

The Ramrodders eBook

The Ramrodders

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Page 1

THE BAITING OF THE ANCIENT LION

War and Peace had swapped corners that morning in the village of Fort Canibas. War was muttering at the end where two meeting-houses placidly faced each other across the street. Peace brooded over the ancient blockhouse, relic of the “Bloodless War,” and upon the structure that Thelismer Thornton had converted from officers’ barracks to his own uses as a dwelling.

At dawn a telegraph messenger jangled the bell in the dim hall of “The Barracks.” It was an urgent cry from the chairman of the Republican State Committee. It announced his coming, and warned the autocrat of the North Country of the plot. The chairman knew. The plotters had been betrayed to him, and from his distance he enjoyed a perspective which is helpful in making political estimates. But Thelismer Thornton only chuckled over Luke Presson’s fears. He went back to bed for another nap.

When he came down and ate breakfast alone in the big mess-room, which he had not allowed the carpenters to narrow by an inch, he was still amused by the chairman’s panic. As a politician older than any of them, a man who had served his district fifty years in the legislature, he refused to believe—intrenched there in his fortress in the north—that there was danger abroad in the State.

“Reformers, eh?” He sneered the word aloud in the big room of echoes. “Well, I can show them one up here. There’s Ivus Niles!”

And at that moment Ivus Niles was marching into the village from the Jo Quacca hills, torch for the tinder that had been prepared. It is said that a cow kicked over a lantern that started the conflagration of its generation. In times when political tinder is dry there have been great men who have underestimated reform torches.

It was a bland June morning. The Hon. Thelismer Thornton was bland, too, in agreement with the weather. A good politician always agrees with what cannot be helped.

He stood in the door of “The Barracks” and gazed out upon the rolling St. John hills—a lofty, ponderous hulk of a man, thatched with white hair, his big, round face cherubic still in spite of its wrinkles. He lighted a cigar, and gazed up into the cloudless sky with the mental endorsement that it was good caucus weather. Then he trudged out across the grass-plot and climbed into his favorite seat. It was an arm-chair set high in the tangle of the roots of an overturned spruce-tree. The politicians of the county called that seat “The Throne,” and for a quarter of a century the Hon. Thelismer Thornton had been nicknamed “The Duke of Fort Canibas.” Add that the nicknames were not ill bestowed. Such was the Hon. Thelismer Thornton.

He had brought newspapers in his pockets. He set his eyeglasses on his bulging nose, and began to read.

In the highway below him teams went jogging into the village. There were fuzzy Canadian horses pulling buckboards sagging under the weight of all the men who could cling on. There were top carriages and even a hayrack well loaded with men.

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Occasionally the old man lifted his gaze from his reading and eyed the dusty wayfarers benignantly. He liked to know that the boys were turning out to the caucus. His perch was a lofty one. He could see that the one long street of Fort Canibas was well gridironed with teams—horses munching at hitching-posts, wagons thrusting their tails into the roadway.

It was quiet at Thornton's end of the village. There was merely twitter of birds in the silver poplar that shaded his seat, busy chatter of swallows, who were plastering up their mud nests under the eaves of the old blockhouse across the road from him. It was so quiet that he could hear a tumult at the other end of the village; it was a tumult for calm Fort Canibas. A raucous voice bellowed oratory of some sort, and yells and laughter and cheers punctuated the speech. Thornton knew the voice, even at that distance, for the voice of "War Eagle" Niles. He grinned, reading his paper. The sound of that voice salted the article that he was skimming:

"—and the fight is beginning early this year. The reform leaders say they find the sentiment of the people to be with them, and so the reformers propose to do their effective work at the caucuses instead of waiting to lock horns with a legislature and lobby controlled by the old politicians of the State. There is a contest on even in that impregnable fortress of the old regime, the 'Duchy of Canibas.' It is said that the whole strength of the State reform movement is quietly behind the attempt to destroy Thelismer Thornton's control in the north country. His is one of the earliest caucuses, and the moral effect of the defeat of that ancient autocrat will be incalculable."

Still more broadly did Thornton smile. "War Eagle" Niles, down there, was a reformer. For forty years he had been bellowing against despots and existing order, and, for the Duke of Fort Canibas, he typified "Reform!" Visionary, windy, snarling, impracticable attempts to smash the machine!

Therefore, in his serene confidence—the confidence of an old man who has founded and knows the solidity of the foundations—Thelismer Thornton smoked peacefully at one end of the village of Fort Canibas, and allowed rebellion to roar at its pleasure in the other end.

Then he saw them coming, heard the growing murmur of many voices, the cackle of occasional laughter, and took especial note of "War Eagle" Ivus Niles, who led the parade. A fuzzy and ancient silk hat topped his head, a rusty frock-coat flapped about his legs, and he tugged along at the end of a cord a dirty buck sheep. A big crowd followed; but when they shuffled into the yard of "The Barracks" most of the men were grinning, as though they had come merely to look on at a show. The old man in his aureole of roots gazed at them with composure, and noted no hostility.

Niles and his buck sheep stood forth alone. The others were grouped in a half circle. Even upon the "War Eagle," Thornton gazed tolerantly. There was the glint of fun in his

eyes when Niles formally removed his silk hat, balanced it, crown up, in the hook of his elbow, and prepared to deliver his message.

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"The dynasty of the house of Thornton must end to-day!" boomed Niles, in his best orotund.

Thornton found eyes in the crowd that blinked appreciation. Quizzical wrinkles deepened in his broad face. He plucked a cigar from his waistcoat-pocket and held it down toward Mr. Niles.

"No, sir!" roared that irreconcilable. "I ain't holding out my porringer to Power—never again!"

"Power," repulsed, lighted the cigar from the one he was smoking, and snapped the butt at the sheep.

"I'm a lover of good oratory, Ivus," he said, placidly, "and I know you've come here loaded. Fire!" He clasped his upcocked knee with his big hands, fingers interlaced, and leaned back.

The crowd exchanged elbow-thrusts and winks. But the ripple of laughter behind did not take the edge off Mr. Niles's earnestness.

"Honorable Thornton, I do not mind your sneers and slurs. When I see my duty I go for it. I'm here before you to-day as Protest walking erect, man-fashion, on two legs, and with a visible emblem that talks plainer than words can talk. The people need visible emblems to remind them. Like I'm leading this sheep, so you have been leading the voters of this legislative district. The ring has been in here"—Mr. Niles savagely pinched the cartilage of his nose—"and you have held the end of the cord. That's the way you've been led, you people!" The orator whirled and included his concourse of listeners as objects of arraignment. "Here's the picture of you as voters right before your eyes. Do you propose to be sheep any longer?" He put his hat on his head, and shook a hairy fist at the Duke of Fort Canibas. "This ain't a dynasty, and you can't make it into one. I call on you to take note of the signs and act accordingly; for the people are awake and arming for the fray. And when the people are once awake they can't any more be bamboozled by a political despot than the war eagle, screaming across the blue dome of the everlasting heavens, will turn tail when he hears the twittering of a pewee!" Mr. Niles closed, as he always closed a speech, with the metaphor that had given him his sobriquet.

"That is real oratory, Ivus," stated Mr. Thornton, serenely; "I know it is, because a man who is listening to real oratory never understands what the orator is driving at."

The Hon. Thelismar Thornton usually spoke with a slow, dry, half-quizzical drawl. That drawl was effective now. He came down from his chair, carefully stepping on the roots, and loomed above Mr. Niles, amiable, tolerant, serene. His wrinkled crash suit, in

whose ample folds his mighty frame bulked, contrasted oddly with the dusty, rusty black in which Mr. Niles defied the heat of the summer day.

“Now I am down where I can talk business, Ivus. What’s the matter with you?”

“Look into the depths of your own soul, if you’ve got the moral eyesight to look through mud,” declaimed Mr. Niles, refusing to descend from polemics to plain business, “and you’ll see what is the matter. You have made yourself the voice by which this district has spoken in the halls of state for fifty years, and that voice is not the voice of the people!” He stood on tiptoe and roared the charge.

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"It is certainly not your voice that I take down to the State House with me," broke in their representative. "Freight charges on it would more than eat up my mileage allowance. Now let's call off this bass-drum solo business. Pull down your kite. To business!" He snapped his fingers under Mr. Niles's nose.

One of those in the throng who had not smiled stepped forth and spoke before the disconcerted "War Eagle" had recovered his voice.

"Since I am no orator, perhaps I can talk business to you, Representative Thornton." He was a grave, repressed, earnest man, whose sunburned face, bowed shoulders, work-stained hands, and general air proclaimed the farmer. "We've come here on a matter of business, sir."

"Led by a buck sheep and a human windmill, eh?"

"Mr. Niles's notions of tactics are his own. I'm sorry to see him handle this thing as he has. It was coming up in the caucus this afternoon in the right way." Thornton was listening with interest, and the man went on with the boldness the humble often display after long and earnest pondering has made duty plain. "When I saw Niles pass through the street and the crowd following, I was afraid that a matter that's very serious to some of us would be turned into horseplay, and so I came along, too. But I am not led by a buck sheep, Mr. Thornton, nor are those who believe with me."

"Believe what?"

"That, after fifty years of honors at our hands, you should be willing to step aside."

The Hon. Thelimer Thornton dragged up his huge figure into the stiffness of resentment. He ran searching eyes over the faces before him. All were grave now, for the sounding of the first note of revolt in a half century makes for gravity. The Duke of Fort Canibas could not distinguish adherents from foes at that moment, when all faces were masked with deep attention. His eyes came back to the stubborn spokesman.

"Walt Davis," he said, "your grandfather put my name before the caucus that nominated me for the legislature fifty years ago, and your father and you have voted for me ever since. You and every other voter in this district know that I do not intend to run again. I have announced it. What do you mean, then, by coming here in this fashion?"

"You have given out that you are going to make your grandson our next representative."

"And this ain't a dynasty!" roared Mr. Niles.

"Is there anything the matter with my grandson?" But Davis did not retreat before the bent brows of the district god.

“The trouble with him is, that he's your grandson.”

“And what fault do you find with me after all these years?” There was wrathful wonderment in the tone.

“If you're going to retire from office,” returned Mr. Davis, doggedly, “there's no need of raking the thing over to make trouble and hard feelings. I've voted for you, like my folks did before me. You're welcome to all those votes, Representative Thornton, but neither you nor your grandson is going to get any more. And as I say, so say many others in this district.”

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"No crowned heads, no rings in the noses of the people," declared Niles, yanking the cord and producing a bleat of fury from his emblematic captive.

"I don't stand for Niles and his monkey business," protested Davis. "I'm on a different platform. All is, we propose to be represented from now on; not *mis*-represented!"

Something like stupefaction succeeded the anger in the countenance of the Duke of Fort Canibas. Again he made careful scrutiny of the faces of his constituents. Then he turned his back on them and climbed up the twisted roots to his chair, sat down, faced them, caught his breath, and ejaculated, "Well, I'll be eternally d——d!"

He studied their faces for some time. But he was too good a politician to put much value on those human documents upraised to him. There were grins, subtle or humorous. There were a few scowls. One or two, tittering while they did it, urged the "War Eagle" on to fresh tirade. It was a mob that hardly knew its own mind, that was plain. But revolt was there. He felt it. It was one of those queer rebellions, starting with a joke for an excuse, but ready to settle into something serious. It was not so much hostility that he saw at that moment as something more dangerous—lack of respect.

"Look here, boys, I've been hearing that some of those cheap suckers from down State have been sneaking around this district. But I've never insulted you by believing you took any stock in that kind of cattle. We're neighbors here together. What's the matter with me? Out with your real grouch!"

"Look at this emblem I've brought," began Niles, oracularly, but Thornton was no longer in the mood that humored cranks. He jumped down, yanked the cord away from Niles, kicked the sheep and sent it scampering off with frightened bleats.

"If you fellows want an emblem, there's one," declared their indignant leader. "I'm all right for a joke—but the joke has got to stop when it has gone far enough."

He had sobered them. His disgusted glance swept their faces, and grins were gone. He went among them.

"Get around me, boys," he invited. "This isn't any stump speech. I'm going to talk business."

They did crowd around him, most of them, but Mr. Niles was still intractable. "You're right, it was your emblem just now! It has always been a kick from you and the rest of the high and mighty ones when you didn't want our wool."

"You're an infernal old liar and meddler, torched on by some one else!" retorted the Duke. "Now, boys, I see into this thing better than you do. Any time when I haven't used my district right, when I've betrayed you, or my word of advice isn't worth anything, I'll step out—and it won't need any bee of this kind to come around and serve notice on

me. But I understand just what this shivaree means. Sneaks have come in here and lied behind my back and fooled some of you. Fools need to be saved from themselves. There are men in this State who would peel to their political shirts if they could lick Thelimer Thornton in his own district just now when the legislative caucuses are beginning. But I won't let you be fooled that way!"

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"The name of 'Duke' fits you all right," piped Niles from a safe distance. "This is a dynasty and I've said it was, and now you're showing the cloven foot!"

Thornton disdained to reply. He continued to walk about among them. "They're trying to work you, boys," he went on. "I heard they were conniving to do business in this district, but I haven't insulted you by paying any attention to rumors. I want you to go down to that caucus this afternoon and vote for Harlan. You all know him. I'm an old man, and I want to see him started right before I get done. You all know what the Thorntons have done for you—and what they can do. I don't propose to see you swap horses while you're crossing the river."

But they did not rally in the good old way. There was something the matter with them. Those who dared to meet his gaze scowled. Those who looked away from him kept their eyes averted as though they were afraid to show their new faith. They had dared to march up to him behind Niles and his buck sheep, masking revolt under their grins. But Thornton realized that whoever had infected them had used the poison well. They had come to laugh; they remained to sulk. And they who had baited him with the unspeakable Niles understood their business when dealing with such an old lion as he.

"You need a guardian, you fellows," he said, contemptuously. "Your mutton marshal just fits you. But I'm going to keep you from buying the gold brick in politics you're reaching for now."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea, Squire Thornton, to let us run our own business awhile? You've done it for fifty years." It was still another of the rebels that spoke.

"If you had come to me like men, instead of playing hoodlums behind a lunatic and a sheep, I would have talked to you as men. But I say again you need a guardian."

"We won't vote for you nor none you name. We've been woke up."

The old man threw up both his hands and cracked his fingers into his palms. "And you're ready to take pap and paregoric from the first that come along, you infants!"

"You're showing yourself now, Duke Thornton!" shouted Niles. "You've used us like you'd use school-boys for fifty years, but you ain't dared to brag of it till now!"

Thornton strode out from among them. He tossed his big arms as though ridding himself of annoying insects. He had been stung out of self-control. It was not that he felt contempt for his people. He had always felt for them that sense of protection one assumes who has taken office from voters' hands for many years, has begged appropriations from the State treasury for them, has taken in hand their public affairs and administered them without bothering to ask advice. He realized all at once that jealousy and ingratitude must have been in their hearts for a long time. Now some

influence had made them bold enough to display their feelings. Thornton had seen that sort of revolt many times before in the case of his friends in the public service. He had always felt pride in the belief that his own people were different—that his hold on them was that of the patriarch whom they loved and trusted.

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The shock of it! He kept his face from them as he toiled up the steps of the old house. Tears sparkled in his eyes, sudden tears that astonished him. For a moment he felt old and broken and childish, and was not surprised that they had detected the weakness of a failing old man. He would have gone into "The Barracks" without showing them his face, but on the porch he was forced to turn. Some one had arrived, and arrived tempestuously. It was the Hon. Luke Presson, Chairman of the State Committee. He stepped down out of his automobile and walked around the crowd, spitting his gloved hands together, and looking them over critically. So he came to Thelismar Thornton, waiting on the steps, and shook his hand.

Mr. Presson was short and fat and rubicund, and, just now, plainly worried.

"This was the last place I expected to have to jump into, Thelismar," he complained. "I know the bunch has been wanting to get at you, but I didn't believe they'd try. I see that you and your boys here realize that you're up against a fight!"

Ha shuttled glances from face to face, and the general gloom impressed him. But it was plain that he did not understand that he was facing declared rebels.

"They've slipped five thousand dollars in here, Thelismar," he went on, speaking low. "They'd rather lug off this caucus than any fifty districts in the State."

"I don't believe there's men here that'll take money to vote against me," insisted Thornton. "But they've been lied to—that much I'll admit."

"You've been king here too long, Thelismar. You take too much for granted. They're bunching their hits here, I tell you. There are fifty thousand straddlers in this State ready to jump into the camp of the men that can lick the Duke of Fort Canibas—it gives a h——l of a line on futures! I thought you had your eye out better."

The deeper guile had masked itself behind such characters as Ivus Niles, and now Thornton realized it, and realized, too, to what a pass his trustful serenity, builded on the loyalty of the years, had brought him.

That strained, strange look of grieved surprise went out of his face. He lighted a cigar, gazing at his constituents over his scooped hands that held the match.

They stared at him, for his old poise had returned.

"This is the chairman of our State Committee, boys," he said, "come up to look over the field. He says there's a rumor going that Thornton can't carry his caucus this year." The Duke dropped into his quizzical drawl now. "I was just telling my friend Luke that it's queer how rumors get started." He walked to the porch-rail and leaned over it, his shaggy head dominating them. And then he threw the challenge at them. "The caucus is going to be held in the other end of the village—not here in my front dooryard. You'd

better get over there. I don't need any such clutter here. Get there quick. There may be some people that you'll want to warn. Tell 'em old Thornton hasn't lost his grip."

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He took Presson by the arm, and swung him hospitably in at the big door of “The Barracks.”

CHAPTER II

THE LINE-UP OF THE FIGHT

“That’s too rough—too rough, that kind of talk, Thelismar,” protested the State chairman.

Thornton swung away from him and went to the window of the living-room and gazed out on his constituents.

“You can’t handle voters the way you used to—you’ve got to hair-oil ’em these days.”

Presson was no stranger in “The Barracks.” But he walked around the big living-room with the fresh interest he always felt in the quaint place. Thornton stayed at the window, silent. The crowd had not left the yard—an additional insult to him. They were gathering around Niles and his sheep, and Niles was declaiming again.

The broad room was low, its time-stained woods were dark, and the chairman wandered in its shadowy recesses like an uneasy ghost.

“It isn’t best to tongue-lash the boys that are for you,” advised Presson, fretfully, “not this year, when reformers have got ’em filled up with a lot of skittish notions. Humor those that are *for* you.”

“*For* me?” snarled “the Duke,” over his shoulder, and then he turned on Presson. “That bunch of mangy pups out there for *me*? Why, Luke, that’s opposition. And it’s nasty, sneering, insulting opposition. I ought to go out there and blow them full of buckshot.”

He shook his fists at the gun-rack beside the moose head which flung its wide antlers above the fireplace.

“Where’s the crowd that’s backing you—your own boys?”

“Luke, I swear I don’t know. I knew there was some growling in this district—there always is in a district. A man like Ivus Niles would growl about John the Baptist, if he came back to earth and went in for politics. But this thing, here, gets me!” He turned to the window once more. “There’s men out there I thought I could reckon on like I’d tie to my own grandson, and they’re standing with their mouths open, whooping on that old blatherskite.”

Chairman Presson went and stood with him at the window, hands in trousers pockets, chinking loose silver and staring gloomily through the dusty panes.

"It's hell to pave this State, and no hot pitch ready," he observed. "I've known it was bad. I knew they meant you. I warned you they were going to get in early and hit hard in this district—but I didn't realize it was as bad as this. They're calling it reform, but I tell you, Thelismer, there's big money and big men sitting back in the dark and rubbing the ears of these prohibition pussies and tom-cats. It's a State overturn that they're playing for!"

He began to stride around the big room. In two of the corners stuffed black bears reared and grinned at each other. In opposite corners loup-cerviers stared with unwinking eyes of glass, lips drawn over their teeth. "I'm running across something just as savage-looking in every political corner of this State," he muttered, "and the trouble is those outside of here are pretty blame much alive."

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Niles was shouting without, and men were cheering his harangue.

"There used to be some sensible politics in this State," went on the disgusted chairman. "But it's got so now that a State committee is called on to consult a lot of cranks before drawing up the convention platform. Even a fellow in the legislature can't do what he wants to for the boys; cranks howling at him from home all the time. Candidates pumped for ante-election pledges, petitions rammed in ahead of every roll-call, lobby committees from the farmers' associations tramping around the State House in their cowhide boots, and a good government angel peeking in at every committee-room keyhole! Jeemsrollickins! Jim Blaine, himself, couldn't play the game these days."

If Thornton listened, he gave no sign. He had his elbows on the window-sill and was glowering on his constituents. They seemed determined to keep up the hateful serenade. It was hard for the old man to understand. But he did understand human nature—how dependence breeds resentment, how favors bestowed hatch sullen ingratitude, how jealousy turns and rends as soon as Democracy hisses, "At him!"

There was a dingy wall map beside him between the windows. A red line surrounded a section of it: two towns, a dozen plantations, and a score of unorganized townships—a thousand square miles of territory that composed his political barony. And on that section double red lines marked off half a million acres of timber-land, mountain, plain, and lake that Thelismer Thornton owned.

Chairman Presson, walking off his indignation, came and stood in front of the map.

"Between you and me, Thelismer, they've got quite a lot to grumble about, the farmers have. You wild-land fellows have grabbed a good deal, and you don't pay much taxes on it. You ought to have loosened a little earlier."

"You feel the cold water on your feet and you lay it to me rocking the boat, hey?" returned the Duke. "This is no time to begin to call names, Luke. But I want to tell you that where there's one man in this State grumbling about wild-land taxes, there are a hundred up and howling against you and the rest of the gilt-edged hotel-keepers that are selling rum and running bars just as though there wasn't any prohibitory law in our constitution." He had turned from the window. "You're looking at that map, eh? You think I've stolen land, do you? Look here! I came down that river out there on a raft—just married—my wife and a few poor little housekeeping traps on it. We never had a comfort till we got to the age where most folks die. I've had to live to be eighty-five to get a little something out of life. And she worked herself to death in spite of all I could say to stop her. Why, when the bill of sale fell due on the first pair of oxen I owned, she gave me the three hundred old-fashioned cents that she—don't get me to talking, Presson! But, by the Jehovah, I've earned that land up there! Dollars don't pay up a man and a woman for being pioneers. I'm not twitting you nor some of the rest of the

men in this State in regard to how you got your money—but you know how you did get it!"

