what God intended you should be, but forget your old friend,

DELL."

When he had finished reading the letter, he sprang from his seat and rang viciously at the telephone. Something was wrong with the wire—there always is something the matter when one is in a hurry. At last he caught the central office, and they gave him the wrong number, as is customary. He rang again and again—the wire was crossed. In a passion of fear and desperation he pulled on his coat, ran out and hunted for a carriage. Of course there was none. When trembling with anxiety and haste, did one ever find a cab? He at last found one and was driven as fast as a bribe could persuade the driver to go, but he reached 25 Mowburn Street too late—not a few moments too late, but hours too late. Dell had gone!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TEST OF HER LOVE.

The impulse which caused Dell to write to Tully had been growing within her from the moment he left her on the eventful night of her engagement. Though it had grown late before he departed she at once sent for Bee McKinley and confided, amidst tears and blushes, the result of her attempt to rescue Mrs. King.

"I told you so, Dell," cried Bee, with enthusiasm, "but I'm sorry I did because you will begin to suspect your motives and fancy all sorts of terrible things. I can see you are at it now and that you sent for me to confess, so begin and I'll show you what an auntie I can be to you!"

"Oh, Bee!" sighed Dell, "why did you discover my trouble so quickly, it makes me feel as if you had suspected me all along. Didn't you now? don't be afraid; tell me just what you thought?"

"There now, just what I thought!" exclaimed Bee, her brow afrown, "you have begun to question yourself to me and no matter what I say you will suspect yourself of having been a fraud. Dell Browning, if you go back on me and my advice, hereafter we must meet as strangers. I'm discouraged with you. It seems as if you were determined to be unhappy and to make everybody else so. Now state your grievance and I'll decide, but remember if my decision is not accepted as final we part for ever."

Bee's tragic intensity seemed to arouse Dell for a moment, but her beautiful face lengthened and the lovely eyes saddened as she sat and thought before she replied.

"Don't try to be facetious, Bee, because what you say increases my fears," she said, after a long pause. "He told me about that girl—his bookkeeper—Cora Burnham, I think her name is; you've heard of her, I know, and it seems to me as if she and I were to be put on the same plane—as if we had indeed been considered together, and Tully decided that I had the strongest claim, and proposed to me on that account."

"But, Dell, he wooed you long before he felt that your property had been lost by his carelessness. How do you account for that?"

"It may have been my money, then. He was poor and anxious to establish himself, and had never analyzed his motives. Later, when he began to see his mistakes, he resolved to make amends where his follies had done most harm."

"I'm going home, Dell Browning! No, I won't stay another minute. You are in love and unreasonable. We shall quarrel if we try to argue it out; I could almost pull your hair now. Happiness comes and offers itself to you and you deliberately sit down and try to find excuse for refusing it. I—"

"Don't, Bee; do be reasonable yourself and talk it over."

"I won't!" retorted Bee, sharply; "it's useless. A blind man could have seen that Tully has been in love with you for more than a year, and if you are determined to wreck him and make yourself unhappy for life, you must do it alone. I wash my hands of the whole business. Good night!"

"Bee, will you go like this when I need a friend so badly?" cried Dell, almost in tears.

"Yes, I am going just like this," answered Bee in a hurt tone. "What you need is not my advice, but something to bring you to your senses. If you regain consciousness any time to-morrow, send for me. Mamma told me to hurry back, but I would have dis-

obeyed her if I could have been of use to you. As it is, I cannot; good night, again. Never mind sending anyone with me."

When Bee had gone Dell's thoughts, with that perverse tendency which always brings reaction after moments of joy or exaltation, more strongly than ever impelled her to renounce Tully and hasten away from the fascination of his presence. Tears blotted two letters but the third was sealed, and then she wrote a note to Mrs. King saying that on the morrow she would join some friends who were going south. For fear she might change her mind, she had Sarah go with her to mail them and was surprised that no relief came to her even after it was impossible to reverse her decision.

"You look poorly, mum," Sarah hinted, sympathetically, when they returned, "I 'ope there haint nothink the matter, mum!"

"No, Sarah, there is nothing the matter. I have a headache, that's all. I'm going away in the morning to be gone a long time and will need you to he'p me pack my trunks—"

"Not for good, mum, I 'ope," cried Sarah in alarm. "It'd break my 'eart, mum, it would, indeed," and the poor girl burst into tears.

"Don't speak of such a thing, Sarah," said Dell, startled into a more reserved attitude. "I'm going south with some friends and though I hardly know when I may come back, I'll be certain to return some time."

The packing of Dell's numerous belongings began early in the morning but was yet unfinished when Mrs. Flambert made her appearance.

After a sleepless night and the worrying work of the morning Dell looked utterly miserable. Dark circles were about her eyes, her hair was disordered and her gown rumpled.

"Lord bless me, Dell, what is the matter with you," demanded Mrs. Flambert, when she met her. "You look as if you had been crying all night—not about that rascal, Tully, I hope?"

Dell raised her eyes steadily to meet Mrs. Flambert's gaze, and the two women looked at each other with a strange reserve. Mrs. Flambert's face was unreadable when she was silent, and Dell's pride had, for the moment, come to her rescue.

"I—I don't know why I should look so woe-begone," began Dell. "Or why you should think I had been cry—"

A sudden softening of Mrs. Flambert's handsome, almost reckless, face, a filling with tears of the brilliant eyes, and trembling of the full red lips, startled Dell from her proud but ineffectual attempt to ignore her suffering, and in a moment they were weeping hysterically in each other's arms.

Electricity, telegraphy—nothing grosser than women's intui-

tions, than women's nerves, will ever bring human beings into such instantaneous communication as the feminine affluity when there is "something wrong," and love seeks to find it out or repair the damage.

"You have heard," whispered Mrs. Flambert, "I know you have.

"Heard what?" questioned Dell with alarm.

"About Tully!"

"No; nothing. What is wrong?" she asked with a sudden huskiness and hardening of her voice.

"Really, Dell, have you heard nothing?"

"Not a word."

"About the villainies he and Killick have been into?"

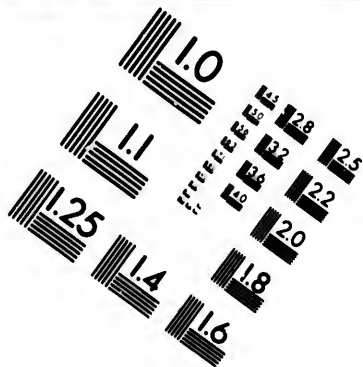
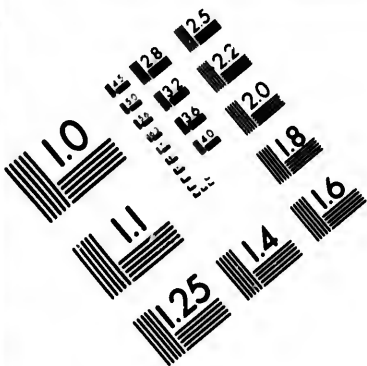
"No; nothing," answered Dell, her voice growing steadier, her eyes calmer and her head uplifting itself with sudden pride and resentment.

"I have been wrong," said Mrs. Flambert, brokenly. "It seems after all that he is a scamp unworthy of confidence, and I could have sworn to his honorable intentions."

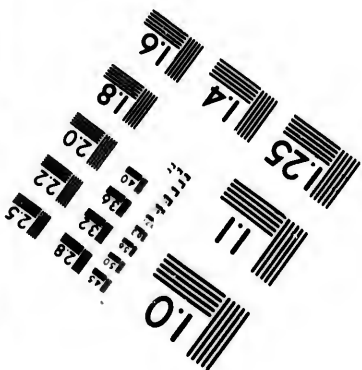
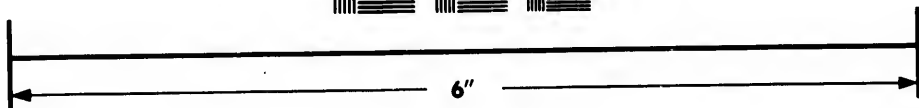
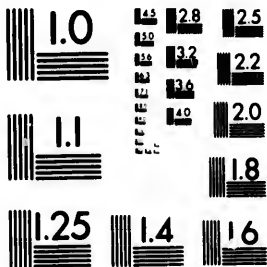
"What has happened?" questioned Dell, withdrawing herself from Mrs. Flambert's embrace.

"Why, Flam came home late last night and told me about the way Tully had used Teddy Grigsby in pretending to act for him while Killick was helping the Kahns to secret their stock and abscond from the town. Then came an account of how Tully had helped Col. Moore and the Loan Company to rob you, and my blood boiled, but when I found out that Tully had managed the whole thing so as to have Cora Burnham made the heiress—or her father for the time made the heir of Col. Moore's estates—I was wild. I've always told Flam that Killick was a scoundrel, but he never believed it till yesterday, and then went down to the office and demanded a settlement. Tully told him he knew nothing of his affairs and that Killick was sick and had not been down. Flam told Tully he believed they were a pair of consummate scoundrels, and Tully replied that he could believe what he liked, as far as he was concerned he had never handled a dollar of Flam's money and never wanted to. Flam is wild and has been trying to see Killick this morning already but the nurse refused him. He believes that the old villain isn't in the city at all, and that there is going to be a terrible crash, what with Killick's frands and Tully's foolish speculations, and he is after them both hot-foot. I'm sure I don't know what will come out of it but I came to tell you that I was wrong and you were right when you refused to have anything to do with Tully."





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"But your husband had nothing to do with Tully," argued Dell, her face flushing. "Killick may have wronged him without Tully knowing anything about it."

"Yes, my dear, but Tully has wronged you, has lost your property; Killick can't be blamed for that."

"I don't know about that," answered Dell; "he may have been to blame for everything."

"But he wasn't, child," retorted Mrs. Flambert, uneasily. "Killick had no control over your estate. Surely, since I saw you, you have not changed in your estimation of Stephen Tully?"

"Yes, I have," answered Dell, boldly. "I am sure he is honest; I can't believe what you say!"

"You—you haven't promised to—you aren't engaged to him?" she asked confusedly. "It can't be that I have been the means of—of—of bringing you together!"

"Yes and no," answered Dell, steadily. "I will tell you all about it, but first of all, let me say—I love him! It is all over now, but I have found out my own heart, and it is his. I believe in him and love him, and since you have told me what you have, I am sorry I wrote to him as I did."

When Dell had confided her troubles to Mrs. Flambert, that kindhearted woman made her promise to abandon her Southern trip for a few days and stay with her.

"Get a cab and drive over to our house. Say nothing to your servants, and when Mrs. King comes home, we'll either fix things up or you can go on to New York and join your friends, as they don't start for a week. In the meantime you will know the truth about Tully and where you stand financially. After all, Dell, I'm glad you stick to him so bravely; everything may turn out all right, but I'm afraid it won't."

Dell promised to go to Mrs. Flambert's and had resumed the packing of her trunks, when Rev. Dr. Strong called to see her.

"I have been uneasy," said he, looking down into her sad face, "since I was here last. I may have given you advice in a general sort of way, that you may have applied in a particular case—particularly so as at heart I intended that it should influence you in your judgment of our mutual friend Tully. Mrs. Flambert advised me to do as I did. Like Adam I lay the sin on the shoulders of Eve. You see, child, I really feel it is necessary to confess, and in confessing I have to tell you how I came to interfere, lest you may resent the impertinence of my interference so strongly that you won't listen to my advice. Mrs. Flambert, however, did not advise me to come this time," said the Doctor, patting the little hand that still lay unresistingly in his. "I want to talk to you as if I were

your father. It is because I loved him, and he trusted me, that I have reproached myself lest, in my eagerness to please the Flambearts—and to please myself I confess—I may have helped to bring you to a wrong decision. I have heard such dreadful things of Tully in the last day or two, that he and his partner, Killick, are mixed up in the most outrageous frauds, in some of which even your money has been sacrificed and you—"

"Could you tell me a specific instance, Doctor? Rumors are so vague and unjust sometimes." She looked up at him so pitifully, the tears dimming those glorious eyes which were often so proud and unyielding.