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"We've stood by you on the tax question."

"And I've stood by you against the prohibition ramrodders, who were foolish enough to think that rumshops ought to be shut up because the law said so; and I've stood with the corporations and I've stood with the politicians, and played the game according to the rules. From the minute you came into my dooryard to-day you've acted as though you thought I'd stirred this whole uproar in the State."

"Did you ever know a man to get anywhere in politics if he didn't play the game—honesty or no honesty?"

"Yes, a few—they got there, but they didn't stay there long," replied the Duke, a flicker of humor in his wistfulness.

"You bet they didn't," agreed the chairman. "Thelismers, I'm just as honest as the world will let me be and succeed! But when a man gets to be perfectly honest in politics, and tries to lead his crowd at the same time, they turn around and swat him. I reckon he makes human nature ashamed of itself, and folks want to get him out of sight."

"I know," agreed the old man, and he looked out again on Niles and his audience. "The tough part of it is, Presson, those men out there are right—at bottom. They're playing traitor to me and acting like infernal fools, and I wouldn't let them know that I thought them anything else. But I'd like to step out there, Luke, and say, 'Boys, you're right. I've been working you. I've done you a lot of favors, I've brought a lot of benefits home to this district, but I've been looking after myself, and standing in with the bunch that has got the best things of the State tied up in a small bundle. I've only done what every successful politician has done—played the game. But you're right. Now go ahead and clean the State.'"

"You don't mean to say you'd do that?" demanded Presson, looking his old friend over pityingly.

"Luke, *I mean* that—but I don't intend to *do* it, not by a blame sight! I don't believe you ever realized that I was really honest deep down. I have told you something from the bottom of my heart. But"—he held out his big hands and closed and unclosed them—"if I should ever let them loose that way they'd be picked up before they'd gone forty feet by some other fellow that might be hollering reform and not be half as honest as I am."

He shoved his hands in his pockets and squinted shrewdly, and spoke with his satiric drawl.

"There was old Lem Ferguson. Lem got to reading books about soul transmigration or something of the kind, and turned to and let all his critters loose. Said that one living being didn't have any right to enslave another living being. Told them to go and be



free. And somebody put his steers in the pound, and vealed two calves and sold 'em, and milked his cows, and stole his sheep, and ripped the tags out of their ears and sheared 'em for what wool they had. Luke, I'm no relative of Lem Ferguson's when it comes to practical politics. I know just as well as you do who's trying to steal this State, a hunk at a time. They've had the nerve to tackle my district. But if they think that I'm going to ungrip and let them grab it they've got a wrong line on old Thornton's sheepfold."

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"What do you need in the way of help?" asked the State chairman.

"Nothing." Thornton turned again to survey his unruly flock. It was plain that they were baiting their overlord. Presson's acumen in politics enlightened him. An angry man may be made to antagonize the neutrals and even to insult his friends—and Thelismor Thornton was not patient when provoked. There was shrewd management behind this revolt.

Suddenly the yard was full of men, new arrivals. It was an orderly little army, woodsmen with meal-sack packs, an incoming crew on its march to the woods. A big man plodded ahead and marshalled them. Thornton hastened out upon the porch, and the chairman followed. The big man halted his crew, and leaned his elbows on the porch rail.

"Thought I'd walk 'em early in the cool of the day," he explained, "and lay off here for dinner and a rest. Pretty good lot of gash-fiddlers, there, Mr. Thornton. I picked the market for you."

"And I'll sample 'em right now," said the Duke, grimly. "Ben, tell 'em to drop those duffel-bags and rush that gang of steers out of my yard." He pointed at the flock of constituents. Niles had begun fresh harangue in regard to despots, addressing the new arrivals. They did not seem to be especially interested. There were a few long-legged Prince Edward Islanders, but most of them were wiry little French Canadians, who did not seem to understand much of the orator's tumultuous speech.

"If you've got a crew that's any good on a log-landing, we'll find it out," added the Duke. "Get at 'em!"

"Good gaddlemighty!" gasped Presson, "you ain't going to do anything like that!"

"You watch."

"Politics?" queried the big boss, swinging about to go to his crew. He grinned. It was evident that he considered that anything under that general head was in the Duke's supreme control, and that his employer's orders absolved him.

"It's just what they've been trying to prod into you—it's their game," adjured Presson, beating expostulating palms upon Thornton's breast.

"Then it has worked," the old man replied, calmly. He pushed the chairman aside. "Rush'em, Ben, and, if they don't go easy, toss 'em over the fence."

The big boss sauntered among his crew and growled a few crisp commands. The smile he wore gave the affair the appearance of a lark, and the woodsmen took it in that spirit. But the mob was sullen. Those who were not active rebels had been stung by the contempt that their leader now displayed. Some resisted when the woodsmen

pushed them half playfully. A burly fellow stood his ground. Ivus Niles lurked at his back.

“The folks up in the Jo Quacca Mountains will snicker in good shape when I tell ’em that Fightin’ MacCracken let himself be dumped out of Duke Thornton’s dooryard by a pack of lard-eating Quedaws,” he sneered in the giant’s ear.

MacCracken swept away the first three men with swinging cuffs. He was thinking of his reputation at home. The taunt pricked him.

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"Call 'em off—call 'em off, sir," pleaded Davis. "I've been trying to get these men out of your yard. I don't approve of Niles. Let's have our politics clean, Mr. Thornton. I'm willing to argue with you. But don't let's have it said outside that Fort Canibas' politics is run by plug-uglies."

"He's right, Thelismer; you're letting them score a point on you," protested Presson.

But Thornton had been too grievously wounded that day to be able to listen to peace measures. He strode down off the porch, shouting commands. His men were willing, and MacCracken's defiance gave them the provocation they wanted.

"If it's fight you're looking for, you spike-horn stag," announced the boss, bursting through the press to reach the Jo Quacca champion, "we can open a full assortment, and no trouble to show goods."

He knocked MacCracken flat, reaching over the heads of the smaller men, and the next moment the Canadians swarmed on the fallen gladiator like flies, lifted him and tossed him into the road. The rest of the mob escaped. Niles's emblematic buck sheep, cropping the grass in the fence corner, was tossed out behind the fugitives.

"I was hoping there'd be a little more cayenne in it," complained the big boss, scrubbing his knuckles against his belted jacket.

"Come out in the road where it ain't private ground owned by the old land-grabber," pleaded MacCracken. "I'll meet you somewhere, Ben Kyle, where it'll have to be a fair stand-up." But Kyle gave him no further attention.

"Take the boys into the ram pasture," directed his employer. He pointed to a long, low addition in the rear of "The Barracks," the shelter that served for the housing of the Thorntons' crews, migratory to or from the big woods. "I'll bring out a present. I guess you've got a good, able crew there, Ben."

Chairman Presson followed the old man back into the mansion. He was angry, and made his sentiment known, but Thornton was stubborn.

"There may be another way of running this district just at this time, Luke, but this is *my* way of running it, and I'm going to control that caucus. So what are you growling about?" He was opening a closet in the wall.

"But you're starting a scandal—and they'll get so stirred up that they'll put an independent ticket into the field. You'll have to fight 'em all over again at the polls. You're rasping them too hard."

"Luke, there are a lot of things you know about down-country politics, and perhaps you know more than I do about politics in general. But there's a rule in seafaring that holds

good in politics. If you're trying to ratch off a lee shore it's no time to be pulling down your canvas."

He took a jug out of the closet, and went to the low building. The chairman followed along, not comforted.

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The woodsmen had piled their duffel-bags in corners and were waiting. There were long tables up and down the centre of the room. They were flanked by benches. The tables were furnished with tin plates, tin pannikins, knives, and two-tined forks. The big boss had already given his orders. He and his crew had been expected. Men were hustling food onto the tables. There were great pans heaped with steaming baked beans, dark with molasses sweetening, gobbets of white pork flecking the mounds. Truncated cones of brownbread smoked here and there on platters. Cubes of gingerbread were heaped high in wooden bowls, and men went along the tables filling the pannikins with hot tea. The kitchen was in a leanto, and the cook was pulling tins of hot biscuits from the oven. There was not a woman in sight about "The Barracks." There had been none for years. Those men in the dirty canvas aprons were maids, cooks, and housekeepers.

It was hospitality rude and lavish. That low, dark room with its tiers of bunks along the four sides, its heaped tables, its air of uncalculated plenty, housed the recrudescence of feudalism in Yankee surroundings. And the lord of the manor set his jug at one end of the table and ordered the big boss to pipe all hands to grog.

"A pretty good lot, Ben," he commented as they crowded around. "And this here is something in the way of appreciation."

"Mr. Harlan coming out here to meet me, or am I going in and hunt him up?" inquired Kyle. "I suppose he has located most of the operations for next season."

"You'll take them in. Harlan won't be out for a while." He turned and walked away, the chairman with him.

"Your grandson seems to be as much in love with the woods as ever," commented Presson. "But I shouldn't think you'd want him to associate with this kind of cattle all his life, herding Canuck goats on a logging operation. You've got money enough, the two of you. He ought to get out into the world, find an up-to-date girl for a wife, and get married."

Thornton had led the way out into the sunshine, and was strolling about the yard, hands behind his back.

"Luke," he confided after a few moments, "you've just tapped me where I'm tender. Look here, if it was just me and me only that this hoorah here to-day was hitting, I'd tell 'em to take their damnation nomination and make it a cock-horse for any reformer that wants to ride. I'd do it, party or no party! But the minute it leaked out that I was putting Harlan up for the caucus they turned on me. And now I propose to show 'em."

The chairman stopped and stared at his friend. That piece of news had not reached him till then.

“You don’t mean to tell me,” he demanded, “that you’re going to take this time of all others to swap horses? Why, Harlan Thornton can’t play politics! He doesn’t know—”

“He don’t need to. I’ll play it for him. Between you and me, Luke, he doesn’t even know yet that he’s going to run for the legislature. I’m keeping him up in the woods so that he won’t know. He’s one of those stiff-necked young colts that wants to do only what he wants to do in a good many things.” He added the last with a growl of disgust. “And he won’t allow that any old man can tell him a few things that he doesn’t know.”

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"Now, Thelismer," protested the chairman, "I don't know anything about what's going on in your family, here, and I don't care. I know your grandson is a straight and square young chap, a worker, and a good business man, but he's no politician. I'm not going to stand for his butting in at this stage of the game."

"He isn't butting in. I'm throwing him in, like I'd train a puppy to swim," retorted the old man, calmly. "And, furthermore, what business of yours is it, anyway?"

"I'm chairman of the State committee."

"And I'm the boss of this legislative district. Now, hold on, Luke." He bent over and planted his two big hands on the chairman's shoulders. "Harlan is all I've got. He's always been a steady, hustling boy. But to get him out of these woods and smoothed up like I want him smoothed up has been worse than rooting up old Katahdin. I've been pioneer enough for both of us. I don't propose to have him spend the rest of his life here. First off, he thought it was his duty to me to take the business burden off my shoulders. Now he's got into the life, and won't stand for anything else. And the only thing I care for under God's heavens at my age is to have him be something in this State. He's got the looks and the brains and the money! And he's going to be something! And I'm going to see him started on the way. God knows where I'll be two years from now. You can't reckon on much after eighty. To-day I'm feeling pretty healthy." There was a bite in his tone. "And I'm going to nominate Harlan for the legislature, and then I'm going to elect him. I'm going to see him started right before I die."

"And he doesn't want to go, and the voters don't want him to go," lamented Presson. "You're only trying to bull through a political slack-wire exhibition for your own amusement—and this whole State on the hair-trigger! By the mighty, it isn't right. I won't stand for it!"

The Duke started for the front of the mansion.

"And, furthermore, Thelismer, if you're willing to run a chance of tipping over the politics of this State for the sake of giving your grandson a course of sprouts, you're losing your mind in your old age, and ought to be taken care of."

Thornton turned and bestowed a grim smile on his angry friend.

"Presson, I've stood by the machine a good many years. Now, if I can't stand for a little business of my own without a riot, bring on your riot. I'll lick you in that caucus with one hand while I'm licking that dirty bunch of rebels with the other. I've got my reasons for what I'm doing."

“Give me a good reason, then,” begged the chairman. “Killing off your friends for the sake of giving Harlan Thornton a liberal education doesn’t appeal to me.”

“My real reason wouldn’t, either—not just now,” returned the Duke, enigmatically.

At that moment half a dozen gaunt hounds raced around the corner of “The Barracks.” They leaped at Thornton playfully, daubing his crash suit with their dusty paws. He seemed to recognize them. He cursed them and kicked them away savagely.

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CHAPTER III

DENNIS KAVANAGH'S GIRL

A rangy roan horse followed the dogs, galloping so wildly that when his rider halted him his hoofs tore up the turf as he slid. A girl rode him. She was mounted astride, and Presson had to look twice at her to make sure she was a girl, for she wore knickerbockers and gaiters, and her copper-red hair curled so crisply that it seemed as short as a boy's.

"Good-morning, Mr. Duke," she called. "Is Harlan down from the woods yet?"

The old man turned to march off after a scornful glance at her. He kicked away another dog. Then he whirled and stepped back toward her. It was anger and not courtesy that impelled him.

"He isn't here, and he won't be here. And how many times more have I got to tell you not to be impertinent to me?"

"How, Mr. Duke?"

"By that infernal nickname," he stormed. "Young woman, I've told you to stay on your side of the river, and you—"

"Really you ought to be called 'Duke' if you order folks off the earth that way," she cried, saucily. "But I did not come to see you, Mr. Duke. I came to see Harlan. Has he got home yet?"

She swung sideways on her horse and nursed her slender ankle across her knee. It was plain that she had expected this reception, and knew how to meet it. She gazed at him serenely from big, gray eyes. She smiled and held her head a little to one side, her nose tiptilted a bit, giving her an aggravatingly teasing expression.

"I tell you he's not here, and he won't be here."

"Oh yes, he will. For"—she smiled more broadly, and there was malice in her eyes—"I sent word to him to come, and he's coming."

"You sent word to him, you red-headed Irish cat? What do you mean?"

The lord of Fort Canibas strode close to her, passion on his face. Presson could see that this was no suddenly evoked quarrel between the two. It was hostility reawakened.



"I mean that I'm looking out for the interests of Harlan when those at home are plotting against him. I hear the news. I listen to news for him, when he's away in the big woods. And I'm not going to let you send him off down to any old prison of a legislature, where he'll be spoiled for his friends up here. And he doesn't want to go. And he'll be here, Mr. Duke, to see that you don't trade him off into your politics."

She delivered her little speech resolutely, and gave him back his blistering gaze without winking.

"Oh, my God, if you were—were only Ivus Niles, or Beelzebub himself sitting there on that horse," Thornton gasped. "You—you—" he turned away from her maddening smile and stamped about on the turf. The hounds still played around him, persistent in their attentions. He kicked at them.

"It suits me to be just Clare Kavanagh, Mr. Duke—and I'm not afraid of you!"

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"Kyle—ho there, Kyle!" The big boss came out of the "ram pasture," wiping food fragments from his beard. "Get a rifle and shoot these dogs. Clean 'em out! Take two men and ride this Irish imp across the river where she belongs."

Kyle balked. His face showed it.

Presson had never seen his old friend in such a fury. He menaced the girl with his fists as though about to forget that she was a woman. But she did not retreat. The picture was that of the kitten and the mastiff. Her sparkling eyes followed him. The scarlet of an anger as ready as his own leaped to the soft curves of her cheeks.

"You've got my orders, Kyle. I stand behind them."

Without taking her eyes off Thornton, the girl reached behind her and jerked a revolver from its holster.

"You shoot my dogs, Kyle, and I'll shoot you." In her tones there was none of the hysteria that usually spices feminine threats. She was angry, but her voice was grimly level. She had the poise of one who had learned to depend on her own resolute spirit. But she displayed something more than that. It was recklessness that was bravado. In the eyes of the State chairman, friend of Thornton, and accustomed to a milder form of femininity, it was impudence. Yet her beauty made its appeal to him. The old man lunged toward her, but the politician seized his arm.

"Thelismer," he protested, "you are going too far. I don't know the girl, or what the main trouble is, but you're acting like a ten-year-old."

Thelismer Thornton knew it, and the knowledge added to his helpless rage. He pulled himself out of Presson's grasp.

He began to revile the girl in language that made Presson set his little eyes open and purse his round mouth.

"Damn it, you don't understand," roared the Duke, whirling on his friend. Presson had faced him at last with protest that stung. "I know it's no kind of talk to use to any one. I'm no ruffian. I'm ashamed to have to use it. But the other kind don't work—not with her. Land-pirate Kavanagh is welcome to the ten thousand acres of timber-land that he stole from me; but when his red-head daughter proposes to steal my grandson, and laugh at me to my face while she's doing it, she'll take what I have to give her if she wants to stay and listen. Look at her, Presson! Look at her! Is that the kind of a girl for any young chap? A rattlebrained imp with a horse between her knees from daylight to dark, riding the country wild, insulting old age, and laughing at me and putting the devil into the head of my grandson! Kyle, get your men and run her across the river into her Canuck country! She isn't even an American citizen, Luke. Do you hear me, Kyle?"

Presson saw that the girl was not looking at her enemy then. From the back of her horse she could see farther up the road than they. She had spied a horseman coming. She recognized him. She uttered a shrill call that he understood, for he forced his horse into a gallop, and came into the yard before Thornton had gathered himself to continue his tirade. The Duke had seen his grandson almost as soon as she, and the passion went out of his face. He looked suddenly old and tired and troubled.

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There was appeal in the gaze he turned on his grandson. He stepped forward.

“Don’t let her make any more trouble between us, Harlan, not till you understand how she—”

But the girl forestalled him. She had fought her battle alone until he came. She slid off her horse and ran across the yard, sobbing like a child. And now Presson saw how young she was. On her horse, defiant almost to the point of impudence, she had a manner that belied her years. But when she fled to her champion, she was revealed as only a little girl with a child’s impulsiveness in speech and action. The young man slipped his foot from a stirrup and held his hand to her. She sprang to him, standing in the stirrup.

“He called me wicked names, Harlan! I was only trying to help you. I wanted you to come, for I thought you ought to know! You’ve come. I knew you’d come. You won’t let him send you away. You’ll not let him call me those names ever again!”

He gently swung her down, alighted and faced his grandfather. He had the stalwart frame of Thelismor Thornton, and with it the poise of youth, clean-limbed, bronzed, and erect. He flashed a pair of indignant brown eyes at the old man. The Duke recognized the Thornton challenge to battle in the sparkle of those eyes.

“Let’s talk this over by ourselves, Harlan,” he advised. “Send the girl along about her business. She has messed things between us badly enough as it is.”

“Have you been talking to this poor little girl as she tells me you have talked?” demanded young Thornton, narrowing his eyes.

“That isn’t the tone to use to me, boy,” warned the Duke. There had been appeal in his face and his voice at the beginning. But this disloyalty in the presence of the girl pricked him. She was still in the hook of Harlan’s arm, and from that vantage-point flung a glance of childishly ingenuous triumph at him. “Not that tone from grandson to grandfather.”

“It’s man to man just now, sir. You know how I feel toward this little friend of mine. If you have abused our friendship here at our home, you’ll apologize, grandfather or no grandfather—and that’s the first disrespectful word I ever gave you, sir. But this is a case where I have the right to speak.”

The Duke stiffened and his face was gray.

“I talked to her the way Land-pirate Kavanagh’s daughter ought to be talked to when she comes here mocking me. Now, Harlan, if you want this in the open instead of in private, where it ought to be, I’ll give it to you straight from the shoulder. You’re not

going to marry that girl. She shan't steal you and spoil you. I've told you so before. I give it to you now before witnesses."

The girl ran toward him. She was furious. It was evident that shame as well as anger possessed her.

"Have I ever said I wanted to marry your grandson? Has he ever said he wanted to marry me? Is it because you have such a wicked old mind that you think we cannot always be the true friends we have been? I do not want a husband. But I have a friend, and you shall not take him away from me!"

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"You have heard, sir. Do you realize how you have insulted both of us? You shall apologize, Grandfather Thornton!"

For reply the old man walked up to him, snapped the fingers of both hands under his nose, and walked away. "Give me ten words more of that talk and I'll take you across my knee," he called over his shoulder. "There are some men that never grow old enough to get beyond the spanking age."

Presson, interested spectator, looked for the natural outburst of youth at that point. But he stared at the young man, and decided that he truly had inherited the Thornton grit and self-restraint which the Duke seemed now to have lost all at once after all the years.

Harlan gazed after his grandfather, lips tightening. He was an embodiment of wholesome young manhood, as he stood there, struggling with the passion that prompted him to unfilial reproaches. Then he turned to the girl. He had a wistful smile for her.

"I'm sorry, little Clare," he said, softly. She slipped her hands under the belt of his corduroy jacket and gazed up at him tearfully.

"He had no right to say that I—that I—oh, he doesn't understand friendship!" she cried.

"No, and we'll not try to explain—not now! But I have some serious matters to talk over with my grandfather. Ride home, dear; I'll see you before I go back to the woods again."

"And you *are* going back to the woods? You are not going to let them send you away where you'll forget your best friends?"

"I never shall forget my friends. And I can't believe that you heard right, little girl. My grandfather will not put me in politics. Don't worry. I'll straighten it all out before I leave."

He lifted her to her horse and sent her away with a pat. She went unprotesting, with a trustful smile. The hounds raced wildly after her.

"Woof!" remarked the Hon. Luke Presson to himself, "there's a kitten that's been fed on plenty of raw meat!" And as he always compared all women with his daughter, reigning beauty of the State capital, he added: "I'd like to have Madeleine get a glimpse of that. She'd be glad that it's the style to bring girls up on a cream diet."