"Ah, my poor little girl, I see that you are wounded. I was afraid when Mrs. Flambeart told me just now you had engaged yourself to Tully, that you had done it simply to try and save him; but I see your heart went with your hand, my little one, and it will be a thankless task for me to be the harbinger of evil tidings, but I am anxious to save you from any heart aches which may come of a publicity which you, from a mistaken sense of loyalty, may seek to share with Tully—not 'seek to share'—but will have to share, if you strive to shield him."

"But the instance, Doctor, tell me what you have heard if you think I should know it," she insisted, her lips ceasing to tremble and taking on a firmer expression.

"Well, there is the case of Kahn with whom Killick was mixed up some time ago. I heard by accident that Teddy Grigsby went to Tully and engaged him to watch Theodore Kahn's brother, and instead of him taking active measures he and Killick arranged to give the Kahns an opportunity of secreting their goods and robbing Grigsby. As it happened, Teddy, who is a smart business man if he is such a slow, queer sort of a fellow otherwise, took vigorous measures himself and brought them to justice. Again, the firm has made an effort, a successful effort I am afraid, to break the Trust and Loan Co., whose bonds I am told you hold in very large amounts, and it is said they will share the profits of depreciating the stock. Worse still, they have got poor Kingsville, the president of the company, into a fix where he will be absolutely ruined both financially and in reputation. They have swindled, or at least report says they have entrapped Col. Moore, and by secreting the will which was in their possession, made him give you a worthless mortgage, the entire sum out of which you were defrauded being returned to them as a price of the—hence. If these things are true you will be rendered almost penniless, and there is no telling where Mrs. King's money may have gone. In a very short time the facts will be disclosed; meanwhile pray take my advice and refuse to see Mr. Tully."

"Would you think better of him, Doctor, if I told you that he had not concealed these things from me; that he had described all the transactions of which you have heard, and shown me that he was the dupe and tool of the conscienceless wretch with whom he has been in partnership? And I believed him, Doctor, every word he told me I believed was true." As she spoke she raised her head proudly, almost defiantly, as if determined to face the world and hold to faith and love.

"Yes, child, I can understand that he may have told you, but we must be worldly in this matter, must look at the motives which impelled him to the confession. The crisis has been coming and he must have known that he could conceal it from you but a little longer. Was it not the most natural thing in the world for him to prepare a way of retreat? Just think now, did he come to you and tell you these things in self-defence or to counsel with you after the first wrong had been perpetrated as to the course he should pursue in future? Wasn't it after all the evil had been done? Did he make any struggle after the discovery of the first mistake—if you are charitable enough to call it a mistake—to set himself right, or even to undo the wrong."

"It was not until a few days ago that I would permit him to speak to me; he had no opportunity to do as you say," answered Dell, quickly.

"But, my child, he might have written."

"Yes; but remember, Doctor, he only made the discovery of the web that had been woven about him a few days ago. Then he came and told me everything, and the disclosures which have since been made were caused by his determination to force Killick to rectify, as far as was in the firm's power, the wrongs they had done. I am sure, when everything is known, that what he told me will be found to be true."

"I hope so, I hope so, but I fear not," said the Doctor, slowly. "I fear not, my poor little friend; I fear not," and he sighed heavily and shook his head.

"But I don't fear. I know, as sure as I live," cried Dell, both her hands pressed tightly over her heart. "I am as sure as I am that there is a heaven that he told me the whole truth; that he was innocent of any intention to do wrong in the things of which you tell me. He made a bad mistake some time ago, before poor Mr. King died, which placed him in Killick's power; but as to defrauding his clients, or trying to rob me, or being in Killick's confidence even, in the wicked things that that repulsive old man has been perpetrating, I am sure he will be proved innocent."

"Possibly, possibly, but you can afford to wait a few days,"

answered the Doctor, his voice sad and incredulous. "Don't be rash, run away out of the city on a visit until things take shape. Come now, you can do that without appearing unfaithful."

"But could I do it without *being* unfaithful? If he ever needed a friend he needs one now. If, when you told me I should reach down and try to raise the fallen, no matter who or where, you meant anything, you must believe that I have a duty now to him to help and strengthen him and prevent him from becoming reckless in his despair," retorted Nell, quickly.

"Yes, but my dear, it is unnecessary to sacrifice yourself."

"You told me the last time you were here that if one does right and trusts in God with a pure heart, evil cannot come. Can't I trust in Him now and dare to do right?"

"But wait, wait my child, for a day or two. If he loves you he will be strong and make the fight as well without you as with you. He won't know that you have heard that everything has become public and can't be wounded by thinking you false to him."

"But I should be false to him, nevertheless, and to myself. I would go to him now, Doctor Strong this moment but the letter—the letter I sent him last night, it—it makes it impossible."

"In what way," asked the clergyman, with surprise.

"I was afraid he had asked me to marry him because he had lost my money and was anxious to do what he could do to save me from poverty and the consequences of his mistakes. I was afraid that it was his generosity rather than his love that prompted the offer. He told me of his trouble with that Miss Burnham, that she saved him once from the exposure of the mistake which got him into Killick's power, and that in a burst of gratitude, knowing that she cared for him, he promised to marry her. I was afraid he had done the same to me and would perhaps repent it as he did in the other case. I was oh, so unhappy, so utterly miserable, and I have been so self-deluded that I wrote to him that I would not see him again."

"I sympathize with you," answered the Doctor, his broad hand resting upon the plaits of her brown hair, "but it almost seems as if Providence had guided your pen. It will now be easier for you to evade him for a few days until your friends find out to what extent he is a partner in Killick's guilt."

"Doctor, I know I should look up to you for advice in this matter, yet I feel that I am doing wrong in not going to him and offering him my sympathy when he needs it so badly. I feel like a coward, for I do not need to wait to have his truth proved. I believe in him absolutely. Since you tell me that he is in trouble, I can understand that his offer was not prompted by a desire to make atonement, but because he loved me."