He hurried away behind Harlan, who had given him rather curt greeting, and had followed the Duke around to the front of the house. The old man was tramping the porch from end to end.

The boarding creaked under him as he strode, his gait a lurch that moved one side of his body at a time. The smoke from his cigar streamed past his ears.

It was silent at the front of the big house, and in that silence the three of them could hear the occasional shouts that greeted demagogic oratory down in the village. The comment of the lord of Canibas was the anathema that he growled to himself.

His grandson faced him twice on his turns along the porch, protest in his demeanor. But the old man brushed past.

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"Grandfather, I want a word with you," Harlan ventured at last.

"You talk girl to me just now, young fellow, and you won't find it safe!"

He marched on, and the grandson resolutely waited his return.

"I'm going to talk business, sir. I want this thing understood. Is it true what I hear? Do you propose to put my name before that caucus? I want to say—"

But the old man strode away from him again.

"He says he's going to do it, and it's fool business," confided Presson. "You've got to stop him. There's no reason in it."

"I've got *my* reasons. If you don't know enough to see 'em, it isn't my fault," snapped the Duke, passing them and overhearing.

"Then I've got this to say." The young man stopped his grandfather—as big, as determined, as passionate—Thornton against Thornton. "I'll not go to the legislature."

The old man shouted his reply.

"I don't know as you will, you tote-road mule, you! But, by the suffering Herod, they'll have to show *me* first!"

He elbowed his grandson aside and kept on pacing the porch.

CHAPTER IV

THE DUKE AT BAY

After that outburst Presson went away by himself to sulk. Young Thornton made no further protest. He stared at his grandfather, trying to comprehend what it meant—this bitterness, this savage resentment, this arbitrary authority that took no heed of his own wishes. He had always known a calm, kindly, sometimes caustic, but never impatient Thelimer Thornton. This old man, surly, domineering, and unreasonable, was new to him. And after a little while, worried and saddened, he went away. His presence seemed to stir even more rancor as the moments passed.

Presson understood better, but could not forgive the bullheadedness that seemed to be wrecking their political plans. His own political training had taught him the benefits of compromise. He was angry at this old man who proposed to go down fighting among the fallen props of a lifetime of power. And even though Presson now understood better

some of the motives that prompted the Duke to force young Harlan out into the world, his political sensibilities were more acute than his sympathy.

Therefore the beleaguered lord of Canibas was left to fight it out alone.

He stood at the end of the porch and listened to the menacing sounds of the village.

He glared down the long street and grunted, "Grinding their knives, eh?"

Evidently the centrifugal motion of the political machine down there was violent enough to throw off one lively spark. A man came up the road at a brisk gait, stamped across the yard, and went direct to the Duke, who waited for him at the far end of the porch. He did not glance at Presson or at Harlan Thornton.

"Did you ever see anything like it, did you ever *hear* anything like it, Honor'ble?" the new arrival demanded with heat. "They're goin' to make a caucus out of it—a *caucus*!"

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The man had a lower jaw edged with a roll of black whisker, a jaw that protruded like a bulldog's. With the familiarity of the long-time lieutenant, he pecked with thumb and forefinger at the end of a cigar protruding from his chief's waistcoat-pocket. He wrenched off the tip between snaggy teeth. He spat the tip far.

"Yes, sir, by jehoshaphat, a caucus!"

Chairman Presson's ear had caught the sound of politics. He felt that he was entitled, ex officio, to be present at any conference. He hurried to the end of the porch.

"We ain't had a caucus in this district for more'n forty years," stated the new arrival, accepting the chairman as a friend of the cause. "Except as the chairman catches the seckertery somewhere and then hollers for some one to come in from the street and renominate the Honor'ble Thornton. But, dammit, this is going to be a *caucus*." The word seemed suddenly to have acquired novel meaning for him. "They must have been pussy-footin' for a month. You could have knocked me down with your cigar-butt, Squire, when I got in here to-day and found how she stood. If it hadn't been for War Eagle Ivus and his buck sheep breakin' out, they'd have ambuscaded ye, surer'n palm-leaf fans can't cool the kitchen o' hell. But even as it is—hoot and holler now, and tag-gool-I-see-ye, they say they've got you licked, and licked in the open—that's what they say!" The man's tone was that of one announcing the blotting-out of the stars.

"Walt Davis bragged about it," said the old man, outwardly calm, but eyes ablaze. "It must be a pretty sure thing when he's got the courage to crawl out from under the wagon and yap."

"Good God!" blurted the chairman of the State Committee, "you don't mean to tell *me*!"

"It's the ramrodders! They've been up here, one or two of the old cock ones, workin' under cover," stated the unswerving one. "About once in so often the people are ripe to be picked. They've mebbe had drought, chilblains, lost a new milch cow, and had a note come due—and some one that's paid to do it tells 'em that it's all due to the political ring—and then they begin to club the tree! But standing here spittin' froth about it ain't convertin' the heathern nor cooperin' them that imagine vain things. Now here's what I've done, grabbin' in so's to lose no time. I—"

"No, just tell me what the *other* side has done," commanded the Duke.

"First place, they've got names in black and white of enough Republicans to down you in caucus. They've got 'em, them ramrodders have! I've hairpinned the truth out o' the cracks! They've been sayin' that you've only wanted your office so as to dicker and trade, and make yourself and them in your political bunch richer; they're showin' figgers to prove that much; sayin' you brag you carry our district in your vest-pocket; sayin' everything to stir up the bile that's in every man when you know how to stir for it.

Furthermore, Squire, the fact that you're gettin' out yourself and proposin' to put your grandson in gives 'em their chance to say a lot. Next place, this is goin' to be a *caucus*. It ain't any imitation. They're goin' to use a marked check-list."

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"What?" roared the Honorable Thelismer, jarred out of his baleful calm.

"Yes, sir! They've pulled the town clerk into camp and have had him mark a list. And you can imagine who they picked out as Republican voters in this town! And they'll stand and challenge every one else till their throats are sore. You and me has cut up a few little innocent tricks in politics in our time, Squire, but we never framed anything quite as tidy as this for a steal. If your friend, here, is in politics, he—"

"I'm Presson, chairman of the State Committee," explained that gentleman. The Duke of Fort Canibas was too much absorbed to make presentations.

"Hell! That so?" ripped out the other, frankly astonished. "Well, I'm glad you're here. You ought to be able to help us out."

Presson was not cheerful or helpful. "They're slashing this whole State open from one end to the other with their devilish reform hullabaloo," he said.

"I hear there *is* quite a stir outside," agreed the agitator, blandly. He looked the chairman up and down with interest. "You may call me Sylvester—Talleyrand Sylvester. Yankee dickerer! Buy and sell everything from a clap o' thunder to a second-hand gravestone. It brings me round the country up here, and so I've been the Squire's right-hand man in the political game, such as there's been of it." He turned his back on the pondering Duke and continued, sotto voce: "I reckon if he'd stayed in himself, Colonel, they wouldn't have had the courage to tackle him. They might have hit him with that whole stockin'ful of mud they've been collectin', and he wouldn't have staggered. But when they go to hit the young feller, there, with it, he's down and out."

"Eh!" barked the magnate of Canibas, catching the last words. "I am? Not by a—" He broke off, ashamed of wasting effort in mere boasts. "Presson," he went on, evidently now intent on proceeding according to the plan that he had been meditating, "you've got your own interest in seeing me keep this district in line, haven't you?"

"You're the head of our row of bricks," bleated the chairman. "We've got to keep you standing—got to do it."

"Then we'll get busy." The old man threw back his shoulders. "Carrying a caucus the way we've probably got to carry this one at the last gasp isn't going to be a genteel entertainment." He tapped a stubby finger on the honorable chairman's shirt-front. "I'm going to raise some very particular hell." He turned to his lieutenant. "The boys right in the village, here, our own bunch, are all right, of course, Sylvester?"

"Stickin' to you like pitch in a spruce crack, as usual. It's the outsiders from the other sections in the district. They hadn't known what a caucus was till them ramrodders got after 'em."

“Can’t they be handled now that they’re in here?”

“Have been lied to already too skilful and thorough. Me and Whisperin’ Urban and a few others of the boys blew the haydust out of their ears, and tried to inject the usual—but they can’t hold any more. They’ve got to be unloaded first—and there ain’t time to do it.”

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"And you're pretty sure they can swing the organization when the caucus is called?" demanded the Duke.

"Two to one—and our men ain't got a smell on that check-list they've doctored. Why, they've even got *me* marked 'Socialist.' You can imagine what they've done to the rest of the boys. It's one o'clock now." (He had looked at four watches, one after the other, a part of his dickerer's stock-in-trade.) "In an hour and fifteen minutes they'll be organized and votin' by check-list. I ain't a man to give up easy, Squire, but I swear it looks as though they had us headed so far on the homestretch that we ain't near enough to trip 'em or bust a sulky wheel on 'em."

"You've got more than an hour's leeway." It was a soft lisp of sound that startled the group. The man had come by devious ways through the gullies of the Thornton field, around the corner of "The Barracks," and upon the porch. Those who knew him declared that "Whispering Urban" Cobb never walked by the straight way when there was a crooked one by which he could dodge around.

"No, they can't get a-goin' at no two o'clock," he assured them. A drooping gray mustache curtained his mouth, drooping gray eyebrows shaded his eyes, and he crowded very close to them and whispered, "I've stole the call for the caucus, and they'll hunt for it about half an hour, and then they'll have to round the committee up and get 'em to sign another, and have constables swear that the other call was posted—and, well, they won't get going much before four."

The Duke looked at him indulgently.

"I took it on myself to do it. I reckoned you might need the extra time, seein' that they was tryin' to spring a trap on you."

He took the cigar that the Duke offered him in lieu of praise.

"Bein' sure of that much time—if you'll see to it that they're regular about the call!" Mr. Cobb cocked inquiring eye at the old man.

"I'll see to it," stated Thornton, grimly.

"Well, then, bein' sure of that time, I'll—Mr. Thornton, would you object if I was to start in this afternoon on the contract of clearing up that slash where you operated on Jo Quacca last winter? Of course, this ain't just the best kind of weather for bonfires, but—the fire will certainly burn!" His whispering voice gave the suggestion ominous significance.

The Hon. Thelismar Thornton stared for a moment at Cobb, and then looked up at the heights that shimmered in the beating sun.

"You may start in, Cobb," he said at last. His perception of what the man meant came instantly. He had hesitated while he figured chances. "Take fifty of those men out behind there," his thumb jerked over his shoulder. "Give every man a shovel, and see that it doesn't get away from you. More smoke than fire, see!"

Mr. Cobb hastened away.

The duller comprehension of the chairman of the State Committee had not grasped the significance of the conversation.

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"I'd let business wait till politics are finished, Thelimer," he chided.

"There is such a thing as running the two on a double track," returned Mr. Thornton, serene but non-committal. He whirled on Sylvester, his mien that of the commander-in-chief disposing his forces in the face of the enemy: "Talleyrand, you'll find fifty more quedaws out there after Cobb takes his pick. Take them down to Aunt Charette's and have her set out her best. And keep 'em well bunched and handy!"

He reached through an open window and filled the pockets of his crash suit with cigars from a box on a stand.

"Now, Luke," he invited, blandly, "let's go to a legislative district caucus. I haven't bothered to attend one for a good many years, but this one on the docket now gives signs of being interesting."

They walked down the dusty road toward the village. The State chairman was silent, with the air of a man pondering matters he does not understand; but the Hon. Thelimer Thornton beamed upon all he met. Having a certainty to deal with, and a tangible enemy in sight, he seemed at ease. He felt like one who has recovered from dizzying blows and is on trail of the enemy who dealt them. He was himself again.

A few of those he met he greeted with especial cordiality. To some he gave cigars, not with the air of one seeking favor, not with the cheap generosity of the professional politician, but with the manner of one taking paternal interest in the conduct of a good child. It was an act that seemed to go with his handclasp and smile. He caught the State chairman looking at him rather doubtfully on one of these occasions.

"The folks understand this thing up here," he said. "When those chaps were young ones I used to give them a stick of candy. Now that they are grown up I hand 'em a cigar—got into the habit and can't stop. Or else I send 'em around to Aunt Charette's and have it put on my account. Wicked performance, I suppose, and so the old ladies tell me. But I was born in the old rum-and-molasses times, Luke, when the liquor thing sort of run itself, and didn't give so many cheap snoozers a job on one side or the other."

"What's this Aunt Charette's you're talking about?" asked the chairman.

"An institution!" The Duke enjoyed the puzzled stare the little man rolled up at him. "I reckon you think you've solved the liquor question in this prohibition State at that hotel bar of yours, Luke. I've solved it in my own way up here. Aunt Charette's is an institution that I've founded. Come and look at it."

He led the way off the main street. There was a cottage at the end of a lane, tree-embowered, neat with fresh white paint and blinds of vivid green. An old man sat in an

arm-chair under one of the trees. He wore gold earrings and an old-style coat with brass buttons.

“Uncle Charette,” explained the Duke, as they passed him. “Simply a lawn ornament.”

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He led the way into the house without knocking.

“And this is Aunt Charette,” he volunteered. In the centre of the spotless fore-room a ponderous woman rocked in her huge chair and knitted placidly. She was a picture of peaceful prosperity in black silk gown and gold-bowed spectacles.

“And here’s the nature of Aunt Charette’s institution.” He pointed to an open cupboard in which there were many bottles.

“Oh! your local liquor agency,” hazarded the chairman.

“No, sir! Aunt Charette’s own dispensary for the ills of the mind and fatigues of the body, and run according to my own notions. It beats your bar and white jackets, Luke, or that solemn farce of cheap liquors and robber prices of the State agency system. You come in here, if you are not a drunkard or a minor or a pauper—and Aunt Charette knows ’em all—and you go to the cupboard and get your drink, or you go out there in the store-room and get your bottle, and hand the change to Aunt Charette and walk away. No other rumshop tolerated in the section, and pocket peddlers run out of town on a rail! No treating, no foolishness, no fraud. Pays her fine twice a year without going to court, the same as you. And no extras!” He smiled at the chairman significantly.

“No extras, eh!” mused Mr. Presson, enviously. “You must have a different crowd of county officers than we’ve got down our way.”

“Perhaps so,” admitted the old man, and then he allowed himself a bit of a boast; “but the secret is, you see, this little institution is something I’ve taken under my own wing.”

It was an ill-starred moment for that honest boast. There came a thumping of feet in the hall. The man who burst in was flushed and sweating and excited.

“I’m glad you’re here, Squire,” he panted. “You’re just in the nick o’ time. They’re going to jump on the old lady.”

“Who’s going to jump?”

“High Sheriff Niles and his posse. They ain’t more’n ten rods behind, jigger wagon and all.”

The Duke of Fort Canibas stared a moment at the herald. Aunt Charette raised her eyes to her protector with the air of one secure under the wings of a patron saint, and went on knitting.

“Gad!” hissed the State chairman. “They certainly do mean you this time, Thelismer! Discrediting your pull in county politics an hour before your caucus! Some one is showing brains!”

Thornton did not answer.

“How in blazes have they pulled over the sheriff?” demanded Presson. But the old man merely stared at the door.

High Sheriff Niles entered at that moment. He stood on the threshold and scowled. He was a stocky man, who had been a butcher. His face was blotched by ruddiness resembling that of raw meat. Behind his cockaded silk hat pressed the faces of his aids. The little yard was filled with men who peered in at the windows. A big truck wagon was creaking as its horses backed it to the door.

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"What are you after here, Niles?" demanded Thornton. "After this stock of rum."

The Duke took another swing across the room, licked his lips, and set his extinguished cigar hard between his teeth. He was striving to control the wrath that came boiling up into his purple face and blazing eyes.

"There's the warrant!" The sheriff clapped the paper across his palm. "Take the stuff, boys!" He waved his hand at the cupboard.

"But the most of it's in the cellar," shrilled the voice of a tattler in the hallway. "There's where she keeps it!"

"I don't need any advice," growled the sheriff. His men trudged into the room and made for the cupboard.

Now at last Aunt Charette understood that her stores were threatened. She did not leave her chair. She fumbled frantically at her big bag that hung at her waist.

"Non, non!" she cried. "Yo' may not to'ch! I have pay! I have pay for nex' sax month."

She flapped a paper at the sheriff. He took it perfunctorily. "That's all right, old woman, but it hasn't got anything to do with my business here. I'm after your stuff on a warrant." He gave back the paper and started for the stairs leading to the cellar.

"But I have pay," she vociferated. "You tell them I have pay, M'sieu' Thornton! You' told me if I have pay twice in ye'r I have de privilege—de privilege!"

The sheriff turned and grinned over his shoulder into the convulsed face of the Honorable Thelismar.

"There's a lot of bargains in politics, marm," he stated, dryly, "that takes more'n two to put 'em through when the pinch comes." He enjoyed the discomfiture that her artless confession brought to the Duke. The old man looked him up and down. That this Niles whom he himself had helped into office, who had been taking private toll from the liquor interests of the county as his predecessors had before him, a procedure condoned by the party leaders of whom the Honorable Thelismar was one—that this person should whirl on him in such fashion was a performance that Thornton could not yet fully understand. But there was the fact to contend with. A man he had helped to elevate was engaged in humiliating him in the frankly wondering gaze of his own community.

Those who peeped in at doors and windows were not, all of them, enemies. There were friends who sympathized and were astonished. Their murmurings told that.

"You infernal Hereford bull!" roared Thornton; "don't you dare to slur me before my people. You're making this raid because I haven't buttered you with ten-dollar bills to

keep your hands off. You've taken 'em from all the other rumsellers—but this isn't one of your regular rumshops."

"That's right, Squire. Give it to him," muttered men at door and windows.

"We all know how the sheriff's office is run in this county." This statement was made by Talleyrand Sylvester, who came thrusting through the jam of the hall into the fore-room. "Squire," he whispered, hoarsely, "I've brought down them quedaws as you told me to. They're outside. Say the word and we'll light on that old steer in the plug-hat!"

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For an instant there was a glint in the old man's eyes which hinted that the word would be given. But the impulse was merely the first reckless one of retaliation. Assault on law, even as represented by such an unworthy executive as he knew Niles to be, would make too wicked a story for slander to handle. Slander would be busy enough as it was.

He pushed the eager Sylvester to one side.

"Let me see your warrant, Niles," he requested. The officer passed it over, with a touch of sudden humility in his demeanor. "I'm only doing my duty as it's laid out by the statutes," he muttered. He quailed under the old man's eyes. He did not like the sound of the mumbling at the windows nor relish the looks of the men who had just come flocking into the yard at the heels of Sylvester.

"'Twas sworn out and passed to me," stated the sheriff.

"Sworn out on complaint of Tom Willy." He looked above the document and saw in the doorway the man who had cried information regarding the liquor in the cellar. "Tom Willy, the cheapest drunkard we've got in the town, taking sneaking revenge because he has been shut off from privileges here that decent men haven't abused! But I tell you, gentlemen, even Tom Willy isn't as cheap as the men who have sneaked behind him and prodded him on to do this. There's some one behind him, for Tom Willy hasn't got brains enough nor sprawl enough to do this all by himself."

He gave the warrant back to the sheriff. He had recovered his self-possession. He was again their Duke of Fort Canibas, who could retire with dignity even from such a position as this. "Go ahead and train with your crowd, Sheriff Niles," he drawled, sarcastically—"Tom Willy, and whoever they are behind him that are too ashamed to show themselves!"

He started for the door, Luke Presson at his heels. Aunt Charette, not exactly understanding, realized that the protecting aegis was departing.

"But I have pay!" she wailed. "You have de power, M'sieu' Thornton! They take my properties!"

He patted the shiny silk of the old woman's shoulder as he passed her.

"Keep your sitting, Aunt Charette," he advised, "and let them take it. It will be a good investment for you—leave it to me."

He lighted a fresh cigar out-of-doors.

"Luke," he declared quietly between puffs, "this is developing into quite a caucus day—take all trimmings. I'm glad you are here to look on!"

CHAPTER V

A CAUCUS, AS IT WAS PLANNED

The town house of Fort Canibas needed no guide-board that day. All roads led to it. Thelimer Thornton walked down the main street, his following at his heels. His hands were behind his back, and he sauntered along like one who was at peace with the world. His face was serene once more. He seemed to have recovered all the genial good-nature that men associated with Thelimer Thornton. The chairman trotted on short legs at his side, looking up at him sourly. Thornton smiled down at him.

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"Finding your old State campaign sicker than you thought for, hey, Luke?"

He was now as Presson had always known him, but the little man did not seem to be consoled thereby.

"I'd like to know what's come over you to-day?" he complained. "Giving a helpless little girl hell-an'-repeat, and then standing for what you did back there right now!"

"Luke, both of us have seen a great many men lose their dignity fighting hornets. But I've come to myself, and I've stopped running and swatting. Well, Briggs, what is it?"

The man who had brought the alarm to Aunt Charette's was crowding close, plainly with something to say.

"I only wanted to tell you, Squire, that Sheriff Niles brought in word to the boys that high-uppers was back of him."

"Thinks he's running with the pack, eh? Well, Briggs, that's hardly news about Bart Niles."

"Thought I'd warn you, Squire. He says things ain't goin' on runnin' in this State the way they have been runnin'. Way he talks, him and them back of him think they've got you layin' with all four paws in the air. But we in the village here, that's behind you, don't understand it that way. Nor we can't figger what started it."

"Don't bother your heads about it to-day, Briggs. Simply stand by and be ready to grab in, you and the boys. That's all."

The post-office was in the lower story of the town house. The walls were brick to the second story. This upper part was a barn-like structure propped on the lower walls. Broad outside stairs led up to it.

Thornton and Presson were obliged to push their way through a crowd to reach the foot of the stairway. They were stopped there by an obstruction. Some men were lifting off a low wagon a cripple in a wheel-chair. He had an in-door pallor that made him seem corpse-like. A man in a frock-coat and with a ministerial white tie was bossing the job.