"You are right, my little friend," replied the Doctor evasively; "you should look to me for advice at a time like this, and I advise you to wait."

"Only for a little while though, Doctor; only for a little while," asked Dell, pitifully, "it won't be for long, will it?"

"No; only a day or two," answered the Doctor, cheerfully, "and I assure you it will be better for everyone concerned. It will relieve my conscience, and you will not be walking in the dark."

"I am going to Mrs. Flambert's. She was here this morning and asked me to stay with her a little while. She feels as you do. I suppose I would be very headstrong to refuse to listen to you."

And so it happened that Dell had left 25 Mowburn Street when Tully came to seek her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN.

During the day following Killick's death Tully was surprised to find his office besieged by clients anxious to obtain sight of mortgages or to obtain a statement of account. He thought it strange that at a time of affliction people with whom they had been doing business should be so anxious to have a statement, but early in the afternoon he heard the rumors which had been the cause of something very much like a "run" on their office, and had no difficulty in tracing them to Chandler. In every instance he had been able to satisfy those who had called that everything was all right, shown them the papers, the contents of which they took pains to state they had forgotten and from which they wished to refresh their memory. There was plenty of money in the bank to the firm's credit, and as soon as Tully found the meaning of the excitement it was not a difficult matter to quiet his clients. Stopping the stories themselves, however, he knew would be a different matter. That the firm was suspected of having been engaged in crooked business and his own reputation was involved; that the death of his partner had left him to bear the burden of Killick's wrong doing, staggered him. After long years of recklessness his name and reputation must now be the target for all mud-throwing envy! The newspapers, too, would discuss the matter, and if Cora Burnham felt inclined to complete her revenge, now was certainly the time she would act. So at last everything would have to come out and the villainous record of his partner would become so associated with the stories of his own dissipa-

tion and irregularity that forever afterwards he would be taluted and besmirched beyond hope of ever being able to rehabilitate himself. How could he ever hold up his head in the city again? The thought of all these things made his brow darken and he ground his teeth with a fierce determination to fight it through.

"If Dell were only with me I could face a thousand furies," he said, half aloud; and with the thought of her the scowl left his handsome face, and throwing himself back in his chair he almost smiled as the idea suggested itself to him that, blackened by calumny and rendered friendless and poor by loss of business, Dell could not suspect him of offering himself as a sacrifice for having wasted her fortune. "I shall be able to convince her, thank God, that she is the one making the sacrifice, and I the one receiving the favor." As his thoughts thus turned in a more hopeful direction, he was beginning almost to congratulate himself that his persecutor was dead and that Providence, after all, was directing his future and bringing him safely through the trial, when Teddy Grigsby's tall and ungainly form appeared at the door of his private room. That his errand was not a pleasant one was evident from his extreme embarrassment and a woful and intensified awkwardness, which made it almost impossible for him to seat himself in the chair which Tully had pushed toward him, without falling down.

"What is the matter with you, Grigsby," inquired Tully, with the cheerfulness which he had all day assumed in the presence of his clients, "you come in with the graceful and funereal manner of a kind hearted sheriff who finds it his painful duty to take the prisoner out and hang him. Unburden yourself, old fellow; don't feel afraid of hurting me. I have had a siege of it all day and can stand almost anything now."

Grigsby sat on the edge of his chair, leaning forward, anxiously scrutinising Tully's face. He pushed his spectacles close up to his eyes, fidgeted about with his hands and then began:

"I hear that you are in trouble, Tully—that Killick's death has disclosed a series of frauds and—and—and villainies in fact; which is likely to ruin you and everyone whose money you have been handling. Is it true, Tully? Has Dell Browning been robbed of the money left in your care for her?"

"Grigsby," answered Tully, steadily, "Killick has not been doing the straight thing, but if God in his wisdom ever struck a man down in order to defeat his plans for the ruin of others, he has done it in the present instance. I do not believe Killick expected to die, I don't imagine that his plans were so matured that his death will not defeat them. He was an exceedingly

wealthy man and I haven't the slightest doubt that everything we owe we shall be able to pay. That he contrived for some diabolical reason of his own to have Miss Browni.g's money invested in worthless securities I admit. I shall endeavor to make our firm responsible; if this cannot be done I will devote the rest of my life to repaying the money I have been the instrument of losing, and I can assure you, old fellow, that it was carelessness and not fraud on my part."

"Then you have lost her money, have you?" demanded Grigsby, straightening up.

"Yes, I fear that the most of it is gone."

"Then Tully, all I have to say to you is, that you are no friend of mine, that you deserve the worst that has been said about you. You are too good a lawyer to excuse yourself by calling it a mistake. I would never have believed it of you. It will take evidence which I am afraid you can't produce to convince me that you are not an infernal rascal."

"I think I shall be able to produce that evidence, Teddy," answered Tully, sadly. "As an old friend, as one I have loved as a brother, withhold your judgment for a little while."

"I can't, Tully, I won't," cried Grigsby. "You have always been able to talk me over, I have always felt somehow that you had a license to do things which I would have considered criminal in myself, but I can't forgive this."

"Teddy," whispered Tully, putting his hand on Grigsby's shoulder and standing erect before him, "I love Dell Browning. You know that for years she has been my ideal of a good and beautiful woman. Why should you think me scoundrel enough to try and do her an injury? Have I been so brutal, so heartless, so utterly without conscience, that you can believe this of me?"

Teddy faltered. He could see the tears in Tully's eyes.

"I can only judge a man," said he, "by his actions. Yours have been those of a man who didn't care what happened, so long as it didn't happen to him. I can't change my opinion, though I wish to God I could. Will you be kind enough to give me all the papers in your office belonging to our firm? Our acquaintanceship and business dealings must end."

"It shall be as you say, Teddy. I now know that I am without a friend."