The Duke stopped and gazed on the work amiably. The man of the white tie scowled.

"Raising a few reliable Republicans from the dead, are you, elder?" inquired the Duke, pleasantly.

The elder did not reply until he had started the cripple's chair bumping up the stairs. Then he turned on Thornton. He was not amiable.

"It's time some of the voters with honest convictions got a chance to attend a caucus in this district, even if they have to be brought from beds of pain."

Thelismar Thornton did not lose his smile.

"I'd like to have you meet the Rev. Enoch Dudley, evangelist, Luke. This is Mr. Presson, chairman of the State Committee, elder. Now that you're getting into politics you'd ought to be acquainted with your chief priest."

But Rev. Mr. Dudley, not approving the company that the State chairman was keeping, did not warm up.

"I thank you for your pleasantries, Mr. Thornton," he returned, stiffly. "I hope your sneers may make you as many votes to-day as they have in the past."

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"Well, they won't," blurted a voice from a knot of men at the foot of the stairs. "We're getting woke up in this district. And it ain't going to be an empire any longer."

"I'm rather too humble a man, sir, to associate with the high lords of politics," Mr. Dudley remarked to the chairman. "The Honorable Thornton has always been up there. I'm simply one of the plain people."

"And it's time for the plain people to have their innings," declared another in the crowd.

"The pack is off!" muttered the Duke in Presson's ear.

"Why don't you introduce him right," called another. "Reverend Dudley is the next representative from this district, Mr. Chairman. And we know where *he* stands!"

"An humble little platform is mine," stated the minister. "But it's down where all can step aboard with me. That's all I can say."

There was a growl of approval in chorus from the larger group at the foot of the stairs. Thornton's men were at one side and looked troubled.

"War Eagle" Ivus Niles stepped forth then. He had recovered his buck sheep. He was hoarse, but still full of zeal.

"I want to ask you this, Tyrant Thornton: You ain't quite so sure that you're Lord Gull, monarch of all you survey, since my brother Bartholomew showed you the power of the law triumphant, are you?" But the taunt did not alter the tolerant smile on the Duke's face.

"Go ahead and get in all your yelps," he said, under his breath. "A hound loves company."

"When we start in to purify, we propose to purify in good shape!" cried another. "And a reverend elder ain't a mite too good for us as representative to the legislature."

"Some people think they are purifying when they burn a rag," observed the Duke, serenely. He lighted another cigar, beaming through the smoke on the glowering minister.

"Don't take that wrong, elder. I respect decency in politics. I respect men who are trying to clean things up. But before I'll let you disinfect *me*, I'll have to see your license and know what system you're using."

"You've got to fight the devil with fire!" roared the War Eagle.

"You mustn't steal my own plan of campaigning, Ivus. I've got a copyright on that."

He had been studying the situation there outside the town hall while he talked. Two men from the shire town, wearing the nickel badges of deputy sheriffs, stood at the foot of the stairs. A group of men that he knew to be his loyal supporters from his own village were standing at one side. He strolled over to them.

“Squire Thornton,” said one, “we’re barred out of this caucus. They won’t let us up.”

And still their leader was imperturbable. He turned inquiring gaze on the Reverend Dudley, and that gentleman declared himself with suspicious haste.

“This is going to be a strictly Republican caucus, and the check-list has been marked,” he said. “We don’t propose to have Democrats come in and run our affairs for us.”

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It was a challenge thrown down in good earnest.

In spite of the warning that his scout had brought to him, the Duke had hardly believed that amateur politicians would go to this extreme. More than ever he realized that unscrupulous men higher up were using these tools. And it was plain that the instruments had been tutored to believe that the end justified the means. What Ivus Niles said about the devil and fire betrayed them.

The Duke walked over to the minister, and took him by the lapels of his coat.

"Elder," he protested, "I don't like to see a good man used for tongs in politics. There's a lot you don't know about this game. You're in wrong."

"You're not the right man to tell me so, Mr. Thornton. I represent reform. It's time we had it. And *your* gospel in politics isn't *my* gospel."

"You've got the revised version, Parson Dudley, if you find a text in it about splitting a caucus at the door of the hall."

"The sheep shall be divided from the goats, sir."

"You've got this caucus and the Judgment Day mixed, elder." He released the minister and stepped back. "I never yet talked rough to a parson. But you've cut loose from common sense. When you get down on a level with me at a caucus door you're no parson—you're a politician, and you'll have to let me say that you're a blasted poor one. You're Enoch Dudley, now. And I want to tell you, Enoch, that neither you nor any bunch of steers you happen to be teaming can keep legal voters out of that hall. As to whether this or that man can vote in the caucus, that will be settled when we get in there. But these men of mine are going in. It's up to you to decide whether they shall go in as lions or lambs."

"Violence shall rest on your own head!" cried the minister. "I'll see that the world knows about it."

"We'll see whose case shows up best when the report is made," retorted the Duke. "But I'm done arguing. Pull off those deputies." Sheriff Niles appeared at that moment. He had left his subalterns to store the confiscated liquors.

"Niles, pull your men off the door, here," commanded the Duke. "Your county politics hasn't any business at our caucus here to-day."

"I've been asked to keep this caucus regular, and I'm going to do it," insisted the sheriff.

"So am I," agreed Thornton. "So when the story goes out it will have to be said that you and I were working together to keep politics pure." The faithful Sylvester was hovering

on the outskirts of the crowd. Thornton beckoned to him and he came. The Duke had probed the scheme and understood the stubbornness of the opposition. He was ready to act now.

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"Sylvester, you're a constable of this town. Take those fifty woodsmen over there as a special posse. I'm going to stand here at the foot of these stairs, and see to it that this caucus isn't packed. If you see hand laid on me or on a respectable voter going up these stairs, you pile in with those men. Go ahead up, boys, one and all!" He stepped between the deputies and beckoned to the voters. He stood there like a lighthouse marking safe channel. He challenged both the sheriff and the minister with his gaze. "We've got peace in stock and fight on tap, gentlemen," he declared. "Full assortment, and no trouble to show goods."

The village loyalists trooped forward promptly and flocked up. The deputies made no effort to stop them. Niles did not issue orders. Threats and badges might cow voters. But he knew woodsmen. He was not prepared to fight fifty of them.

The opposition hurried up also. Men streamed past on both sides of the old man, looming there in his wrinkled suit of crash.

"Let 'em go. We've got him licked in the caucus anyway," growled Niles to one of his deputies. "The back districts are here two to one against his village crowd."

Chairman Presson stood at one side and waited. Harlan Thornton came to him, leading his horse through the crowd.

"You have influence with my grandfather, Mr. Presson. You have told me yourself that it's folly to try to send me to the legislature. I'm not fitted for such duties. I am interested only in our business. You have had a chance to talk with him since you left the house. Haven't you made him change his mind?"

"I don't know," confessed Mr. Presson. "He's got my opinion, but he doesn't seem to think it's worth much."

"Well, there's only one thing to do," stated Harlan, resolutely. "I'll stand up here and let the voters of this district know how I feel about it. I've got my own rights in this thing, grandfather or no grandfather."

"Harlan, my boy!" The State chairman laid his hand protestingly on the young man's arm. "You've got my sympathy in regard to your going to the legislature in this fashion. But let me say something to you. Thelismar Thornton is standing here to-day putting up as pretty a political fight as I ever looked on. I hope he'll change his mind about sending you. I'll talk with him again. But if you lift one finger now when he's got his back against the wall you'll be a disgrace to your family. Take that from me. You'd better hop on your horse and ride off where the air is better."

After a moment of sombre reflection the young man swung himself to the back of his horse and galloped away. The look that he got from his grandfather when he departed did not enlighten or reassure him.

The little square of the town house was pretty well cleared by this time. The voters had crowded into the hall. One of the last men to pass the Duke hesitated on the stairs and came back. He was a short, chunky, very much troubled gentleman. He had slunk rather than walked past. He came back with the air known as “meeching.”

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"I'm afraid you're going to misunderstand me, Mr. Thornton."

The Duke offered no opinion.

"I hardly know how to go to work to explain myself in this matter," faltered the apologist.

"Considering that I got your appropriation for your seminary doubled last session in the stingiest year since the grasshoppers ate up Egypt, I should think you'd find it just a little troublesome convincing me that Enoch Dudley has got any claim over my interests so far's you're concerned. What's the matter with you, Professor?"

He invited the State chairman toward them by a toss of his head. His tone had been severe, but there was humor in his eyes.

"This is Principal Tute, of the Canibas Seminary, Luke. You remember the cussing I got from the Finance Committee for holding up the bill till I got the Professor's appropriation doubled. He's trying to tell me how much obliged he is."

Mr. Tute looked very miserable.

"I've always said you were the best man this district ever had in the legislature. I've stood up and said that in the open, Mr. Thornton. You're an institution down to the capitol. When there was talk of a change for the sake of reform—and you know I'm teaching reform principles in my school, Mr. Thornton," he hastened on desperately; "I'm teaching sociological principles in accordance with the advanced movement, and if I don't practice what I preach I'm false to my pupils, and—"

"You're going to vote against me to-day, are you, Tute?"

"I've said right along we ought to bear with you so long as you lived and wanted to be elected."

"Like the seven years' itch, eh?"

"But you are trying to make us mere serfs in politics by dictating our choice, and what I teach of the principles of democracy—"

Thornton tapped the little man on the shoulder.

"What they've done, Tute, is come up here with a dose to fit the palate of every one of you fellows, and you don't know enough to understand that you're being handled. You're going to vote against me, are you?"

“I call on this gentleman to witness that I say you’re the best man for the place. You’re able, you’re efficient, and you have done an immense amount of good for your constituents, and you—”

“But you won’t vote for me to-day, eh?” reiterated the old man, pitilessly.

Mr. Tute started again on his line of fulsome praise, but the Duke checked him brusquely.

“That will do, Professor Tute. I like cake. I like it frosted. But I’ll be d—d if I want it all frosting. Run up into the hall. Come along, Luke. We’ll miss the text if we don’t get in.”

The last of the stragglers followed them up the stairs.

CHAPTER VI

A CAUCUS, AND HOW IT WAS RUN

The earlier arrivals had pushed the settees of the Fort Canibas town hall to one side. They were piled against an end wall. There were not enough of them to furnish seats for that mob. For that matter, voters seemed to have no inclination to sit down that day. There was barely enough standing-room when all had entered the hall.

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Through them, friends and foes jostling each other, the Duke took his leisurely way. Presson was close behind him.

The rostrum, elevated a few feet above the main floor, was enclosed by boarding that came almost to the shoulders of those who stood within. Thornton, arrived at the front of the hall, put his shoulders against the boarding, shoved his hands into his trousers pockets, and gazed into the faces of his constituents. He was still amiable. But Presson sulked. It was hot in there, and the proletariat was unkempt and smoked rank tobacco.

"It's worth your while just the same, Luke," advised Thornton, in an undertone. He was conscious of the chairman's disgust, and it amused him. "They're going to have real caucuses in this State this year, they tell me. And this seems to be a nice little working model of the real thing. Better study it. It'll give you points on 'popular unrest,' as the newspapers are calling it."

The men in the pen above them were having an animated discussion. They were the members of the town committee. Thornton craned his neck and looked up at them. One of his loyal friends was there.

"What's the matter, Tom? Why not call to order?"

The man gave him a cautious wink before replying.

"There don't seem to be any copy of the call here, Squire. Some of 'em says we'll waive the reading of it. I say no. I say we don't want any holler to go out that this caucus wasn't run regular."

"It's only a 'technetical' point, anyway," protested one of the disputants.

"Well, I wouldn't allow too many of those 'technetical' points to get by in a caucus that you're ready to advertise under your reform headlines," advised the Duke. He settled himself against the boarding again. "Better give us straight work, boys."

It was not a threat. But it operated as effectually. A member of the town committee rapped for silence, and explained the situation rather shamefacedly. He asked the voters to be patient until the call could be prepared in the regular way.

"And now comes War Eagle Niles to help us kill time," observed Thornton. The agitator was pushing toward them. Men were urging him forward. It was evident that baiting their autocrat had become the favorite diversion of Fort Canibas' voters that day.

"Perhaps it was all right once for politicians to lead people by the nose, but it ain't all right now," stated Niles, as soon as he had squirmed into a favorable position for attack. "People didn't know, once. They didn't have newspapers, nor grange

discussions, nor lecturers, nor anything to keep 'em posted. They let themselves be led."

"Don't let yourself be led, Ivus. You're more interesting as you are now, bolting with your head and tail up. But I wonder whether you know just what it was you shied at?"

"Know? You bet I know!" shouted the demagogue. "How about taxes? I'm paying more to-day on my little farm out back there than you're paying on a whole township of your wild lands. And don't you suppose I know how it's all arranged?"

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"Why, Ivus, I suppose the chaps that have paid you to go around this district shooting your mouth off about 'tyrants' have supplied you with plenty of ammunition. Go ahead! I'd like to know how it was arranged, according to their notions."

"Who was that man that drove up to your house this morning in his devil machine, that cost more than my whole stand of farm buildings twice over—that man that's standing there beside you now, sneering at the voters of this State that he's been teaming? That's the Honor'ble Presson. He's chairman of the State Committee. He runs the big hotel down to the capital city. And where does he get money to buy automobiles with? I know. It's out of selling rum over his bar—and there's a law in the State constitution that makes selling rum a jail offence. But you don't see him in jail, do you?"

Astonishment that changed to fury nearly paralyzed the honorable chairman's tongue while Niles proceeded that far. When he did find his voice to protest, the War Eagle turned from him to the Duke like one who finds a weapon in each hand and becomes reckless.

"And no one sees you coming up and paying taxes on what you're really worth. It's all: 'You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours!' among the big fellows in this State. You can break all the laws you want to if you're in the right ring. And it's going to have a stop put to it!"

"Go ahead, Ivus!" encouraged his object of attack.

"If she's as sick as all that, she needs medicine quick. Get out your dose."

"The people is going to be reckoned with now," declaimed Niles, banging his knotted fist against the boarding.

"You mean of course The People—spelled with a capital T and a capital P, the same as you see it in those reform newspapers you've mentioned! Now, boys, I want you all to listen to me just one moment. You know I'm no hand to make speeches. But just let's talk this over. It'll take only a jiffy. There's a little time to kill while we're getting this caucus started *regular*. Now, some of these newspaper editors, who never get anywhere out of their offices except home to dinner, are writing a lot just now about THE PEOPLE—in capital letters, understand! Talking about 'em like as though they were a great force in politics—always organized and ready to support reform. Only needed to be called on. Fellows like Ivus here, that read and read and never bump up next to real things outside, get to think that The People make up an angel band that's all ready to march right up to the ballot-box and vote for just the right thing. Only have to be called on!"

The voters were crowding closer and listening. There was a half-smile on his face while he talked. He was not patronizing. But he took them into his confidence with simple directness.

“Boys, I don’t know where you’ll go to find that angel band!”

“The people of this State are gettin’ woke up enough to know!” cried a voice. The man stepped forward. It was Davis. “I say to you again, Mr. Thornton, don’t put us all on the plane of Ivus Niles.”

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The Duke was not ruffled by the interruption.

“Walt, I’ve been in politics a good many years. I was in the House in this State when Jim Blaine was there reporting for his newspaper. I want to tell you that when you get next to the real thing in politics you’ll find that this people thing—the capital-letter idea—is a dream. Yes, it is, now! Don’t undertake to dispute me! Here in one town you’ll find a man or a set of men handling a bunch. A county clique handles another one. Some especial local interest makes this crowd vote one way; same thing will make another bunch in another town mad and they’ll vote against it. It’s all factions and self-interest, and you can’t make it over into anything different. That’s practical politics. Get out and you’ll see it for yourself. You can swap and steer—that’s politics. But as for uniting ’em into The People—well, try to weld a cat’s tail and a tallow candle, and see how you get along!”

“It’s high time we had less politics, then,” cried Davis, “when politics lets the picked and chosen get rich selling rum or dodging taxes, and takes a poor man and pestles his head into the mortar till every cent is banged out of his pocket!”

“Davis, I’m patient with ramrodders when they’re having an acute attack like you’re having. It’s the chronic cases I get after, the ones who are in it for profit, and have been poking you fellows up because they’re paid for doing it. All of a sudden all of you are yapping at me because I’ve played the game. I’m talking business with you now. I suppose I might spread-eagle to you about our grand old State, and the call of duty and the noble principles of reform; I might fly up on this fence here and crow just as loud as any of those reform roosters, and not have any more sense in what I was saying than they do. I see you’ve got hungry for that revival hoorah. But I’m not going to perch and crow for the sake of getting three cheers! I’m going to stay right down here on the gravel with you, boys, and scratch a few times, and show you a few kernels, and cluck a little business talk. This district—you and your folks before you—has been sending me to the legislature for a good many years. I’m an ordinary man, and I’ve been against ordinary men down there at the State House. I should have played the game different with angels, but I couldn’t find the angels.”

He pointed through a window to a large building that occupied a hilltop just outside the village.

“Half the counties in the State were after that training seminary,” he went on. “I beat the lobby, and got it. How much money do you and your neighbors make boarding the scholars? I have pulled out State money for more than a thousand miles of State roads in this county. I got the State to pay every cent of the expense of that iron bridge across the river. I lugged off bigger appropriations for my district than any other man who has been in the House—because I know the ropes and have the pull. I could have played angel, and not brought home a plum. Would that suit you?”

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"I ain't detracting from what you got for us. But while you was dipping with your right hand for us, you was dipping with your left hand for yourself and them that trained with you," retorted Davis.

"And I wasn't to take any ordinary, human, business precautions about looking out for myself in any way, then?"

"You wasn't supposed to be representing yourself down there."

"For one hundred and fifty dollars every two years, and my mileage, I was to give up all my own business and my interests, and play statesman, pure and holy, for you up here? Refuse to help those men down there who helped me when I wanted something, and go down in the rotunda twice a day and thumb my nose at the portraits of the fathers of the State because they played politics in their time? That what you wanted me to do?"

"I've only got this to say," retorted Mr. Davis, afraid to argue: "You're proposing to jam your grandson down our throats, now that you've made your pile and got tired. You're going to have a man from this district that will do what you say and keep on flimflamming the people. I and them with me say no, and we'll show you as much in the caucus to-day."

"For the sake of having your own stubborn way—like most of the others that are howling about 'The People' in this State just now—you are ready to tip over this district's apple-cart, are you? Is that what you are trying to do? You take what I have given you, legislation and money that I've paid for labor in this section, and then propose to kick my pride in the tenderest place? I'll show you, Davis!"

"Well, show! We ain't a mite scared."

For some moments the throng in the town hall had shown waning interest in this discussion. There seemed to be matters outside that distracted the attention of those near the windows.

"There's a fire up Jo Quacca way!" called some one. The windows of town hall were high and uncurtained. All could see. Smoke, ominous and yellow, ballooned in huge volumes across the blue sky of the June day.

"There ain't no bonfire in that, gents," declared a man. "That fire has got a start, and if it's in that slash from that logging operation, it ain't going to be put out with no pint dipperful."

There was sudden hush in the big room. All men were gazing at the mounting masses that rolled into the heavens and blossomed bodefully over the wooded hills. Fat clouds

of the smoke hung high and motionless. From the earth went up to them whirls and spirals and billowing discharges like smoke from noiseless artillery.

A man had climbed upon a window-sill of the hall in order to see more clearly.

"I tell you, boys," he shouted, "that's a racin' fire, and it's in that Jo Quacca slash! I, for one, have got a stand of buildin's in front of that fire."

He jumped down and started for the door. Several men followed him.

The chairman of the town committee began to shake a paper above his head.

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"It's no time to be leaving a caucus," he pleaded. "We've fixed up a new call. We'll get down to business now."

"I know where my business is just this minute!" shouted the man who was leading the first volunteers. "And it ain't in politics."

The chairman tried to put a motion to adjourn, but at that moment the meeting-house bell began to clang its alarm.

"Save your property, you Jo Quacca fellows!" some one cried, and the crowd stampeded.

Thornton remained in his place in front of the rostrum. He noted who were running away. The deserters were the back-district voters—the opposition among whom his enemies had prevailed. The villagers remained. Here and there among them walked Talleyrand Sylvester. He was unobtrusive and he spoke low, but he was earnest.

When at last the chairman made his voice heard, Ivus Niles was shouting for recognition. That stern patriot had remained on guard.

"Maybe my house is burning, gents, but I ain't going to desert my post of duty till a square deal has been given. I call on you to adjourn this caucus till evening."

"Question!" was the chorus that assailed the chairman. The villagers crowded around the rostrum.

The motion to adjourn was voted down with a viva voce vote there was no disputing.

"It ain't just nor right!" squalled the War Eagle. "I'm here to protest! You ain't giving the voters a show! This thing shan't be bulled through this way!"

But that caucus was out of the hands of Mr. Niles and such as he, though some of the staunchest of Thornton's opposition had remained to fight.

Sylvester elbowed his way to the front, his followers at his back.

"I move, Mr. Chairman, that the check-list be dispensed with. It ain't ever been used in this caucus, anyway. And I'm in favor of hustling this thing so that we can all get up there and fight that fire. I don't believe in staying here caucusing, and let folks' property burn up."

The opposition howled their wrath. They understood all the hypocrisy of this bland assertion, but protest amounted to nothing. The voters were behind Sylvester. That gentleman promptly put in nomination the name of Harlan Thornton for representative to the legislature from the Canibas class of towns and plantations, and the choice was

affirmed by a yell that made the protesting chorus seem only a feeble chirp. And then the caucus adjourned tumultuously.

Through it all Thelimer Thornton stood with shoulders against the boarding, that quizzical half-smile on his face. He walked out of the hall past the outraged Ivus Niles without losing that smile, though the demagogue followed him to the door with frantic threats and taunts.

The meeting-house bell still chattered its alarm, an excited ringer rolling the wheel over and over.