He went to the vault, selected the papers, insisted on Grigsby glancing over them, and then with a quiet dignity which impressed Teddy in spite of himself, bade him good evening. Returning to his private office, he stood at the window looking down on the street below, his heart heavy and his eyes almost unable to

restrain the tears. "If Grigsby believes it," he thought, "I need hope for no mercy from public opinion. Dell herself will believe me guilty."

He heard the door open sharply behind him, and turning around he stood face to face with John Stryde.

"What is this I hear, Tully?" demanded Stryde, his voice trembling with excitement and anger.

"I don't know what you have heard," answered Tully, bitterly; "no thing good, I presume."

"I have heard that you have squandered every cent of trust money in your possession; that Killick's death has brought things to a crisis; that the firm is bankrupt, and that you and that dead villain have used me as a dupe, and that not only Dell Browning's money, but Mrs. King's has been squandered."

"If you will sit down I will talk the matter over with you," answered Tully, defiantly, "but I have endured so much to-day that I can't enter into any discussion with a man who insists on stigmatising me as a rascal before he knows the facts. Chandler has been circulating all sorts of infernal lies, and this office has been a pandemonium all day. I would like to have your good opinion, and I certainly expect that even if I have forfeited it you will not do any talking until you know what you are talking about. All that has been done is past and no amount of talking will alter it."

"But has the money been lost?" insisted Stryde, hoarsely.

"I am not aware of a cent of Mrs. King's money having been lost or misapplied. As far as the investment of Dell Browning's money is concerned I was as innocent of any intention to do wrong as you were. I am as anxious to make reparation as you are. Tomorrow after the funeral Scott and I intend to go into the matter thoroughly. My whole day has been employed satisfying my clients that their affairs are perfectly straight. If you will join us tomorrow afternoon we will look into this matter. In the meantime, Stryde," added Tully, bitterly, "in your righteousness do not judge me too harshly. If you are a Christian act like one until I am proven unworthy of even that mercy which God is willing to show to the vilest sinner."

"You have no reason, Tully, to speak to me in this way. I am not an old woman; I don't go about tattling scandals. I have asked you a business question—give me a straight answer."

"My answer, Mr. Stryde, is, that this firm is perfectly solvent; that while Killick has been manipulating stocks and following out some infernal scheme to ruin me and half a dozen others, he has made money at every turn. As far as I am aware his estate will

satisfy ten times over every claim that can be brought against the firm. I am personally unaware of a cent of indebtedness to anybody which is not covered by our balance in the bank; and though no doubt you will refuse to believe me, I assure you that I have done nothing unprofessional; was not implicated in any irregularity, except as I told you I was careless in looking into the title of that Moore property. We shall go into this matter to-morrow; it would be useless for me to endeavor to hide anything from you now, as the facts will then be disclosed. In the meantime, any man who says to you that I have been doing anything crooked, if you are a friend of mine, you can stigmatize as a slanderer; if you are not a friend of mine, you can suggest that he had better hold his tongue till he knows the facts."

With a crusty "Good evening," Stryde gave Tully a look full of suspicion and left the room.

It was after six o'clock, and the clerks had all gone. Tully sat in his office, bruised and dejected, after his interview with Grigsby and Stryde. The gas had not been lit in his private room, and in the half-darkness he lay back in his chair thinking with bitter hopelessness of the task before him.

"If she were only here to help me," he thought, "I wouldn't care for the rest of the world; but to have everyone against me, no one to whisper a word of encouragement, and even Grigsby cutting my acquaintance, it is enough to drive a man to desperation. A month ago it would have driven me to drink. Funny, I hadn't thought of drink through all this worry; it never struck me as the easiest escape from this load of shame. I must be getting some strength, for temptation doesn't come to me as it used to, and to-day, whenever there has been no one here to bully and berate me, my thoughts have all turned to her. For her sake I could be stretched on the rack if I were only sure that she loved me, and if she stood by with her hand in mine I could see every dollar either of us ever had or expect to have sunk to the bottom of the sea and be supremely happy. She can't know what I have to undergo or she would have sent me some little message to make me brave. How gentle, how loving she was; what a heaven this troublesome earth seemed when for that sweet moment it held no one but Dell and me. And yet—and yet—she is gone. I cannot plead with her, I cannot explain the frightful things she will hear. Every hour may be fixing a great gulf between us."

The torture of this thought seemed insupportable; he rose from his chair and walked excitedly up and down the room. If he lost her what would become of him? Could he make the fight alone? For her sake he would try. He stopped for a moment and looked

out upon the brightly illuminated street, his arm leaning against the casing of the window, and his face resting upon it; though his lips were tightly drawn and his brow was knit with deep determination, his eyes filled with tears and a choking sob told how bitter was the thought of a future from which the angel of hope would be forever absent.

"I shall never give up," thought he. "It may take years yet, but I shall make her believe in me. As long as I know that she is not entirely lost to me I can keep on trying. I can live on, though every day be a new misery, and at last God cannot but forgive me, and give her to me."

He did not notice the sleigh which stopped in the street below, nor heed the steps ascending the stair.

"Is Mither Tully in, d'ye say, mum? 'Dade I don't know, mum, but there is somewan in his office, mum, and I'll ask who it is, if your leddyship would loike me to, but I'm thinking who'ver it is would loike to be alone, mum, for he is wandering up an' down the room in the dark, mum!"

The sound of the voice of the old Irish woman, who was cleaning out the office, startled Tully, and he turned away from the window, hurriedly wiping his eyes, to face the intruder. He opened the door in answer to the old Irishwoman's knock, and as she stood bowing apologetically before him, her sleeves and skirts rolled up, she explained, "There is a leddy, sor, two av thim, sor, would loike to see ye, sor."

"Show them in, Mrs. Murphy," he answered, at the same time feeling in his pocket for a match, and speaking loudly enough to discourage a long interview. "It is after business hours, but I suppose at a time like this I must refuse no one."

The match did not light, and he was trying another, when a fur-robed figure entered the door. The lighted match dropped from his fingers and he sprang forward and clasped the outstretched hands of Dell Browning.