Chairman Presson, who had found speech inadequate for some time, followed the Duke to the stairway outside, and stood beside him, gazing up at the conflagration. Smoke masked the hills. Fire-flashes, pallid in the afternoon light, shot up here and there in the yellow billows rolling nearest the ground.

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"I tell you, Thelismer, you'll never get across with this! It's too devilish rank!"

Elder Dudley marched past, leading the last stragglers of his following from the hall. His face was flushed with passion, but he had neither word nor look for the Duke. Even Niles was silent, bringing up the rear of the retreat, pumped dry of invective.

"You'll be up against Dudley, there, at the polls, running on an independent ticket. He's sure to do it!" went on Presson, watching them out of sight.

"You don't know the district," said Thornton, serenely. "And what's more important, I've got almost three months to meet that possibility in. I had only three hours to-day. You needn't worry about the election, Luke."

With his eyes still on the seething smoke vomiting up from the Jo Quacca hills he lighted a fresh cigar.

"There's something up there that's worrying me more. Cobb has got fire enough to break up a State convention."

Certain columns of smoke shot up, bearing knobs like hideous mushrooms. The knobs were black with cinders and spangled with sparks. The menace they bore could be descried even at that distance. A breeze wrenched off one of those knobs, and carried it out from the main conflagration. The roof of a barn half-way down the hillside began to smoke. Sparks had dropped there. After a time the two men could see trickles of fire running up the shingles.

"There goes one stand of buildings," announced Thornton.

"I swear, you take this thing cool enough!"

"Well, I'm not a rain-storm or a pipe-line, Luke. There's nothing more I can do. When Sylvester gets there with his crowd I'll have a hundred men or so of my own fighting it. And if a man sets fire on his land the law makes him pay the neighbors if the fire gets away and damages them. I'm prepared to settle without beating down prices. Let's go over to The Barracks."

Presson went along grumbling.

"You ought to have stayed in this fight this year for yourself, Thelismer. There was no need of all this uproar in ticklish times. A proposition like this makes the general campaign all the harder." He kept casting apprehensive glances behind at the swelling smoke-clouds.

"I'm paying the freight, Luke."

“There’d have been no fight to it if you’d stayed in yourself. Even your old whooping cyclone of a Niles, there, said that much. You’ve gone to work and got your grandson nominated, but between him and the bunch and that fire up there it looks to me as though your troubles were just beginning. Say, look here, Thelimer, honest to gad, you’re using our politics just to grind your own axes with!”

“And you never heard of anybody except patriots in politics, eh?”

“When you prejudice a State campaign in order to break up a spooning-match and to give your grandson a course of sprouts outside a lumbering operation, you’re making it a little too personal—and a little too expensive for all concerned.”

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The State chairman had his eyes on the fire again.

“As far as my business goes—that’s *my* business,” said the Duke, placidly. “As for the expense—well, I never got a great deal of fun out of anything except politics, and politics is always more or less expensive. When the bills get in for what has happened to-day I reckon I’ll find the job was worth the price. You needn’t worry about me, Luke—not about my failing to get my money’s worth. For when I walk across the lobby of the State House, and they can say behind my back, ‘There’s old Thornton—a gone-by. Got licked in his district!’ When they can say that, Luke, life won’t be worth living, not if I’ve got thousand-dollar bills enough to wad a forty-foot driving-crew quilt!”

CHAPTER VII

WITH THE KAVANAGH AT HOME

When Harlan Thornton rode away out of the yard of the town house he was the bitterest rebel in the Duke’s dominions. But he realized fully the futility of standing there in public and wrangling with his grandfather.

He understood pretty well the ambitious motive his grandfather had in forcing his will; Thelismier Thornton had urged the matter in the past. It had been the only question in dispute between them. And the young man had never resented the urgings. He appreciated what his grandfather hoped to accomplish for the only one who bore his name. But this high-handed attempt to shanghai him into politics outraged his independence. His protests had been unheeded. The old man had not even granted him an interview in private, where he could plead his own case. In business matters they had been co-workers, intimate on the level of partnership, with the grandfather asking for and obeying the suggestions the grandson made. On a sudden Harlan felt that he hardly knew this old man, who had shown himself contemptuous, harsh, and domineering. And then he thought of the girl who had been so grievously insulted in his presence, and he rode to find her.

His way took him across the long bridge that spanned the river. The river marked the boundary-line of his country. After that day’s taste of the politics of his native land he felt a queer sense of relief when he found himself on foreign soil.

Beyond the little church and its burying-ground, with the tall cross in its centre, the road led up the river hill to the edge of the forest. Here was set Dennis Kavanagh’s house, its back to the black growth, staring sullenly with its little windows out across the cleared farms of the river valley.

To one who knew Kavanagh it seemed to typify his attitude toward the world. He had seen other men clutching and grabbing. He had clutched and grabbed with the best of



them. When one deals with squatter claims, tax titles, forgotten land grants and other complications that tie up the public domain, it often happens that the man who waits for the right to prevail finds the more unscrupulous and impetuous rival in possession, and claiming rather more than the allowed nine points at that. So Dennis Kavanagh had played the game as the others had played it. When one looked up at the house, with its back against the woods, staring with its surly window-eyes, one saw the resoluteness of the intrenched Kavanagh put into visible form.

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The dogs came racing to meet Harlan. They knew him as their mistress's friend.

She was sitting on the broad porch-rail when he rode up, and he swung his horse close and patted her cheek as one greets a child. She smiled wistfully at him.

"Am I impudent, and all the things your grandfather said? I've been thinking it all over, Big Boy, as I was riding home."

"You're only a little girl, and he talked to you as he'd talk to one of our lumber-jacks," he burst out, angrily. "It was shameful, Clare. I never saw my grandfather as he was to-day. He has used me just as shamefully."

"I suppose I haven't had the bringing up a girl ought to have," she confessed. "I haven't thought much about it before. There was nothing ever happened to make me think about it. I was just Dennis Kavanagh's girl, without any mother to tell me better. I suppose it has been wrong for me to ride about with you. But you didn't have any mother and I didn't have any mother, and it—it sort of seemed to make us—I don't know how to say it, Big Boy! But it seemed to make us related—just as though I had a brother to keep me company. I suppose it has been wrong when you look at it the way girls have to look at such things."

He gazed on her compassionately. A few ruthless words had broken the spell of childhood.

There was shame in her eyes as she gazed up at him. He had seen the flush of youth and joy in her cheeks before—he had seen the happy color come and go as they had met and parted. But this hue that crept up over cheeks and brow made pity grow in him.

"He said—but you know what he said! And it isn't true. You know it isn't true. He shamed and insulted me because I'm a girl—and can't a girl have a friend that's tender and good to her?"

"A girl can," he said, gravely, "because I'm that friend, Clare. Perhaps my grandfather cannot understand. But I'll see that he does. We are to have some very serious talk together, he and I. I'm here to tell you, little girl, that I'm grateful because you sent that message into the woods to me. I'm not going to allow myself to be made a fool of in any such fashion; I'm not going to be sent to the legislature."

"Oh, I've been thinking—thinking how it sounded—all that I said," she mourned. "It all came to me as I was riding home—after what your grandfather said. I didn't realize what kind of a girl I must seem to folks that didn't know. But you know. It sounded as though I was claiming you for myself, when I didn't want you to go away. I'm ashamed—ashamed!" She averted her eyes from him. The crimson in her cheeks was deeper.

It was a vandal hand that had wrecked the little shrine of her childhood. His indignation against Thelimer Thornton blazed higher.

But Dennis Kavanagh knew how to be even more brutal, for that was Dennis Kavanagh's style of attack. He came out upon the porch, a broad, stocky chunk of a man, with eyebrows sticking up like the horns on a snail, and the eyes beneath them keen with humor of the grim and pitiless sort.

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"And how do you do to-day, Harlan Thornton?" he asked. "And how is that old gorilla of a grandfather of yours? Though you needn't tell me, for I don't want to know—not unless you can lighten me up a bit by telling me that he's enjoying his last sickness. But right now while I think of it, I have something to say to you, young Thornton, sir."

The young man stared hard at him. It was an unwonted tone for Kavanagh to employ. Clare's father, till now, had not included Harlan in his feud with the grandfather. He had always treated him with a brusqueness that had a sort of good-humor beneath it. His discourse with the young man had been curt and satiric and infrequent, and consisted usually in mock messages of defiance which he asked to have delivered by word of mouth to the grandfather. But his tone now was crisp and it had a straight business ring.

"My girl will be sixteen to-morrow. She is done with childhood to-day. Children may ride cock-horse and play ring-around-a-rosy. I haven't drawn any particular line on playfellows up to now. But there isn't going to be any playing at love, sir."

"I never have played at love with your daughter!" cried Harlan, shocked and indignant at this sudden attack.

"Well, I'm fixing it so you won't. We won't argue about what has happened, nor we won't discuss what might happen. All is, I don't propose to have any grandson of old Thornton mixed up in my family. I don't like the breed. You take that word back to him. I hear he's been making talk. He made some talk to-day. You needn't look at Clare, young man. She didn't tell me. But it came across to me mighty sudden. Others heard, too. What I ought to do is go over there and stripe his old Yankee hide with a horsewhip. But you tell him for me that that would be taking too much stock in anything that a politician in your politics-ridden States could say. That's all. You've got it, blunt and straight. And, by-the-way, I understand he's making a politician out of you, too, to-day? I'm taking this thing just in time!"

The young man and the girl looked at each other. It was a pitiful, appealing glance that they exchanged. Shame surged in both of them. In that gaze, also, was mutual apology for the ruthless ones who had dealt such insult that day in their hearing; there was hopelessness that any words from them to each other, just then, could help the situation. And in that gaze, too, there was proud denial, from one to the other, that anything except friendship, the true, honest comradeship of youth, had drawn them together.

Kavanagh eyed them with grim relish. The thought that he was harrying one of the Thorntons overbore any consideration he felt for his daughter, even if he stopped to think that her affection was anything except the silliness of childhood.

“Politics seems to be a good side-line for the Thornton family,” Kavanagh remarked, maliciously. “If you can start where your grandfather is leaving off, you ought to be something big over in your country before you die!”

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"I'm not interested in politics, Mr. Kavanagh, nor in my grandfather's quarrels with you."

"I am, though! Interested enough to advise you to keep to your own side of that river!"

"I'll admit that you have the right to advise your daughter about the friends she makes. But I don't grant you the privilege of insulting me before her face and eyes by putting wrong constructions on our friendship."

"Meaning that you're going to keep up this dilly-dally business whether I allow you to or not?"

It was a cruel question at that moment. The girl was looking at him with her heart in her eyes. He had understood her pledge of loyalty given a moment before. Youth is not philosophic. She would misunderstand anything except loyalty in return.

"Going to court my daughter, are you, according to the Thornton style of grabbing anything in sight that they want?"

"Say, look here, Mr. Kavanagh," declared the young man, hotly, "I'm not going to answer any such questions. But I'm going to tell you something, and I'm going to tell it to you straight and right here where your daughter can hear me. I'm not the kind that goes around making love to any father's daughter behind his back. I've never made love to your daughter. Why, man she's only a child! And don't you give me any more sneers about it. That's man to man—understand? And I'm not going to let you nor my grandfather or any one else break up the innocent friendship between my little playmate here and myself. Now I hope you'll take that in the way I mean it. If you don't, it's your fault." He had spoken to answer the appeal in her eyes.

He had backed his horse away so that he could face Kavanagh on the steps of the porch. The girl leaped down from the rail, her face alight, and ran to him and patted his hand.

"By Saint Mike, do you think you'll tell me how to run my house?" demanded Kavanagh. He came down the steps. "I'll build a coffin for you and a cage for her before that!"

"You stay where you are, father!" She faced him with spirit. "You have insulted me worse than you've insulted Harlan. You needn't worry about my going behind your back to make love to any one. But you shall not break up the dearest friendship I ever had."

This was the Clare Kavanagh who had bearded even Thelismor Thornton that day—the imperious young beauty that the country-side knew. Her father had often tested that spirit before, and had allowed her to dominate, secretly proud that she was truly his own in violence of temper and in determination to have her own way. But just now he was lacking that tolerantly humorous mood which usually gave in to her.

“To the devil with your fiddle-de-dee friendship!” he shouted. “You’re sixteen, you young Jezebel; and you—you’re old enough to know better, Thornton. I know what it’s leading to, and it ain’t going further. I’ll not stand here and argue with you. But if you come meddling in my family after what I’ve said, you’ll get hurt, young man.”

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"That's right—we won't argue the question," Thornton retorted. "There's nothing to argue. You know where I stand in the matter, little girl. That's all there is to it, so far as we're concerned. I'm going now. I think I'm ready for that, talk with my grandfather."

He took leave of her with a frank handclasp. Kavanagh glowered, but did not comment.

When Harlan whirled his horse he saw the conflagration on the Jo Quacca hills.

He gasped something like an oath. "There goes the slash on our operation!" he said, aloud.

"Your grandfather must have got you into politics in good shape by this time," observed Kavanagh, sarcastically. "At any rate, he seems to be celebrating with a good big bonfire."

At that moment the three of them beheld the farm buildings burst into flame.

"Offering up sacrifices, too!" commented the satirist. "Seems to me, Thornton, you ought to be there. They'll be calling for three cheers and a speech!"

In one heartsick moment Thornton realized that this raging fire had something to do with the political affairs of that day. He had seen "Whispering" Urban Cobb at "The Barracks" in the forenoon, and knew that he had led away a crowd of woodsmen for some purpose of his own. Just what a dangerous conflagration on the Jo Quacca hills could accomplish in relation to that caucus, Harlan did not stop to ponder. He could see that a fire was rioting over his lands, and destroying the property of others. His horse had already begun to leap for the highway, but the girl cried after him so beseechingly that he reined the animal back.

"Just one moment, Harlan! A little instant! I haven't unsaddled Zero yet. Wait!" She whistled, and the horse came cantering. The hounds, seeing him, leaped and gave tongue understandingly. "I'm going with you," she declared, swinging to her saddle.

Her father came down off the steps, running at her. "No, you're not, you wild banshee. What did I just tell you?"

"You told me that children may ride cock-horse—and I'm not sixteen till to-morrow!" she cried, jumping her horse just as her father's clutching fingers touched his bridle. She was out in the road before Harlan's horse had picked up his heels. She swung her little whip above her head.

"Come on, Big Boy!" she urged at the top of her voice, crying above the clamor of the racing dogs. "We're playfellows to-day, and I can't fall in love till to-morrow!" The last words she lilted mockingly, flashing a look backward at Dennis Kavanagh.

The old man did not shift his attitude, fingers curved to clutch, arms extended, until he heard the tattoo of their horses' hoofs on the long bridge.

"Maybe Brian Boru might have been proud of her for a daughter," he muttered, as he trudged back up the steps, "but I'll be damned if I know whether I am or not!"

CHAPTER VIII

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THE MANTLE OF THELISMER THORNTON

The fire on the Jo Quacca hills was checked at nightfall. Two hundred beaters and trenchers managed to fight it back and hold it in leash to feed on the slash of the timber operation. But, like a tiger confined in its cage, it had reached out through its bars and claimed victims. Three stands of farm buildings were in ruins.

Harlan Thornton, sooty and weary, left the fire-line as soon as he knew that the monster had been subdued. He rode about to reassure the owners that their losses would be made up by himself and his grandfather.

"Keep away from the lawyers," he counselled the losers. "They'll get half the money out of you if you hire them. We'll settle after appraisal."

The men that he talked to seemed sullen in spite of his assurances. They seemed to be repressing taunts or reproaches merely in consideration of the fact that he was holding the purse-strings. He noted this demeanor, and feared to ask questions.

Clare Kavanagh rode with him; she had not left his side, even when he led his crews into perilous places and entreated her to keep back.

And they rode away together down the long stretch of highway from the hills to the village. Behind them, against the dusk, glowed the red, last signals of the dying fires: tree-trunks upraised like smouldering torches, the timbers of the falling buildings tumbling from their props and sending up showers of sparks. A pale sliver of new moon made the red of the fires even more baleful, and the two who rode together looked back and felt the obsession of something they had never experienced before.

"I am unhappy, Big Boy," sighed the girl. "We have never come back from our rides like this."

"It has been a wicked day for both of us, child."

"And you cannot call me child after to-day—so my father says." Her voice was still plaintive, but there was a hint of the old mischief there. "I'll be sixteen to-morrow—and I didn't know until to-day that I'd be so sorry that it is so. Ever since I was ten I've been wishing I could be eighteen without waiting for the years. But I don't know, now, Harlan. It seemed as though I'd be getting more out of living. I thought so." Tears were in her voice now. "It seems as though I'd grown up all of a sudden; and things aren't beautiful and happy and—and as they used to be—not any more! I've lost something, Harlan. And if growing up is losing so much, I don't want to grow up."

He listened indulgently and understood this protest of the child. Their horses walked slowly side by side, and the tired hounds trailed after them.

“The grown-ups do lose a lot of things out of life, little girl—things that mean a great deal in childhood. But keep your heart open, and other things will come.”

“Perhaps when I get to be twenty-four years old and as big as you are I can talk that way, and believe it, too. But just now I’m only a girl that doesn’t believe she’s grown up, even if they do tell her so, and tell her she mustn’t be a playmate any longer. And you are not to ride with me any more, and you are not to come to my house nor may I come to yours. That’s what they say. What are we to do, then?”

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She cried her question passionately. He had no answer ready. Platitudes would not do for this child, he reflected, and to lecture her then even on the A B C's of the social code would be wounding her ingenuous faith.

"If this is the way it all turns out, and I can't have your friendship any longer, what is it that you're going to do or I'm going to do?" she insisted. "That's losing too much, just because one is grown up."

Tenderness surged in his heart toward this motherless girl—tenderness in which there was a new quality. But he had no answer for her just then. He did not understand his own emotions. He was as unsophisticated as she in the affairs of the heart. His man's life of the woods had kept him free from women. His friendship with this child, their rides, their companionship, had been almost on the plane of boy with boy; her character invited that kind of intimacy.

And so he wondered what to say; for her demand had been explicit, and she demanded candor in return.

At that moment he welcomed the appearance of even Ivus Niles. That sooty prophet of ill appeared around a bend in the road ahead. The twilight shrouded him, but there was no mistaking his stove-pipe hat and his frock-coat. He was leading his buck sheep, and the hounds rushed forward clamorously. Niles stopped in the middle of the road, and let them frolic about him and his emblematic captive.

"The dogs won't hurt you, Niles," Harlan assured him, spurring forward.

"I ain't afraid of dogs, I ain't afraid of wolves, not after what I've been through with the political Bengal tigers I've been up against to-day," Niles assured him, sourly. "And your grandfather is the old he one of the pack. You tell him—"

"You can take your own messages to my grandfather, Niles." He swung his horse to pass, the girl at his side, but the War Eagle threw up his hand commandingly.

"I've got a message for you, yourself, then, and you stay here and take it. He stole our caucus for you to-day, your grandfather did—"

"You don't mean to say I was nominated!"

"That's too polite a word, Mr. Harlan Thornton. I gave you the right one the first time. He stampeded our caucus by having that fire set on the Jo Quacca hills. Three sets of farm buildings offered up to the gods of rotten politics! That's a nice kind of sacrifice, Thornton's grandson! It goes well with the crowd you're in with. It will smell well in the nostrils of the people of this State. You ought to be proud of being made a lawmaker in that way."

It was not reproach—it was insult, sneered in the agitator’s bitterest tone.

“The property of three poor toilers of the soil laid flat in ashes, a town terrified by danger rushing down through the heavens like the flight of the war eagle,” shouted Niles, declaiming after his accustomed manner, “and all to put you into a seat in the State House, where you can keep stealing the few things that your grandfather ain’t had time or strength to steal! You’ve had your bonfire and your celebration—now go down and hoist the Star-Spangled Banner over ‘The Barracks’—but you’d better hoist it Union down!”

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Harlan dropped off his horse and strode to Niles. He seized him by the shoulder and shook him roughly, for the man had begun his oratory once more.

"Enough of that, Niles! Was I chosen in the caucus to-day? I want yes or no."

"Yes—and after three-quarters of the voters had been stampeded to fight that fire that was sweeping down on their property! And you—"

Harlan pushed him to one side, leaped upon his horse, and rode away. The girl jumped her roan to his side.

"It's wicked, Harlan," she gasped, "wicked! I heard him! What are you going to do?"

That was another of her questions that he found it hard to answer. "I'm going to find my grandfather, Clare, and I'm going in a great hurry. Come, I can't talk now, little girl!"

They galloped down the long hill to the bridge, their horses neck and neck.

"The last ride as playmates!" she cried, as they started. Her voice broke, pathetically. He did not reply. He was too furiously angry to trust himself in conversation at that moment, and he rode like a madman, knowing that she could keep pace with him.

They drew rein at the end of the bridge.

"It's only a bit of a run for you now, little girl. I'll keep on home."

She put her hand out to him and held him for a moment.

"I'm afraid you'll go away to be a big man, after all, Harlan," she said, dolefully.

"Go in this way? What are you talking about, child?" he demanded, choking, his fury getting possession of him. "I've been disgraced—abused. I'll—but I mustn't talk to you now—the wicked words might slip out."

But she would not loose his hand just then.

"I sent for you to come home because I heard father say that politics is wicked business. But I didn't know it was as wicked as this. It's no wonder they can't get the good men like you to go into it. If they could it would be better, wouldn't it?"

Even in his distress it occurred to him that out of the mouth of this child was proceeding quaint and unconscious wisdom.

"I wish it wasn't wicked," she went on, wistfully. "I've been thinking as I rode along that I've been selfish. I'd like to see you a big man like some of those I've read about. It was selfish of me to say I didn't want you to get out of the woods and be a big man."

"I couldn't be one," he protested.

"Even a foolish little girl up here in the woods has got faith that you can—and men who are really big don't forget their old friends. I don't want you mixed up in any wicked thing, Harlan, but I wouldn't want you to go away from me thinking I was selfish and jealous. That isn't the right kind of a friend for any one to have. I've been thinking it over."

He stared at her through the dusk. This sudden flash of worldly wisdom, this unselfish loyalty in one so young, rather startled him.

"That's real grown-up talk, child," he blurted.

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"Is it?" The wan little flicker of a smile that she mustered brought tears to his eyes. "Maybe it's because I'll be sixteen to-morrow. Good-night, Big Boy!" This new, womanly seriousness was full of infinite pathos. She had not released his hand. She bent forward suddenly, leaning from her saddle, and kissed his cheek. "And good-bye, my playmate!" she whispered. While his fingers still throbbed with the last pressure of her hand, the black mouth of the big bridge swallowed her. He listened to the ringing hoof-beats of her horse till sudden silence told him she had reached the soft soil on the other shore.

He did not gallop to meet his grandfather. He walked his horse for the long mile past the scattered houses of the village till he came to "The Barracks."

When he was still some distance away he saw in the gloom of the porch the red coal of the Duke's cigar. Even then he did not rush forward to protest and denounce.

He slipped off his horse, and led him toward the porch. But before he could speak his grandfather hailed him.

"Run in to your supper, bub. The boys are holding it hot for you. Luke and I were too hungry to wait."

"I can't eat now—not with what's on *my* mind."

"Oh, bub—bub! Run along with you! There's plenty of time for talk. I'll be here when you come out. Get something to eat, now! That's a good boy!"

Somehow he couldn't begin the attack just then. That tone was too affectionate, too matter-of-fact. And even then his hand seemed to feel the pressure of the little fingers that had released him at the bridge, and the choking feeling was still in his throat.

He gave his horse over to the hostler, and went into the house.

The lamp in the old mess-room thrust its beams only a little way into the gloom. It shone over the table and left the corners dark. The cookee brought the food from the kitchen, poured the tea, and then wiped his hands briskly on his canvas apron.

"I want to shake with you, Mr. Harlan!" He put out his hand, so frankly confident that he was doing the proper thing that the young man grasped it. "It was done to 'em good and proper. They tried to pull too hot a kittle out of the bean-hole that time—sure they did! I congratulate you! I knowed you'd get into politics some day."

Harlan pulled his hand away, and began to eat.

“Served up hot to ’em—that mess was,” chuckled the cookee, on the easy terms of the familiar in the household. “Nothing like a rousin’ fire if you’re going to make the political pot bile in good shape.”

He chuckled significantly.

The man pushed the food nearer, for Harlan did not seem to be taking much interest in his supper.

“I suppose you’ll be boardin’ at Mr. Presson’s hotel when you get down to the legislature. I had a meal there once. They certainly do put it up fine. Say, Mr. Harlan, what do you say? Can’t you use your pull, and get me a job as waiter or something down there for the session? Excuse me for gettin’ at it so quick, but I thought I’d hop in ahead of the rush—they’ll all be after you for something, now that you’re nominated.”

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The young man could not discuss with this cheerful suppliant his indignant resolve not to be a legislator.

"You'll have to stay home here and look after Grandfather Thornton, Bob," he hedged.

"Oh, thunder! He's goin' right down to spend the winter with you. Was tellin' Mr. Presson so when they et just now. Said you'd be needin' a steerin' committee of just his bigness!"

Harlan got up and kicked his chair from under him. It went over with a clatter. To his infinite relief he had suddenly recovered some of that wrathful determination that Ivus Niles's sneers had given him earlier in the evening.

Thelismar Thornton heard him coming.

"Pretty heavy on his heels, the boy is!" he observed to the State chairman. "He's been licking his dander around in a circle till he's got it rearing."

The young man halted, erect before his grandfather, but again the old man got in the first word.

"I'm going to give you all the time to talk in you want, bub. I was a little short with you to-day, when I was stirred up, but no more of that! Say all you want to. And I'm going to give you a little advice about starting in. Now—now—now! Hold on. I know just how you feel. I don't blame you for feeling that way. But it had to be done just as I did it—all of it! Now you ought to start in with me just the way Sol Lurchin was advised to when he wanted to tackle Cola Jordan, who had done him on a horse-trade. Sol went to old Squire Bain, and says he to the Squire, 'I want to stay inside the law in this. I don't want him to get no legal hold on me. But I want to talk to him. Now, what'll I say so's to give him what's comin' and still be legal?' 'Well,' says old Squire, rubbing his hands together, 'you've got to start easy, you know. You want to start easy, so's to make the climax worth something. Now, let's see! Well, suppose you walk up to him and say, 'You spawn of the pike-eyed sneak that Herod hired to kill babies, you low-down, contemptible son of a body-snatcher, you was born a murderer, but lacked the courage and became a horse-thief!' There, Sol, start in easy like that and gradually work up to a climax, and you'll have him going—and all inside the law. Two dollars, please!'"

The Duke leaned back in his chair and nested his head in his big hands. He gazed up meekly at his chafing grandson.

"Start in easy, bub, like that, and work up to your climax. I know just how you feel!"

But just at that moment the chairman of the State Committee was laughing too loudly for any dignified protest to be heard.

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"For some reason, grandfather, you seem all at once to have taken me as a subject for a practical joke," said the young man, stiffly. The interlude had taken the sharp edge off his indignation, but he was still bitter. "It may seem a joke to you. To me it seems insult and persecution. I have attended to business, I've worked hard and made money for both of us. To-day you've held me up before this section to be laughed at by some and hated by the rest. I'm glad I've had half an hour to think it over since I first heard about what happened in that caucus. I won't say the things to you I intended to say. I'll simply say this: I'm going to write a letter declining this nomination. I'm going to publish that letter. And I'm going to say in that letter that I will not take any office that isn't come at honestly."

"Harlan, sit down." His feet had been in one of the porch chairs. He pushed it toward his grandson. The young man sat down.

"You don't know much about the practical end of politics, do you?"

"I do not."

"You'll allow that I do?"

"You seem to, if that's what you call this sort of business that has been going on here to-day."

"Bub, look at the thing from my standpoint for just one moment. I'll consider it from yours, too—you needn't worry. I want you to be something in this world besides a lumber-jack. You've got the right stuff in you. I tried argument with you. You'll have to own up that I did. It didn't work—now, did it?"

"I told you I didn't want to get into politics. I don't want to get in. I don't like the company."

"Politics is all right, Harlan, when the right men are in. You are the kind the people are calling for these days. You're clean, straight, open-minded, and—"

"Clean and straight! And the people are calling for me!" The young man broke in wrathfully. "You say that to me after the sort of a caucus you sprung to-day? If that's what you consider a call from the people, I don't want to be called that way."

"It was a call, but it had to be *shaded by politics* a little," returned the Duke, serenely.

"If a good man is going into politics, he can go in square."

"Sometimes. But not when the opposition is out to do him with every dirty trick that's laid down in the back of the political almanac."

“If you wanted to start me, and start me fair and right, why didn’t you let my name go before that caucus to-day, and then hold off your hands?”

“Because if I had you’d have stood about the same chance as a worsted dog chasing an asbestos cat through hell. Look here, bub, I wish I had the time; I’d like to tell you how most of the good men I know got their start in politics. You can be a statesman after you’ve got your head up where the sun can shine on it, but you’ve got to be touching ground to keep your head up. And if you’re touching ground in politics, you’ll find that your shoes are muddy—and you can’t help it.”

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The grandson did not reply. Thornton relighted his cigar. The flare of the match showed disgust and stubbornness in the features opposite.

"You know Enoch Dudley as well as I do, Harlan. That's the man they put up. And a man that has let two of his sons be bound out and has turned back his wife for her own people to support can't hide behind any white necktie, so far's I'm concerned. Luke and I know where the money came from that they've been putting in here. We know the men behind, and what their object is. We know what they are trying to do in the next legislature. You'll see it all for yourself when the time comes, Harlan. You'll be up against them. You understand men. I'll only be wasting time in telling you what you'll see for yourself. Do you want to see a man like Enoch Dudley representing this district? If you do, go ahead and write that letter!"

"You'll not do that, Harlan," stated the chairman, with decision. "As it stands now, whatever they say about this caucus will be simply the whinings of a licked opposition. We know how to handle that kind of talk. There isn't a man on our side, from Sylvester to Urban Cobb, who will open his mouth, even if the thumb-screws are put to him. Harlan, are you the kind of a fellow that would hold your grandfather up before the people of this State in any such light? Of course you are not!"

"No, I don't suppose I am," acknowledged the young man. "But I can decline to run."

The State chairman pulled his chair close, and tapped emphasis on the candidate's knee.

"No, you can't. It would give 'em the one fact that they need for a foundation to build their case on. What you've got to do, Harlan, is accept this nomination, just as it is handed to you. Stand up and fight for your election like a man. The thing may look rank to you. Politics usually looks rank to a beginner, who has to get down and fight on the level of the other fellow. But you'll understand things better after you get along a little further. If you back out now you're leaving your grandfather open to attack. Those dogs can only bark, now. If you let 'em past you they'll have a chance to set their teeth in. Harlan, you think too much of your grandfather to do such a thing as that, don't you?"

The three of them sat in silence for a while.

"I hate to say anything just now, my boy," said the old man, at last. He leaned forward, his elbows on the arms of his chair. "Luke has put it to you a little stronger than I should have done. I don't want to beg you or coax you. If you think it's too much of a sacrifice to stand by me—if you want to quit, and can't look at it in any other way, go ahead. I can fight it out alone. I've had a good many lone fights. I'm good for one more. But before you say what you're going to say, I've got a last word to drop in. You know how I've dealt with men in business matters, my boy."

“But why can’t you do the same in politics?” demanded his grandson, bitterly.

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"It's just on that point that I want to put you right. I know pretty well why you haven't hankered to get into politics, Harlan. You've heard some of the sneers, slurs, and the gossip. You didn't know much about it, but you sort of felt ashamed of me on account of politics. Hold on! I know. It has been a kind of shame and pity mixed, like one feels for a drunkard in the family. This caucus seemed to you like a spree—and you got mixed into it, and you're angry with me. Listen: there are people in this world who won't allow that a man is honest in politics unless he goes about hunting for all the measures that might help him personally and kills 'em. And the same yellow-skins that howl because he doesn't do that would turn around and cuss him for seventeen kinds of a fool if he did, and ruined himself by doing it. I haven't stolen, boy. I've given my time and my energies to developing this State. I've seen it prosper and grow big. And I've shared in the prosperity by seeing that my own interests got their rights along with the rest. I'm where I can look back. And I can't see where the reputation of being a saint who cut off his own fingers for a sacrifice would help me get endorsers at the bank or find friends I could borrow money from. Harlan, boy, I'm an old man. I can't live much longer. A little reputation of some kind or another will live after me. I want you to know the right of it. And the only way for you to find out is to be what I have been. Hearing about it won't inform you. I want you to meet the men and play the game. I want you to realize that when I say I've done the best I could, I'm telling you the truth. Harlan, stand up here with me. Give me your hand. Say that you'll stand by the old man in this one thing—the biggest he ever has asked of you. It's a matter between the Thorntons, boy!"

There had been an appeal in his voice that was near wistfulness. And while he talked the wisdom that had come from the mouth of a child that evening threaded its own quaint appeal into the argument of the grandfather. Resentment and obstinacy, if they be tempered with youth, cannot fight long against affection and the ties of blood.

Harlan took his grandfather's hand.

"That's my boy!" cried the Duke, heartily, and he slipped his arm about his grandson's shoulders and patted him.

"It straightens things out a good deal," observed Presson, with the practicality of the politician. "Harlan, you're going to find a winter at the State House worth while. With your grandfather to set you going right and post you up, you ought to make good."

"I'd like to have a little light on one point," remarked the young man, curtly. He felt again the irritating prick of resentment. "What am I to be down to that legislature—myself, or Thelismar Thornton's grandson?"

"You can't afford to throw good advice over your shoulder," protested the chairman—"not when it comes from a man that's had fifty years of experience."

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"Hold on, Luke, don't set the boy off on the wrong track. I know how he feels. Harlan, you're going down there just as I said you're going—with an open mind, clean hands, good, straight American spirit to do right just so far as a man in politics can do right! I want you to see for yourself. If you want my help in anything you shall have it. But it'll be Gramp advising his boy—not a boss, hectoring. Believe that!"

"You needn't be afraid of the city fellows," advised Presson.

Harlan stood up before them, earnest, intense, determined.

"A fellow placed as I have been has this much advantage over city chaps, and I'm going to take courage from it," he said: "I've had a chance to read. There are long evenings in the woods, and I haven't been able or obliged to kill time at clubs and parties. I have read, Mr. Presson. I don't know how much good it has done me. That remains to be found out. Perhaps a fellow who reads and hasn't real experience gets a wrong viewpoint. But this much I do believe: a man can be honest, himself, in politics, and can find enough honest men to stand with him. I'm going to try, at any rate. For if there's any dependence to be put in what I read there's something serious the matter in public affairs."

"Going to start a reform party, young man?" chuckled the State chairman. He had seen and tested youthful ideals before in his political experience.

"I didn't mean it that way. I wasn't talking about myself. I'll be only a little spoke in the wheel, sir. But I mean to say that when I get to the State House I'm going to hunt up the men who believe in a square deal, and I'm going to train with 'em." He spoke a bit defiantly. It was youth declaring itself. It was a spark from the fire that Ivus Niles had kindled by his sneers.

"Boy," said the old man, cheerfully, "you're prancing just a bit now. But you needn't be afraid of me, because I said I'd help you. The first thing I'll do will be to take you around and introduce you to the men down in the legislature who are proposing to reform the State. So you see I mean right!"

The State chairman seemed much amused. He chuckled.

The Duke walked to the end of the porch and gazed up at the Jo Quacca hills, where the dim, red glow still shone against the sky.

"So it took down three stands of buildings, did it, Harlan?" he called. "Did you tell the boys we'd settle promptly, and for them to keep away from the lawyers?"

"I arranged it the best I could and got their promise. But they seem to know the fire was set on purpose, and are pretty gruff about it."



“Of course the fire was set on purpose—and I have a right to clear my own land when I want to. But I know how to settle, bub, so as to turn their vinegar to cream. For when I square a political debt, whether it’s pay or collect, there’s no scaling down! Full value—and then a little over!”

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He came back and as he passed he tweaked Harlan's ear.

"It's been a hard day, boy! Come on, let's all three go to bed."

CHAPTER IX

IN THE CENTRE OF THE BIG STATE WEB

Chairman Presson, going his way next morning, had to confess to himself that he did not have much to do with the workings of the Fort Canibas caucus. But it was worth while to see it. It revealed the character of the opposition throughout the State. And he did a notable job in the publicity line immediately. That was his opportunity of "rallying to the flag." The Duke had got his blow in first; the chairman of the State Committee got his news in first—for the State machine controlled the principal newspapers.

First news, put right, wins. The caucus in Fort Canibas exposed the methods of "so-called reformers"—as the report of it was set forth in print. And that news was a tocsin for town committeemen who had been dozing.

Thelismar Thornton, House leader, party boss, knight of the old regime, and representative of all that the reformers had been inveighing against, still controlled his district. That fact was impressed upon all. And the more vociferous the resulting complaints of the opposition, the more apparent it became that it was no mere skirmish party that had been sent out against him; he had whipped the generals themselves. His methods were mentioned discreetly; his results were made known to all men.

The fact that it was his grandson who had been nominated was not emphasized as an item of general knowledge. That "Thornton had been nominated" was. It was the essential point.

It was accepted as a tip by the many who were waiting and wondering just what this reform movement would accomplish in actual results—and that means ability to own and distribute plums. It shifted the complexion of many caucuses, or rather fixed that complexion, without any one being the wiser; for the managers of districts had been waiting for tips without saying anything in regard to their uncertainty. That's an essential in practical politics—being able to wait without letting any one know of the waiting. It gives a man his chance to cheer with the winner and declare himself an "original." The convert is never half as precious in politics as an "original." It is in heaven that the joy over the sinner who repenteth is comforting and extreme. In politics the first men on the band-wagon get the hand and what's in it.

And yet, as the tide of caucuses swelled and reports of results flowed into State headquarters, Chairman Presson and his lieutenants found themselves unable to mark men with the old certitude of touch. There was a queer kind of slipperiness

everywhere. It was evident that the Canibas result had stiffened backbones in many quarters, but more new men than usual were coming forward with nominations in their fists. Many of these men were not telling any one how they felt on the big questions that were agitating the State. Some announced themselves with the usual grandiloquent generalities. It is easy enough to say that one believes in reform and good citizenship, for one can construe that later to suit circumstances.

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The reformers were making a great deal of noise, mostly threats. They were passing to candidates specific questions as to their stand on the larger issues. Many candidates who had subscribed and declared themselves dodged up to headquarters on the sly and assured the State chairman that they had pledged their positions because it seemed to be a reform year, and they had to do something to shut up the yawp of the reformers. When they privately assured Presson that they would be found on the right side just the same after election, he took heart for a moment, and then was downcast after they were gone; it was tabulating liars—an uncertain job. Presson listened and took what courage he could, but the asterisks in his lists confessed his doubts.

“There’s a line of stars down those lists that would puzzle the man who invented political astronomy,” he told his intimates. “But I don’t dare to go looking for the trouble right now. It’ll be like a man looking for measles in his family of thirteen; it’ll break out if it’s there—he won’t have to hunt for it.”

The Republican State Convention was called for late June. The party managers believed that it would clarify the situation somewhat; “it would afford an opportunity for conference and free debate on the big questions where division of opinion existed,” so the party organs assured their readers day by day. Chairman Presson asked them to drum this idea into the heads of the people.

But what he told himself and the secret council was that there needed to be a round-up where some of the wild steers could be thrown and branded before they should succeed in stampeding the main herd. It was a situation that called for one of the good, old-fashioned “nights before.” For a practical politician knows that speeches and band music do not make a convention; they merely ratify the real convention; the real convention is held “the night before,” behind closed doors at the headquarters hotel.

There were two candidates for the gubernatorial nomination. The natural legatee of the old regime in his party was in line, of course. He had been in line for ten years, as his predecessors had waited before him. He had served apprenticeship after the usual fashion: had given his money and his time; he had won the valuable title which only he who has suffered and has been bled can win, that of “the logical candidate.”

But that seemed not the halcyon year for “the logical candidate.”

The inevitable had happened in the matter of political succession. There had been too long a line of successors. The machine had become too close a corporation. A machine, over-long in power, by the approved process of making itself strong makes itself weak. It must pass around the offices. When it picks the best men it makes enemies of all those it disappoints. That includes principals and followers. For a time these “best men” have enough of a personal following to repel boarders. But party “best men” must make enemies in fortifying themselves and their friends.

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Every time a matter is decided between factions, or a political seeker wins a subordinate job, a rival and his friends are sent away to sulk. And so at last, in the process of making the fortress impregnable, the big wall falls and “the unders” come into the citadel.

Chairman Presson would not allow that the situation in that year of reform unrest was as bad as the “unders” seemed to think. But he was worried because he was finding all men liars. And when men are lying and marking time in politics and glancing over their shoulders, look out for the stampede!

In a stampede “a logical candidate” is the first one to be trampled on. This one was threatened in earnest.

His opponent in his own party was Protest walking on two legs and thundering anathema through a mat of mustaches that made him a marked figure in any throng. His enemies called him “Fog-horn” Spinney; his admirers considered him a silver-tongued orator. As a professional organizer of leagues, clubs, orders, and societies he knew by their first names men enough to elect him if he could be nominated. And Arba Spinney’s methods may be known from the fact that once he got enough votes to make him a State Senator by asking his auditors at each rally to feel of the lumps in the corners of their ready-made vests. A man who is fingering the sheddings of shoddy feels like voting for the candidate who declares that he will make a sheep a respectable member of society once more.

As “a logical candidate,” David Everett, ending his four years as a member of the Governor’s executive council, was the refinement of political grooming. And he was “safe.” A well-organized political machine has no use for any other sort!

Arba Spinney, vociferous, rank outsider, apostrophizing the “tramp of the cowhide boots,” reckless in his denunciation of every man who held office, promising everything that would catch a vote, urging overturn for the sake of overturn and a new deal, marked the other extreme. For the mass, Change, labelled Reform, seems wholly desirable. Political sagacity saw trouble ahead. And no one in the State was politically more sagacious than Thelismer Thornton, who had seen men come and seen men go, and knew all their moods and fancies.

On the morning that the State chairman hurried out of Fort Canibas he discussed the matter of the rival candidates with the old man—that is to say, he talked and Thornton listened. And the more the chairman talked, the more his own declarations convinced him.

“Why, the old bull fiddle can’t fool the convention, Thelismer. He’s running around the State now, and they’re listening to him like they’d listen to a steam calliope, but what he says don’t amount to anything for an argument. It’s the pledged delegates that count.”

The old man drew a fat, black wallet from his hip pocket, and leisurely extracted a packet of newspaper clippings.

“I’ve been watching the lists of delegates as they’ve been chosen, Luke. But I fail to see where you’re getting pledged delegations.”

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"They don't need to be pledged, not the men our town committees are picking."

"Your town committees may be picking the men for delegates, but it is the caucus that does the pledging. And the delegates are being sent out without labels. You don't dare to insist on the pledges—now, do you?"

"You know as well as I do, Thelismer, there's no need of shaking the red rag this year. We're making a different play. We've been having our newspapers drum hard on the tune: 'Leave it out to the people.' It'll be Everett all right in the convention, but we don't want to seem to be prying open their jaws and jamming him down their throats."

Thornton fingered his clippings.

"Luke, I thought you realized yesterday after that caucus of mine was over just how sick your State campaign is. But you've started in hollering now to try to convince yourself that it isn't so. You can't afford to do that. I've been in this thing longer than you have. I've seen the symptoms before. I recognize the signs of a stampede. That convention will be ripe for one. And you know what will happen to Dave Everett, once they get started! You and I know there ain't a thing that can be said for him except that he's the residuary legatee of all the machine politics that's been played in this State for the last twenty-five years. That's between us, and you and I might as well talk the thing as it is. She's balancing, Luke. She's right up on end. And there'll be enough old wind-bags in that convention to get up a devil of a breeze. They'll blow her over."