"You here?" he cried. "I had expected it as little as the coming of an angel from heaven."

"The scrub, scrub, and swish of the discreet old Irishwoman's brush on the remotest part of the floor, showed that she did not propose to be a witness of the interview. Mrs. Flambert, who had accompanied Dell, had dropped into a chair by one of the desks, and there was no one to see the clinging of Dell's arms about her lover's neck, or to look with unsympathetic eyes on the kisses, tender and reverential, which Tully pressed upon the beautiful face upturned to his.

"I could not stay away, dear. When I heard the terrible stories

that people are telling, I knew how unjust they were to you. It seems as if some power, stronger than my own, forced me to come and tell you that I love you. I knew how hard these things must be to bear, and I felt like a coward that I was not helping you to bear them. When I found you were in such trouble, I understood that you had not asked me to marry you to help me out of my difficulties—and I came to you!"

Tully, poor fellow, could not speak. As she looked up at him, her glorious eyes so full of devotion, when he found the prayer, which had been echoing through his heart all day, answered just as his suffering had become almost insupportable, his strength gave way and the tears streamed down his white and haggard face. For a few moments his only answer was the passionate clasp with which he held her close to his wildly beating heart.

Dell seemed to understand, and yet she longed to be assured in words that her coming was welcome. "Can't you tell me, she whispered, "that you are really and truly glad to see me?"

"Dell, my love, I cannot speak," he answered, unsteadily. "It seems almost like sacrilege for me to attempt to tell you how much your coming means to me. It is almost as if you were the messenger of God's forgiveness, and one can hardly imagine the sinner who hears in his ears at judgment the voice of God's mercy looking up and being able to thank Him for it."

"Were you sorry when you thought I had gone away, did you miss me very much?" she asked, still anxious to hear assurances of his love.

"Sweetheart, need I tell you? Is there not something better than my words assures you that it was desolation to me? Through the long nights I thought of you, dreamed of you, and prayed that we might not be separated; through this evil and bitter day I have been sustained by thoughts of you."

"Oh, my love! Can you forgive me for not coming to you sooner?" whispered Dell.

"Forgive you, my sweetheart? Do you know what this means? Do you understand that your coming to me, though it strengthens me, must not mean that you are to assume any part of my burden just now. You have given me the strength of a giant to bear the trials before me, but you must not share them with me. I can't tell what may happen. Some of Killick's victims may seek to be revenged on me and cause my arrest. I cannot tell what he has done. I do not imagine that he has transgressed the law, he understood it too well; but he may have come so near the debatable ground that I, as his partner, will be liable to some process intended to accomplish a revenge and inflict disgrace by imprison

ment. I repeat now what I told you before, that I have done nothing which need make me fear investigation. Until it is all over I sha'n't ask to see you again; I must not see you again."

Dell's arms were still about his neck. "Dear," she murmured, her lips close to his, "I shall see you every day if I have to go to the jail to see you. When I decided that I believed in you—though long before that I knew I loved you—I cast in my lot with yours, and unto the end I will be faithful."

"Sweetheart," answered Tully tenderly, "impose no burden of duty on yourself. I am now strong enough to stand alone until this trouble is over. I would feel unmanly if I laid on your shoulders any of the burden that I should myself bear. The knowledge that you love me, and that when all is over I can claim you, is sufficient."

"For you, perhaps, but not for me," answered Dell, her face beaming with the devotion which meant that no sacrifice would be too great to be made for him she loved. "We must not again be separated."

The rustling of skirts in the outer office, and a short premonitory cough, announced Mrs. Flambert's approach, but the lovers did not move. After the dark days and the great trials through which they had passed, they felt no shame in their affection.

"Well, I declare! you are a pair of very interesting spoonies," exclaimed Mrs. Flambert, as she stood in the doorway. "I endeavored to announce my coming with sufficient distinctness to have you prepared to receive me. However, I can excuse it; it is a long time ago, but I was that way once myself. You must not stay any longer, Dell; it will excite public remark if my sleigh is kept at the door of Mr. Tully's office any longer. You may come up with her if you like, Tully; but I want you to understand that I advised her with all my hitherto unsurpassed powers of persuasion to keep away from here. I am not sure that you are as proper a young man as I used to think you."

"I hope you don't believe the rumors about me, Mrs. Flambert. When I was really a bad man you saved me from being worse by believing in me. Now that I am trying to do right I hope you won't desert me."

"Oh Tully, Tully, you rascal, you can always wheedle me—but other people? How are you going to persuade them that you have done what is right?"

"To-morrow shall prove me innocent of any wrong doing. I may have been a fool—Killick's dupe—but in this case I am not so black as I am painted. I shall not come up to-night, but to-morrow night, after the examination of our affairs by some gentlemen I have appointed for that purpose, I shall come and tell you the worst."

"I want to ask you something, Tully," exclaimed Mrs. Flambert, her voice changing, "are you in the good or bad graces of Mrs. Killick?"

"I am sure I can't tell you, Mrs. Flambert. I never saw her till yesterday, but she seems to be a pure and gentle woman. Why do you ask?"

"Because she sent for Dell to attend the funeral, and says that she has something of importance to communicate to her afterwards. What can it be?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, Mrs. Flambert. Surely she can't be in her scoundrelly husband's plot to ruin Dell and myself. She seems incapable of anything of the kind."

"Well, I don't know what it is, but Dr. Strong made me promise to bring Dell. If you come up at night we will be able to tell you all about it. Come now, Dell, we must go."

"Good night, dear," said Dell, and as Tully bent down his head to kiss her she whispered, "no matter what it is, it can't separate us."

CHAPTER XXX.

A SCENE FROM A RUINED LIFE.

The funeral was over; the repulsive face of James Killick was forever hidden from the gaze of his fellow-men by the coffin lid. Those who assumed to mourn for him had carried him to his last resting-place. The oppressive odour of flowers and the solemn voice of the clergyman seemed yet to linger in the desolate room. Dr. Strong, who had not been the officiating clergyman, he being a favorite of Mrs. Killick, but not of her deceased husband, together with Dell Browning and Mrs. Flambert, were sitting by the bedside of the invalid widow.

Dell was irresistibly attracted by the sweet faced woman who lay propped up by pillows, and the hand clasp which united them introduced a silence which lasted for several minutes.

"My dear," said the invalid to Dell, "I have been told you are proud and unforgiving, but in your face I see nothing but a gentleness and love which encourage me to tell you a story which I was forbidden to tell while my husband was alive. I am your aunt. Twenty-five years ago your father and I loved one another as brother and sister seldom do. He was ten years my senior and devoted himself to me and my happiness. When he married I was lonely, and James Killick, who in his infancy had been taken from a foundling asylum and adopted by my father and cared for almost

as kindly as if he had been his son, returned to our house to look after father's affairs, he having lost his first wife. He had won my confidence and I soon, foolish girl, thought that I loved him. By his address and ability he had gained a place in our household which he was not originally intended to have, and when he returned with the experience of a man of the world, he had a power which you would hardly suspect him of possessing. Lying here and thinking about the past I cannot conceive the supreme folly, the forgetfulness of the mean traits of his character, which induced me to listen to his proposal that we should run away and be married—we both knew my proud old father would never consent to such a mesalliance. But listen to him I did, and a life of misery has been my reward. My brother—your father—was furious. He sought us out, knocked my husband down and beat him unmercifully in his passion. When he found out that we were married he cast me off, and swore that he would never speak to me again. My father, too, was irreconcilable, and he died soon after without forgiving me. When Killick heard that your father, who had left England, had settled in Toronto he followed, determined some day to be revenged, for he hated your father with the most deadly hatred and vowed that he would live to see both him and you beggared. A few weeks ago he boasted to me that at last he had succeeded. Is it true?"

"I am afraid I have lost some of my money, but not all of it. I really don't know yet," answered Dell, hesitatingly, "but it doesn't matter. I have plenty of friends, you see!"

"Mr. Killick often boasted to me that he was a very rich man. It seemed to give him pleasure to tell me about it, and then say I should never enjoy any of it. He is dead now, and I should speak no evil of him; but he hated me, from the day your father beat him, almost as fiercely as he did my brother. He died trying to make his will. Even if he had already made one, Dr. Strong says he could not leave all his property away from me—and there may be enough in my portion to repair some of the mischief he has done. If there is, you shall not be poor, my dear. I shall not live to need anything very long.

"Poor aunt, you must not talk about money or dying. Think of living and being happy. Now that—that—that your husband's persecutions have ceased there is nothing to prevent you from getting well. I have no father or mother; you can be both to me."

Dell had seated herself on the side of the bed, and the invalid threw her arms about her, and Dell, in response, had caught her aunt's wasted form in her embrace.

"An exceedingly strong likeness," whispered Dr. Strong to Mrs. Flambert."

"Yes, Mrs. Killick looks as Dell may twenty years hence, but I hope the poor child won't pass through such trials as that unfortunate woman has endured."

"Thoughts of money have never troubled me, my dear Dell, until now," continued Mrs. Killick; "but I am very anxious to know whether Mr. Killick left any will, and in what condition his property is. We shall know this afternoon, for Mr. Tully and some gentlemen he has called in to represent me are going all through his papers. Mr. Tully seems to be a gentleman, I never saw him until the day before yesterday. I have been afraid Mr. Killick would spoil him, but when he came to me he seemed so manly and good-hearted, I trusted him at once. Do you know him?" questioned the invalid, to whom the outside world was a blank.

"Yes," stammered Dell, blushing to the roots of her hair. No matter how many years a woman has been away from society and from contact with her sex, she never forgets how to read her sister-woman, but Dell's tell-tale face would have been an open book to the most obtuse.

"Ah, I see! And does he love you?"

Dr. Strong and Mrs. Flambert found it convenient to look out of the window, while Dell pressed her flushed cheek against the pale face of the sufferer and whispered, "Yes, he has told me so."

"So my sweet little girlie has already made her choice, and it is not a bad one. I am sure he will be kind to you. He has his faults, Dell. We bedridden folks can often read faces better than those who see so many that they never mark the difference. But you can manage him. I will tell you some day just how I think you ought to do it, but for fear that 'some day' should never come, I will tell you one thing now. Always be strong; be his model of what is right in thinking and doing, but never be cross and scold. But you couldn't scold, could you? After he went away the other day, I could not forget his face. I wondered what his wife was like, or if he had one, and how he treated her, and how a woman could best succeed with such a man. I have so little to think about, you know, Dell. Every strange face in my room has been a rare glimpse of the outside world. They have been very few. Mr. Killick did not like it, and the orders have always been to the servant at the door to say that I was not well enough to see anyone, though a very few who insisted have occasionally come in to give me something to think about. I would just like to live two or three little months longer to see you happy. My lesson has been such a bitter one that perhaps I might assist you to begin right. I began wrong, but I have tried to do right and be patient, though, my dear, my patience has sometimes been

exhausted, and I have had to suffer for it. Couldn't you come and stay with me, Dell? But no, something terrible might be disclosed by my husband's death, and you shall not share my disgrace. It will only be a little longer—I must not be selfish. Wait till we know the worst."

Dell protested her disregard of public opinion, but Mrs. Killick would not listen. "Nothing must be said of our relationship. I disgraced the family once, I sha'n't do it again," and no persuasion could move her from this resolution.

After they had gone, Mr. Tully and Mr. Scott returning from the cemetery called to obtain permission to look through the papers in Mr. Killick's desk in the library beneath.

"You may look through them, Mr. Tully, I want Mr. Scott to remain with me for a few moments. You will find writing materials over there," said she to Mr. Scott, wearily. "I want to make my will; it won't take you long. Everything I have I leave to my niece, Dell Browning, my brother's daughter, and if it exceeds fifty thousand dollars she is to use what is required of the remainder to recompense all those my husband has directly injured by defrauding them of money. You understand what I mean, don't you, Mr. Scott?"