The State chairman had started to leave, after his declaration. His automobile was purring at the foot of the steps. But he turned his back on the expectant chauffeur, and tramped onto the porch.

"You don't mean to tell me that 'Fog-horn' Spinney is a dangerous candidate, do you?"

"No, but Everett *is*! It happens once in so often, Luke—a situation like this. Everett is lugging too much. Last fire we had in the village here Ed Stilson tried to lug an old-fashioned bureau on his back and a feather tick in his teeth, but he couldn't get through the door."

"Thelismer, why have you waited till now before saying this? I'd rather have your judgment in political futures than that of any other man in this State. But this is a damnation poor time to be getting around to me with it."

"We had a caucus here yesterday, Luke, I'd only been suspecting till then. In politics I'm quite a fellow to judge the whole piece in the web by a sample. And I tell you Everett is going to make a dangerous proposition for us!"

Presson stared at him for a full minute, blinking, thinking, knotting his brows, and chewing fiercely on a piece of gum.

“Pull him out—that what you mean? Well, it can be done. There are plenty of men in the party that are all safe and right, but haven’t been identified with the machine.”

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“And what will you say to Dave Everett and his friends, all of whom you’ll need at the polls?”

“It’s a party exigency, isn’t it?”

“It can be called that—and you can call a skunk ‘Kitty’ on your way home from the club, but that fact won’t change your wife’s opinion of you when you come in. You walk up to Dave Everett now with your political exigency in your hand, Luke, and it would turn to a political axegency, and you’d have a pack of rebels on your back that would down you sure! No, sir! You can’t afford to smash a man that way.”

“Then we’ll ram him through the convention, reformers or no reformers!”

“You haven’t got your crowd.”

“Thelismar, you’re right! I wouldn’t have admitted it yesterday, but after seeing how they came roaring up against you, I’m scared. I’m going to pull Everett out of the fight and set up another man—one of the young and liberal fellows. I’ll do it within twenty-four hours!”

The Duke replaced his clippings and shoved the big wallet into his pocket.

“Sudden remedies are sometimes good in extreme cases, Luke,” he drawled, “but administering knockout drops to a sick party is not to be recommended.”

The chairman’s patience left him then.

“What kind of a trick is this, standing up here at the eleventh hour and putting the knife into your party?” he demanded, wrathfully.

“I had a dog once, Luke, that was snapping at flies in general as he was lying on the porch here, and he snapped at a brown hackle fly that was hitched onto a fish-line. And he ran off down the road with a hook in his mouth and sixty yards of line and a pole following him. You’d better spit out that last fly, Luke. Now will you take a little advice from me, on the condition that I’ll follow up that advice with some practical help?”

“That’s what I’m waiting for.”

“Then you get back onto your job, and leave Everett just where he is—not one word to him or his friends. That’s the advice part. The help will come when I’ve got a few things straightened out a little more.”

“The convention is less than three weeks off. What’s your plan? I want to know it now.”

“Well, you won’t.”

“Do you think for a moment that I, the chairman of the Republican State Committee, am going into a convention with blinders on?”

“You can go in any way you want to,” retorted the Duke, calmly. “But that’s all you’re going to hear from me to-day, Luke. Faith without works is no good. You furnish the faith, and I’ll furnish the works.”

“I never heard of any such devilish campaign management as this,” grumbled the chairman. “You’re talking to me as though I didn’t know any more politics than a village hog-reeve.”

“Well, I’m the doctor in this case, providing I’m called,” said the old man. “Just now I’m feeling of the pulse and making the diagnosis, and am getting ready to prescribe the dose. I’ll call you into consultation, Luke, when the right time comes, and I’ll guarantee that nothing will leak out to wound your pride or your political reputation. But I want to say that if you stand here to-day waiting to hear any more about what I intend to do, you’d better shut off that automobile. You won’t be leaving for quite a spell.”

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The chairman knew his man. He trotted down the steps and got into his car.

“When you get ready to let me know how you’re running this campaign, you’ll find me at headquarters,” he said, wrathfully, by way of farewell. Then he departed, with the news of how Thelismer Thornton was still boss of the northern principality—but that Thelismer Thornton, Nestor of State politicians, had calmly arrogated to himself the sole handling of the biggest question in State politics, the chairman kept to himself. He was in too desperate straits to rebel at that time. Furthermore, he knew that Thelismer Thornton in the years past had served as kedge for many a political craft that a lee shore threatened. He was measurably contented, after reflection, to have the old man take the thing into his own hands in that masterful fashion.

The Duke pulled his chair to the end of the porch, where he could look across to the far hills beyond the river. He lighted one of his long cigars, put his feet on the rail, and began to smoke, squinting thoughtfully, pondering deeply.

To all practical intents and purposes he was holding there on the porch of “The Barracks” the next State convention of the Republican party. The birds were busy about the old blockhouse opposite, coming and going. He seemed to be studying their movements through his half-open eyes, as though they were prospective delegates. And at last a grim smile of satisfaction fixed itself upon his face.

His grandson found him in this amiable mood when he came with the losers by the Jo Quacca fire. Each man submitted his list rather defiantly. They sat down and scowled while Harlan told what he had discovered in his investigation of the circumstances.

“I have not tried to beat them down,” he concluded. “I even reminded them of a few items they had overlooked. What happened yesterday was enough to make almost any man forget things.”

He was inclined to be a little defiant, toe fighting the battles of the property owners, even though his own pocket must suffer by the settlement.

But the Duke preserved his unruffled demeanor. He slowly made some figures on the bottoms of the papers and passed the sheets to his grandson.

“Fill in the checks and bring them out here and I’ll sign ’em,” he directed. And as Harlan bent over him, he whispered: “You’re playing good politics now, boy. Stand up for the under dog. I see you’re remembering that you’re a candidate.”

“I’m only doing what’s right,” protested the young man.

“When you can be right and still play politics, you’re getting ahead fast,” murmured the Duke. “Fill in the checks!”

“But you’ve increased their own appraisal! You’re giving them more than they’ve asked for!” Harlan was careless of the presence of the three farmers.

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"Well, wasn't it your own suggestion that we use these men right?" demanded his grandfather. He gazed benignly on the claimants. "I'm square, myself, when it comes to my debts, boys. You all know that. But Harlan argued your case last night in a way that's worth the extra money. If he can do that here at home, first crack out of the box, when it's our own money at stake, don't you think he'll do a pretty good job for you down at the State House, where it'll be a case of the public money?"

His grandson had gone into the house. He had found himself at a loss for words, suddenly.

"Harlan is as straight as a stilya'd, and allus has been," admitted one of the men, gratefully. He was wondering how much the Duke had added to the amount.

"All of you think now that a fellow like that will make a pretty good sort of a representative, don't you?"

They muttered assent.

"Well, why did you back-district chaps come in here yesterday and try to lick him in the caucus?"

They had no answer ready. They looked at the porch floor, and rasped their hard hands together and cracked their knuckles in embarrassment. The old man kept his complacency.

"I'll tell you how it was, boys. You got fooled, now, didn't you? You let 'em use you like old Samson used the foxes. Now, the next time one of those disturber fellows ties a blazing pine knot to your tail, you sit right down and gnaw the string in two before you start to run. Because a man holds office it's no sign he's a renegade. You'll usually find the renegades standing outside and slandering him and trying to get his office away for their own use. They got you going, didn't they, when they went around telling that I thought I owned you in this district, body and soul? Got you jealous and suspicious and mad? Can you afford to be jealous and mad when you've got a fellow like Harlan Thornton willing to go down to the legislature and work for you? Do you want one of those blatherskites to represent you? Now tell me!"

"Poor men that have to work all the time don't have the chance to look into public things as much as they ought to," said one of the men, apologetically. "And sometimes when a fellow comes around who can talk smooth we get fooled."

"You've bought a lot of fake things from travelling agents in this county. Now don't buy fake politics," He took the checks from his grandson's hand. Harlan had brought them, and a pen. He cocked his knee and scrawled his signature. They came to him and

took their checks. Each stood there, holding the slip of paper awkwardly pinched between thumb and forefinger. The Duke waited.

“I want to say this,” stammered the spokesman. “You get fooled sometimes. Most often in politics. But no one can fool us again—not about the Thornton family.”

“Pass that word around the district, boys,” advised the Duke, complacently. “There’s an election coming, you know.”

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They departed, three new and promising evangelists.

"Campaign expenses, bub," broke in the old man, when Harlan began; "campaign expenses! It's a soggy lump of dough out back there. That kind of yeast will lighten it."

He looked across at the hills, squinting reflectively again, and at last glanced up at his grandson, who stood regarding him with thoughtful hesitation.

"Say it, boy!" he counselled. "A little more bile left over from yesterday?"

"No, sir! Not that. But I think I'll send Ben Kyle in with the crews and let him locate the new camps."

"I didn't intend to have you go back—not if you'd listen to me. We've got men enough to attend to that sort of work, Harlan. I want you with me for a while. I've got some plans for you."

"And I've got a few plans for myself. Now that I'm in this, I propose to be in it in earnest."

"You wouldn't be a Thornton if you didn't get at it all over," commended the Duke. "You see, I understood you, boy!"

"I'm going to call on every man in this district and tell him where I stand. I'm going to tell him that if there are honest men in that legislature I propose to be counted in with them. I may be a very humble helper, but I'm going to lift with all my strength, grandfather, on the square-deal end of every proposition that I find to lay hold of."

"Good politics, boy, all good politics!" declared the old man. With humor that had a little malicious fun in it he avoided endorsing this impulsive zeal as anything except shrewd playing of his own game. But his eyes told the young man what his lips did not utter. There was pride in them, encouragement, joy that would not be hidden—and something else: wistful regret, perhaps; it seemed to be that—the regret that age feels when it has lost its illusions and beholds them springing again in the heart of fervent youth; regret conscious that in its turn this new faith in things present and things to come will be dead and cold, too.

"I don't think we have to worry much about the election, Harlan. Go out and tackle the boys. You'll make good. Take two days. That'll be time enough. And then I want you."

Harlan's eyes questioned him.

"You know I opened up a little to you last night, bub. You're all I've got, you know. I've not been much of a hand to talk. I don't believe you've realized just how I've felt. But we'll let it stand as it is. I've got plans for you, boy, better than the little pancake politics



of this district. I know a few things in politics. I'm old enough to understand how to put you in right. It's one thing to know how, and it's another thing to find occasion just ripe and ready."

He rolled his cigar to the centre of his mouth and lifted the corners in an illuminating grin.

"Bub, in two days be ready to come with me. I'm going to put you in right!"

CHAPTER X

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A POLITICAL CONVERT

For two days Harlan Thornton rode about over the Fort Canibas district. He talked to men at their doors, in their shops, over the fences of their fields. He knew that some sneered at him behind his back. Some even dared to arraign him, boldly and angrily, and flung his motives in his face, accusing the grandfather of inciting the grandson to this attempt to catch votes.

He realized that most of the voters did not understand him aright. They did not understand sincerity in politics. But his own consciousness of rectitude supplied his consolation and provided his impetus. Till then he had employed the Thornton grit only in his business efforts; he employed it now with just as much vigor in his proselyting. Once in the fight, he was awake to what it meant. His frank earnestness impressed those with whom he talked. He did not lose his temper, when men assailed him and tried to discredit his protestations. Here and there, in neighborhoods, knots of farmers gathered about him and listened. He began to win his way, and he knew it. The knowledge that Harlan Thornton was a square man in business needed no herald in that section.

That this integrity would extend to his politics grew into belief more and more as he went about.

The distrust of him, because of his associations, a suspicion fostered by the paid agents of the opposition, began to give way before his calm, earnest young manhood. But in every knot of men he found a few bitter irreconcilables still. They were those whom change invites, and the established order offends. One man, unable to provoke him by vituperation, and in a frenzy of childish rage because Harlan's calm poise was not disturbed by his outpourings, ran at him and struck him. He was a little man, and though he leaped when he struck, the blow landed no higher than the shoulder that Harlan turned to him. And when he leaped again the young man caught him by the wrist and smiled down on him, unperturbed.

"If that's the way you talk politics, Sam, I'll have to adjourn the debate," he said, quietly. And the story of that went the rounds, accompanied by much laughter, and the big, sturdy, serene young man who was master of his own passions met smiles wherever he went.

Another story preceded him, too. "Fighting" MacCracken, of the Jo Quacca neighborhood, smarting ever since that day in the yard of "The Barracks," jealous of his prestige as a man of might, offered obscene and brutal insult to the name of Thelimer Thornton in the hearing of his grandson. It had been hinted previously along the border that the six-foot scion of the Thorntons was a handy man in a scrap, but now his prowess was surely established. MacCracken went about, a living advertisement of how effectually righteous anger can back up two good fists.

Therefore, respect attended on good-humor and went with, or ahead of, the candidate.

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He wondered at himself sometimes. He hardly understood the zeal that now animated him, so sudden a convert. But the zest of youth was in him; the spirit of the toil of the big woods, of the race with drought when the drives are going down, the everlasting struggle with nature's forces, the rivalry between man and man where accomplishment that bulks large in the eyes of men is the only accomplishment that counts—all these spurred him to make good, now that he had begun. In the open arena of life his training had been that of man to man, and the best man taking the prize. And his reading during the long evenings had been more in the way of education in public matters than he had realized. As for ideals, he had followed the masterful men who preached a gospel that appealed to him, living the life of the open, battling for the weak against the selfishly strong—so it seemed to the one who studied their achievements on the printed page. With his own opportunity now thrust upon him, Harlan Thornton determined to make candor his code, honesty his system. He entertained no false ideas of his personal importance. But his lack of experience did not daunt him. He simply made up his mind that he would go forward, keeping soul and heart open, as well as eyes and ears. He believed that the square deal could not be hidden from those who entered public life in that manner.

He did not discuss all this with his grandfather. If he had, Thelismar Thornton would have been vastly interested. He might have been amused. Probably he would have been more amused than interested, for hot youth and glowing ideals have humorous phases for the man who has lived among men for more than eighty years.

But that he had unloosed a bottle imp in his own family would not have occurred to the old man, even after he had listened, for he still had the cynical belief that circumstances must control, interest convert, and personal profit kill the most glowing ardor in reform.

Lacking the gift of divination, Thelismar Thornton watched the rapid development of this bottle imp with much complacency. "Whispering" Urban Cobb brought him reports from the field. Talleyrand Sylvester was trying to place bets on Harlan Thornton, but there were no takers. It was even stated that Enoch Dudley was finding it hard work to secure pledges enough to warrant his running as an independent candidate.

Harlan Thornton, looking in from the outside, had found politics, as managed *for* him, an abhorrent mess. Now, plunged in, he was embracing his opportunity, and finding good in the contest.

On the other hand, Harlan Thornton, making his own plea and his own pledges as a candidate, was embraced by the voters. He was not a mere legatee forced on them by a boss—he was speaking for himself, and the sincerity of the young man made itself felt.

At the end of the appointed two days he knew that his prospects were safe. One of the other towns in the district and three of the plantations had endorsed his name in

caucus. If Thelimer Thornton had been responsible for his candidacy, so was his own personality responsible for this clearing away of difficulties. He felt his self-respect returning. That cruel wound to his pride was healing.

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He was riding home in the evening of the second day, past the end of the long bridge, finding comfort in this thought.

A white figure, framed in the black mouth of the bridge, startled rider and horse.

"It's only Clare," she said. "I heard you were up the river to-day, and I've been waiting for you."

He rode closer. It was a new and strange Clare who was revealed to him in the dim light. She was gowned and gloved, and her broad hat hid her boyish curls. She walked out of the gloom and leaned against the bridge rail.

"Ah, the little playmate did ride away from me forever!" he cried, looking her up and down. "But this young lady—why, she takes my breath away!" He took off his hat and bowed to the pommel.

"You needn't make fun of me, Mr. Harlan Thornton," she returned, crisply. "And a real young lady wouldn't come down in this bridge and wait for you. I wanted to tell you I'm glad. I hear all about your success. When I was a little girl I didn't want you to go away and be a big man. But now that I'm a woman I'm glad you're going. I wanted you to realize, Mr. Harlan Thornton, that I'm a woman, so if you'll reach down your hand I'll shake it and congratulate you."

He took her little hand in both his own.

"You were a real little woman two days ago right here in this place," he said, gratefully. "I didn't realize it at that moment, but it was what you said to me that put some real sense into my head, after all. It set me to thinking."

"What kind of laws are you going to make?" she demanded.

"I don't think I'll have much to do with making laws, Clare. All I can do is listen and try to be on the right side when the voting comes."

"Can't you make a law to oblige old men to stop fighting each other," she demanded, petulantly—"fighting each other, and making all their folks uncomfortable?"

"I think it would be a good law, especially in one case I know about. But sometimes the best laws don't get passed."

"I'll come down and make a speech for it. You said I talked like old folks the other evening."

“A speech from you would convert them all,” he returned, indulging her in this childish banter. “You see, you converted me with only a few words, and I was a hard case just then.”

“Then I’ll come down to your legislature and we’ll make it into a law, and the punishment shall be, if they don’t make up and allow their folks to be comfortable and friends, they must have their old heads bumped together—bumped harder and harder till they shake hands and make up and live happy ever after. Old folks haven’t any business to stay mad. They won’t get into heaven if they do.”

She withdrew her hand, and went away into the black mouth of the bridge.

“That’s all, Big Boy!” she cried. “It was some business, you see, that I waited to talk over with you. And a grown-up young lady mustn’t stay after her business is finished.”

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"But I'll walk home with you!" he called.

"No, I'll not be frightened at the dark until I get old enough to be called an old maid," she said, mischievously. "Good-night!"

He waited by the side of the river until he saw her white figure safely through the dark bridge, and on its way up the quiet hillside past the church. Then he rode to "The Barracks," his mind dwelling a bit more particularly on the vagaries of womankind than it ever had before.

He joined his grandfather on the porch after he had eaten his supper alone.

"The fences, so I hear, Harlan, will pass the inspection of the most expert fence-viewers," he chuckled. "So I suppose you'll be ready to leave with me to-morrow."

"If you think it's necessary to have me go anywhere with you, grandfather, I'll go."

There was silence for a time. The young man was waiting. The old man smoked placidly.

"Is there any reason why you can't tell me where we are going?" inquired Harlan.

"No especial reason—only I'll be wasting time telling you. You'll see for yourself. We'll meet a big man or so—that's all!"

"The man I'd like to meet," began the young man, fervently, "is one that every young chap in this country can follow and ought to follow, if he's got red blood and honesty in him. I wish I could meet him now when I'm starting out, if only to shake his hand."

"You'd better not meet any man so long as he's wearing a halo, where you're concerned. You'll find political halos, bub, when you get too near to 'em, something like restaurant doughnuts—holes surrounded by poor cooking. Better keep away a spell. That's why I'm not going to tell you where we're going—not just now. I might go to cracking up the man too much. I'll let you build your own halo for him—and then maybe you can eat your own cooking, provided you find the halo a doughnut."

They left Fort Canibas the next morning, travelling humbly by mail stage to the railroad terminus. The branch line took them to a populous junction, and by that time Harlan Thornton began to appreciate that his grandfather was rather more of a figure in State politics than he had dreamed. He had made many trips with him through the State in years past, but never before when men understood, some dimly, some fearfully, that a political crisis was on. Thelimer Thornton's seat in the train, his room at the hotel, was besieged by those who respectfully solicited his opinions. They seemed to realize that some of the wisdom of the fathers in State politics, of the patriarchs with whom he had trained, had fallen to him by natural inheritance. But though he listened patiently, he

said but little. Harlan noticed, however, that he did take especial pains to deprecate some of the suppressive movements advised by the more hot-headed managers.

“Let things swing as they’re going,” he advised. “She’ll take care of herself, give her free run right now. But you can’t pinch up a line gale by putting a clothespin on the nose of the tempest. Let her snort! Brace the party and face it like a hitching—post! Don’t try to choke off Arba Spinney. Let him froth.”

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His grandfather was so insistent on this point that Harlan took notice of its frequent repetition and the earnestness with which it was pressed. He began to understand that some plan lay back of his grandfather's silence to him and to others as to his private reasons for this appeal. He began to take lively interest in the ramifications of practical politics as played by the hand of a master.

CHAPTER XI

A MAN FROM THE SHADOWS

There was a provoking flavor of mystery about Thelismer Thornton's early movements the next day. His grandson became still more interested. This element in politics appealed to him, for he was young.

They left the city by an early train. The Duke secluded himself and his grandson in a drawing-room of the car.

It was an express—train which did not stop at way stations. But when the conductor came for the tickets the old man inquired whether orders had been issued to have the train held up at a certain siding.

"Yes, sir, to leave two passengers," said the conductor. He was courteous, but he winked at the old politician with the air of one who thought he understood something. He exhibited his telegram from the dispatcher. "Can't be much politics there, Mr. Thornton," he remarked, by way of jest.

"I'm on a fishing-trip," explained the Duke, blandly. And the conductor, who knew that the siding had no fishing water within ten miles of it, went away chuckling in order to applaud the joke of a man of power.

A few hours later the two were let off at the siding and the train hurried on.

There was a farm-house near the railroad. They ate dinner with the farmer and his wife, who seemed to realize that they were entertaining some one out of the ordinary, and were much flustered thereby. Especially did the farmer struggle with his vague memory of personalities, asking many round-about questions and "supposing" many possibilities that the Duke placidly neglected to confirm.

The only definite information the farmer received was that the big elderly man wanted himself and his companion conveyed to Burnside Village by wagon, starting in the late afternoon.

"I'll take you," said the man; "but what sticks me is that you didn't stay right on board that train. It stops at Burnside regular, and it don't stop here at all."

"But it stopped to-day," remarked the Duke.

"I know it did, and that's what sticks me again."

The old man rose from the table and smiled down on him.

"Here's a good cigar, brother. I've often worked out many a puzzle while having a bang-up smoke."