"Yes, madam," answered the stately old lawyer. In fifteen minutes the document was prepared, and the nurse and manservant were called in as witnesses. As she said good night to the two lawyers she whispered faintly, "Now if I die all will be well."

In the office, assisted by the senior clerks, all the papers in Mr. Killick's safe were carefully examined. No will could be found and but few papers which at all compromised the dead man. His private account book, carefully kept, proved him to be worth over half a million dollars, nearly a hundred thousand of which had been obtained from his manipulation of the Loan Company's stock. The thirty thousand he had received from Col. Moore had been duly entered. Without further knowledge of his transactions it was impossible to find any traces of criminal or even improper methods.

It was nine o'clock before Tully rang the door bell at the magnificent Flambert mansion. He was elated by the result of the search; he, at least, would not be disgraced. Lawyer Scott, with professional reticence, had told him nothing of Mrs. Killick's will, and there was not a sordid impulse within him, when a few moments later, Dell entered the reception room alone, and he caught her in his arms, exclaiming:

"My darling, all is well; we can pay everything we owe, and there will be no disgraceful disclosures involving the firm; even your property, I hope, will be saved!"

"I'm so glad for your sake," answered Dell, looking lovingly up into his excited face. "You have suffered so much. You were so long coming, I was afraid something was wrong."

"It is all over now, my sweetheart. To-day shuts out the past. I begin a new life, and with you by my side I can make it such that you won't be ashamed to share it with me."

"Look out, young people, I am coming," cried Mrs. Flambert in the hall. "I am just dying to hear the news; I can't wait another minute. Mr. Tully, what is the result of your investigation? Is Mr. Killick as bad a man as I have always thought him, or has he died rich and left his memory to be respected?"

"He died rich, Mrs. Flambert, and his memory, as far as I can find out, will not be any more cursed than that of the ordinary rich man, whose entrance into heaven is described as likely to be so difficult. As far as I can find out by examining his papers there is nothing against him except some stock manipulation and his scheme to deprive Dell of her money."

"And you—now honestly and truly, young man—are you out of the woods?"

"Yes, thank Heaven, I have nothing to fear. There is no act of my own of which I am ashamed, that is——" looking appealingly at Dell and blushing painfully, "since long ago. I feel positive that everything will come out all right. Do you know old Killick was worth a half a million dollars! Scott and I figured it up in his private account book. That ought to be enough to protect the firm from any claims which may be brought against it."

"Then you are a free man, are you, Tully," inquired Mrs. Flambert, looking at him searchingly, "and can marry Dell without being afraid of bringing disgrace upon her for your actions either past or future."

"Ah, Mrs. Flambert, the past is rolled up like a scroll. I am not afraid that it will ever appear against me. The future, with God's help and Dell beside me, I have vowed shall be worthy of the pure love I have won and the pure wife—it won't be long, will it, Dell, before you are my wife!—on whose name any disgrace of mine would leave a blot which would burn into her soul more than it would into mine."

"Dell," exclaimed Mrs. Flambert, with a burst of her old enthusiasm, "would you mind if I kissed him just once, and only on the cheek? I feel like a mother to that young scamp, and I believe that at last he has learned sense enough to behave himself." With this Mrs. Flambert threw her by no means slender arms around Mr. Tully and kissed his cheek with a maternal fondness, which proved that she had no more fears of his future.

Dr. Strong, too, who had been unable to resist the impulse to hear the news, came in and congratulated Dell and Tully on the result. "I really don't know, my young friends, whether I dare claim any credit for myself; I've been on both sides of the question, don't you see; but then we poor parsons have to be with both factions for society's sake," he added, with a quizzical side look at Dell.

The astute Mr. Scott next morning so managed it that the daily papers when announcing the funeral of James J. Killick, also chronicled the fact that he had died worth at least half a million dollars, and the clients of the old firm felt no more uneasiness. As Cora Burnham scanned this paragraph in the morning paper she told her father that it would be much better for them to effect a settlement with Col. Moore than to engage in a law suit, if the honor of so wealthy a firm was implicated.

"I know Tully," said she, "too well to imagine—under present circumstances—that he would permit any imputation to rest on his professional honor, and if this matter comes to a fight it will be impossible for us to win in the protracted law suit which would be the result." With this in view they held a consultation in the afternoon and instructed Mr. Chandler to offer Col. Moore fifty thousand dollars to abandon his title to his estates and acknowledge them the heirs of the English property. Astounded at his good fortune he consented, and the matter never went into court. Mrs. Killick, after a searching investigation, sent her check to the Loan Company for the amount which her husband had secured by the fraudulent loans given to his tools, and as the sum amounted to nearly a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the company was saved from ruin. Tully notified Col. Moore when he became aware of the settlement which had been effected between him and his uncle, that the mortgage made to Miss Browning would be cancelled, as it was evident that Mr. Killick had received the money, and thus the calamities which impended over the firm of Killick & Tully faded away; and when a few months later Mrs. Killick succumbed to her long illness, Mrs. Stephen Tully was left heiress to a sum which made her one of the wealthiest women in the city.

Cora Burnham, with her father and mother, sailed for England to prove their title to their property there, and have not since returned.

Mrs. King's widowhood shows no sign of mourning, and the gaiety of her house suggests her effort to forget her old folly and find opportunities for new ones. Poor little Jack, who had been sent away to school before Dell left 25 Mowburn Street, sees little of his mother, but once a week Auntie Dell calls upon the little

fellow and brightens his life by her caresses and loving remembrances of their old acquaintanceship.

It was once esteemed the duty of a story teller to dispose—either by death or marriage—of all the characters who incidentally appeared in his pages, but I might say in bidding my readers adieu that when people are not disposed of in life it would be folly for the writer to settle their future in fiction. Bee McKinley is still unmarried, though it is her own fault. John Stryde is devoting himself more vigorously than ever to his missionary work—and incidentally to Bee McKinley; while Stephen Tully has not shown the slightest sign of relapsing into his old habits, but is alike faithful to his resolution and true to his sweetheart.

April 26th
1907

T. M. F.

THE END.

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