He invited Harlan by a nod of the head, and they went out and strolled in the maple grove behind the house.

"I suppose you think by this time, bub, that I'm in my second childhood, and playing dime novel. But there are some things in politics that have to be done as gentle and careful as picking a rose petal off a school-ma'am's shoulder." The Duke chuckled and smoked for a time. "When I've had a job of that sort to do I haven't even talked to myself, Harlan. So you mustn't think I'm distrustful of you because I don't tell you what's on."

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"I'm willing to wait," said his grandson.

"Learn your lesson, Harlan—the one I'm trying to teach you now. I never knew but one man who could keep his mouth shut under all circumstances when he felt it was his duty to do so. That was old Ben Holt. He's dead now. He fell off a bridge on his way to church and didn't holler 'Help!' for fear of breaking the Sabbath. You don't find any more of that kind in these days—not in political matters. I'm not distrusting you, I say, but I'm teaching you the lesson. Keep your mouth shut till it's time to open it. I'm drawing this thing here strong on you, so as to impress it. As for the other fellows—if I had got off the train at Burnside to-day the news would have been in every afternoon paper in the State. They'd only need that one fact to build fifty stories on—all different. *Most* of those stories would have hurt; there'd have been one guess, at least, that would kill the scheme. Sit down here, and let's take it easy."

He sat at the foot of a tree, his broad straw hat beside him. He leaned his head against the trunk, and gazed upward and away from his grandson. When the question came it was so irrelevant, so astonishing, that the young man gasped without replying.

"Harlan, how do you stand with the Kavanagh girl?"

The old man smoked on in the silence without removing his gaze from the leaves above his head.

"I want to confess to you, my boy, that your old grandfather made rather a disgraceful exhibition of himself the other day. But as I said then, a man will thrash and swear at a hornet and make an ass of himself, generally, in the operation. The impudent little fool didn't realize what a big matter she was trifling with."

"Grandfather," protested Harlan, manfully, "that's no way to speak of a young lady. You ask me how I stand? I stand this way—I'll not have the child mentioned in any such manner—not in my hearing; and that's with all respect to you, sir."

"Young lady—child? Well, which is she?"

"I don't know," confessed Harlan, ingenuously. "And it doesn't make much difference."

"Sort of ashamed of me, aren't you?" inquired his grandfather. "A man that you've seen all the politicians catering to the last day or so, and small enough to bandy insults with a snippet of a girl! Well, bub, there's a lot of childishness in human nature. It breaks out once in a while. Cuss a tack, and grin and bear an amputation! We'll let the girl alone. I don't seem to get in right when she is mentioned. But I wanted to have you tell me that you don't intend to marry Dennis Kavanagh's daughter. You can't afford to do that, boy! Not with your prospects. And now I'm not saying anything against the girl. We'll leave her out, I say. It's just that she isn't the kind of a woman—when she gets to be a

woman—that I want to see mated with you.” He burst out: “Dammit, Harlan, I can see where you’re going to land in this State if you’ll let your old gramp have free rein! And the right kind of a wife is half the battle in what you’re going into.”

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"Have you got that right kind picked out for me—along with the rest? You talk as though you had."

It was said almost in the tone of insult. It might have been the tone—it might have been that the taunt touched upon the truth: Thelismar Thornton's face flushed. He did not seem to find reply easy.

"There's only this to say, grandfather. I know you're interested in me and in seeing me get ahead in the world. You pushed me into politics, and I'm trying to make good. I'm glad you did it—I'll say that now. I see opportunities ahead if I stay square and honest. But don't you try to push me into marriage. I'm going to do my own choosing there. And that doesn't mean that I'm in love with Clare Kavanagh, or intend to marry Clare Kavanagh, or want to marry her—or that she wants to marry me. That's straight, and I don't want to talk about it any more."

He stood up, and his tone was defiant.

"You'd better take a walk, bub," commended the Duke, quietly. "I'm going to nap for a little while. We may be up late to-night."

He picked up his hat and canted it over his face. "Get back here as early as five o'clock," he said, from under its brim.

They were away in the farmer's carryall at that hour, after a supper of bread-and-milk.

In the edge of the village of Burnside the Duke ordered a halt, and stepped down from the carriage. The evening had settled in and it was dark under the elms.

"Here's five dollars, brother. You've used us all right, and now so long to you."

"But I hain't got you to nowhere yet!" protested the farmer. He had finally decided in his own mind that these were railroad managers planning projects, with an eye on his own farm. He wanted to carry them where he could exhibit them to some one who could inform him.

But the Duke promptly drew Harlan along into the shadows, and a farmer hampered with a two-seated carriage is not equipped for the trail. They heard the complaining squeal of iron against iron as he turned to go back home.

"We've come here to call on a man," stated the Duke, after they had walked for a little time.

"On ex-Governor Waymouth, I suppose," Harlan suggested, quietly.

The old man chuckled.

“How long have you been suspecting that?”

“Ever since I heard Burnside mentioned, of course.”

“Good! You guessed and kept still about it. You’ve got the makings of a politician, and you are learning fast. Now what do you suppose I’m sneaking up on Varden Waymouth in this way for?”

“You said I’d see for myself when the time came. I’m in no hurry, grandfather.”

The Duke patted Harlan’s shoulder. “You’re one of my kind, that’s sure, boy. I haven’t got to put any patent time-lock onto your tongue. And I can’t say that of many chaps in this State. You’re a safe man to have along. Come on!”

The house was back from the street a bit—a modest mansion of brick, dignifiedly old. Tall twin columns flanked the front door and supported the roof of the porch. Harlan had never seen the residence of General Waymouth before, but that exterior seemed fitted to the man, such as he knew him to be.

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He admitted them himself, when they had waited a few moments after sounding alarm with the ancient knocker. Framed in the door, he was a picturesque figure. His abundant white hair hung straight down over his ears, and curled outward at the ends; his short beard was snowy, but there was healthful ruddiness on his face, and though his figure, tall above the average, stooped a bit, he walked briskly ahead of them into the library, crying delighted welcome over his shoulder. His meeting with Thelismor Thornton had been almost an embrace.

“And this boosting big chap is Harlan—my grand-baby, Vard! Guess you used to see him at ‘The Barracks’ when he was smaller. Since then he’s been trying to outgrow one of our spruce-trees.”

The ex-Governor gave Harlan his left hand. The empty sleeve of the right arm was pinned to the shoulder.

“The old Yankee stock doesn’t need a step-ladder to stand on to light the moon, so they used to say.”

He rolled chairs close to each other and urged them to sit, with the anxious hospitality of the old man who has grown to prize the narrowing circle of his intimates.

“Smoke, Thelismor,” he pleaded. “Stretch out and smoke. I always like to see you smoke. You take so much comfort. I sometimes wish I’d learned to smoke. Old age gets lonely once in a while. Perhaps a good cigar might be a consolation.”

“So you do get lonesome sometimes, Vard?” inquired the Duke.

“It’s a lonesome age when you’re eighty, comrade. You probably find it so yourself. There are so few of one’s old friends that live to be eighty.”

Then they fell into discourse, eager, wistful reminiscences such as come to the lips of old friends who meet infrequently. The young man, sitting close in the circle, listened appreciatively. This courtly old soldier, lawyer, Governor, and kindly gentleman had been to him since boyhood, as he had to the understanding youth of his State, an ideal knight of the old regime. And so the hours slipped past, and he sat listening.

The calm night outside was breathlessly still, except for the drone of insects at the screens, attracted by the glow of the library lamp. A steeple clock clanged its ten sonorous strokes, and still the old men chatted on, and the Duke had not hinted at his errand.

The General suddenly remembered that he had in the cellar some home-made wine, and he asked the young man to come with him, as lamp-bearer.

“The good wife would have thought of that little touch of hospitality long ago, my son,” he said, as they walked down the stairs, “but a widower’s house with grouchy hired help makes old age still more lonely.”

On their return they found the Duke, feet extended, head tipped back, eyes on the ceiling. He was deep in thought, and told Harlan to place his glass on the chair’s arm.

“Varden,” he said, “eighty isn’t old, not for a man like you; and it shouldn’t be lonely, that age. I’m still older, and I propose to wear out instead of rust out.”

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"I don't feel rusty, exactly," returned the General, smiling into his glass. "But when I think of all the marches, Thelismer, of the campaigns, the heartbreaking struggles of the war—of all the cases won and cases lost, the nights of study and days of labor in the law—the fuss and fury of politics—of all the years behind me, I feel as though I'd like to be used as my father used his old boots: Before he took his bed for the last time he went up into the garret of the old farm-house and laid his boots there on their sides. 'Let 'em lie down, now, and rest,' he said. And I've never allowed them to be disturbed."

The Duke still stared at the ceiling.

"Varden, you and I have known each other so long that you don't need as much talk from me as you would from a stranger. When I've asked a thing from you in the past I didn't have to sit down and talk to you an hour about the reasons why I wanted it. You understood that I had a good reason for asking. I'm going to ask just one more thing from you in this life. I'm going to ask it straight from the shoulder. You and I don't need to beat about the bush with each other. I want you to say 'yes,' for if you don't you're abandoning our old State as though she were a widow headed for the almshouse."

Thornton leaned forward, grasped his glass and drained it at a gulp, and then looked the amazed General squarely in the eyes.

"You're going to be nominated as Governor of this State in the next convention, and you've got to accept," he declared. "Now hold on! Just as you understand that I've got good reasons for asking you to do this, just so I understand all that you're going to say in objection. I discount all your objections in advance. I know you haven't lost run of affairs in this State—you know all the mix-up the party is in right now. They're going to beat Dave Everett in convention, General, just as sure as the devil can't freeze his own ice. It's going to be 'Seventy-two all over again. People gone crazy for a change and jumping the wrong way, like grasshoppers in front of a mowing machine. Spinney means the whole rotten thing over again—State treasury looted, tax rate reduced to get a popular hoorah, a floating debt that will make us stagger and keep enterprise out of this State for ten years, petty graft in every State office, and every strap on the party nag busted from snaffle to crupper. Now I want to ask you one question: Do you want Arba Spinney for the next Governor of this State—sitting in the chair that you honored? You know him! You've heard his mouth go. You understand his calibre. Do you want him?"

"No," admitted General Waymouth.

"Well, you're going to get him if you don't accept that nomination. You're going to get him, blab-mouth, mob-rule, mortification, and merry hell—the whole bagful! Do you want that for this State, Vard?"

"Our State can't afford to have such a man," agreed General Waymouth, "but—"

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"I'd, myself, rather see a Democrat win at the polls!" shouted Thornton. "But the Democrat that they've got in line is worse than Spinney. It's a popocratic year, and they're all playing that game. But they can't overcome our natural plurality, Varden. It means Spinney if he goes to the polls! It's up to you to stop him. You've got to do it!"

The General rose and walked around the room. His shoulders were stooped a bit more. Then he came and put his hand on Thelismer's shoulder.

"Your faith in what I am and what I might do is worthy of you, my old comrade, even if it exalts my poor powers too much. And I thank you, Thelismer. But I know what I am. I'm only a stranded old man. The younger generation will not think as you do. Go and find some good man there. I'm too weary, Thelismer, too old and too weary—and almost forgotten. Find another man!"

"What's that? Find a man for Governor of this State, groom him, work him out, score him down and shove him under the wire of State Convention a winner inside of two weeks? Varden, you know politics better than that! *You* forgotten by the younger generation of this State? Harlan, what have you to say to that?"

The young man stood up. He had listened well and listened long that evening. In the presence of this gracious old knight of the heroic days of history he had felt his heart swelling as he remembered the record that all men of his State knew.

The fervor of his admiration showed so plainly in his glistening eyes that General Waymouth was touched, and waited indulgently.

"General, it's only because my grandfather is your old friend and has commanded me that I dare to speak. I simply have a hope. It has become dear to me. I'm hoping for a privilege. I honestly believe that outside of all party preferences there are thousands of young men in this State who will feel proud to have that same privilege—will esteem it one of the honors of their lives. Their fathers had the same honor. And that's to go to the polls and cast a ballot for Gen. Varden Waymouth. It will make politics seem worth while to us, sir."

"Good!" ejaculated the Duke. "You're hearing the voice of the young men of this State now, Varden." He stood up. "Here's my boy for your service. He'll be in the next legislature. Use him. Depend on him. You're old—you've earned your rest. I know it. But here's a loud call for a sacrifice. This boy and such as he can lift a lot of the load. Varden, give me your hand. Say that you'll do it!"

"Let's sit down a moment," said the General, solemn gentleness in his tone. "I have something that it's in my heart to say."

He drew his chair even closer to them. They waited a few moments for him to speak. In that room with its dignity of ancient things, with the silence of the summer night surrounding, that waiting was impressive. Harlan felt the thrill of it. Even his grandfather was gravely anxious. The General leaned forward and put his thin hand on the elder Thornton's knee.

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"Thelismer, you yourself link the past with the present, so far as the politics of this State go. You link them even more than I do, for you are active in the present. You have been a strong man—you are strong to-day. But I want to say to you, and this is as friend to friend, you haven't always used that strength right. I know what reply you'd make to that. We've talked it all over many times. You say that you've had to play the game. That's right. And I've played it myself, too. But in the years since then, while I've sat at one side of the arena and looked on, I've had a chance to meditate and a chance to observe. I don't think matters have been running right in this State—and now I'm not speaking of Arba Spinney or his ilk. You come to me to-night and you ask me to be the Governor of this State once more. You want me to come back into the game. You ask me to appeal to the suffrage of the young men who admire what little I've accomplished. I want to warn you. I may be putting it too strong when I call it a warning. I have some ideals to-day. You may not find them to your liking in politics."

"I'm willing to trust in your good judgment and your sense of what is square for all concerned," protested the Duke, stoutly. "In the hot old days I was hot with the rest, Vard. I've mellowed some since."

"You may not find me a safe man, Thelismer. I shall come back out of the shadows with a firm resolve to merit the approval of the young men of this State—and the young men see more clearly than their fathers did."

"I'm not here to-night with bridle or bit or halter, Varden. We need you. The party has got to have you. I know what your name will accomplish in that convention. You shall be Governor of this State without making pledge or promise. Will you stand?"

"I ask you again, Thelismer, if there is no other way?"

"Any other way means Spinney and mob rule."

General Waymouth turned to Harlan. "Go out and tell the honest young men of this State that I will try to satisfy their ideals. That's the only pledge I'll give. I'm afraid I haven't any promise for the old machine, Thelismer." He smiled.

"We don't need any," returned the Duke, briskly. "We know Vard Waymouth. But there's one pledge I do want from you. This whole thing is to be left in my hands so far as announcement goes. My plan of campaign makes that much necessary. We don't want to flush that bunch of birds till we can give 'em both barrels."

"I consent. I'll live in the lingering hope that at the last moment you'll find I won't be needed."

He rose and gave his hand to each in turn, bringing them to their feet.

"Now for bed. Of course, you'll remain here the night."

“No,” declared Thornton, decisively. “Out o’ here on the midnight! I want to dodge out of Burnside in the dark. We’ll walk down to the station now. It’s settled. I’ll keep you posted.”

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At the door the General gave Harlan the last word, grasping his hand again.

"You brought me a message from the young men that touched me."

"I spoke for myself, but I believe that all of them would like to have the same opportunity that I had," faltered Harlan. "I know they would. Will you let us come to you at the right time and make it plain?"

"I shall depend upon you in a great many ways in the months to come. You know it's to be a young man's administration by an old man made young again. I'm proud of my first volunteer!"

"He's a good boy, and he's got the makings in him," declared the Duke.

"I've been too long with men not to appreciate a good chief of staff when I see him," laughed the General.

Framed in the big door, with the dim glow of light behind him, he watched them depart.

The Duke walked in the far shadows of the station platform in silence, smoking, until the train whistled.

"Bub, you remember that I told you I'd put you in right," he said, climbing the car steps. "Now follow your hand."

But Harlan Thornton, fresh from that presence, understood that he had pledged a loyalty deeper than the loyalty of mere politics or preferment.

CHAPTER XII

DEALS AND IDEALS

There was no one in the smoking-room of the car, so the Duke discovered with relief. It was late, and the passengers were in their berths. There was no one to spy, ask questions, or guess.

"Complete!" he grunted, satisfiedly, as he sat down. "We've come through with the job in good shape, Harlan. It'll have to be a mind-reader that finds out what I've put up to-day."

He swung his feet upon the seat opposite and sighed.

"I'm a pretty old man to be tearing 'round nights in this fashion, bub, but I feel younger by twenty years just this minute. Now I didn't tell you my plans this morning. Reckoned

I'd wait till I had a clear view ahead. I've got it now. I'll wire ahead to the junction for our baggage to be brought from the hotel and put on board this train. We'll stay on. State capital next. Down to Luke's place. We'll stay there till State Convention. Finger right on the pulse after this."

He called the porter and arranged for his berths, and ordered the telegram sent from the next station.

He began leisurely to unfasten his necktie and collar.

"Got to tell Luke, you know. A close corporation of four—that's enough to know it. Can't trust the rest. We'll let 'em keep their old political hen sitting on their china egg. We'll hatch the good egg in our own nest. Then for a glorious old cackle! Vard Waymouth will be the next Governor of this State! Sure!"

"And this State will have the right man on the job with him as Governor!" cried the young man, enthusiastically. "I'm proud of what you did to-night, grandfather. I don't believe he would have listened to anyone else."

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"Friendship, comradeship, mean something when you get old, my boy."

"I hope they'll all know who did it when the time comes right. Some of the men who have been growling about you behind your back will have their mouths shut for them."

"You've been hearing the old man cussed thoroughly and scientifically, eh?" drawled the Duke. He squinted, quizzically. "Well, a man who stays in politics fifty years and doesn't make enemies, stays too close to the ground to be worth anything. Good, healthy, vigorous enemies are a compliment."

"I wonder whether his party will say that when General Waymouth starts out in his reforms."

"What reforms?" demanded the old man, tugging off his collar.

"You heard what he said—about what he intended to do—the warning, as he called it."

Thornton looked at his grandson serenely and with a glint of humor in his eyes.

"You don't have any idea, do you, that Vard Waymouth is going to play politics with sugar-plums instead of with the chips he finds on the table? Get your wisdom teeth cut, young chap. That's another branch of the science for you to learn."

Harlan protested, his loyalty a bit shocked.

"I believe that General Waymouth meant what he said."

"Well, what did he say?"

"You *know* what he said. I saw you listening pretty closely, grandfather. He intends a square deal for this State. I may be young, and I probably don't understand politics, but I know an honest gentleman when I see one."

"My boy, there's no question of dishonesty here. Don't pick up any of the patter that the demagogues are babbling—and they don't know just what they mean themselves. He *is* an honest man. Have I known him all my life without finding that out? But he isn't going to start out and clinch any reputation for honesty by turning his back on his own party and its interests—not for the sake of having the cheap demagogues of the other side pat him on the back and pick his pockets at the same time. He knows politics too well. But we won't sit up here to-night and discuss that. Keep your faith in him. He's worth it."

With his coat on his arm he started for his berth.

“The idea is, then, the party is going to make him stand first of all for things that will help the party, without much regard for what will help the people of this State as a whole? That’s politics according to the code, is it, grandfather?”

“That’s politics, my boy,” stated the Duke with decision. “Once in a while you find a fellow splitting off and trying to play it different, but he doesn’t last. Why the devil should he? It’s his party, isn’t it, that puts him on the job?”

“It’s the majority of the people that do it, if he’s elected.”

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"Don't get fooled on this 'people' idea, Harlan. The people are no good without organization—and organization *is* the party. I don't want to discourage you, son. You'll see some opportunities where you can grab in and turn a trick for the general good of all hands. But you can't dump your friends. You've got to stand by your own party first. You do anything else, and you'll simply get the reputation of being a kicker and an insurgent. And then you can't spin a thread. Your own party doesn't want you and the other side is afraid of you. *Ideals* are blasted good in their way, but in politics cut out the *I* and attend to the *deals*. It's the only way you'll get anywhere."

Harlan sat alone for a while and thought. Rebellion seethed in him. But it was rebellion against something vague—protest that was more instinct than actual understanding. He still lacked the prick of party enthusiasm; party, as he had seen its operations, stood for some pretty sordid actualities. One thing comforted him: he had not lost his faith in General Waymouth. His grandfather's cynicism had not destroyed that. He realized that his youth and his lack of experience would make him a very humble cog in the legislative machinery. But he had youth and high hopes, and his creed from boyhood had been to do everything that he had to do resolutely and to the full measure of his ability.

When he looked at his watch he decided that he would not go to his berth. The train would reach the State capital shortly after four in the morning. He dozed in his seat, the grateful breath of the summer night fanning his face through the screen. The Duke found him there, appearing as he had departed, his coat on his arm, his collar in his hand. He was full of the briskness of the dawn in spite of his short rations of sleep.

"You mustn't think because you've found sins in the party that you've been picked out for the atonement, boy," he chided, jocosely. "Get your sleep—always get your sleep. I wouldn't have been alive to-day if I'd been kept awake by worry and wonder."

A cab took their luggage to the hotel. They walked up the hill. It was the old man's suggestion.

"It'll do us good. This air beats any cocktail you can get over Luke's bar—and they serve as good a one as you'll get anywhere, even if this is a prohibition State."

"Wasn't it Governor Waymouth who signed the first prohibition bill in this State?" asked Harlan.

"Still dwelling on visions of reform, eh?" inquired his grandfather, smiling broadly. He did not reply immediately. He stepped ahead, for they were obliged to walk in single file past a man who was sweeping sawdust across the sidewalk. In the windows that flanked the open doors of his shop dusty cigar boxes were piled. The shelves within were empty. Harlan recognized the nature of the establishment. It was a grog-shop in its partial disguise. He got the odor of stale liquors from the open door as he passed.

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"I was present when he signed it," said the Duke, as soon as they were walking side by side once more. "Something had to be done politically with the Washingtonian movement, you know; it had cut the cranks out of the main herd. You'd think, nowadays, to hear some of the things that are said about conditions in the old times, that every man in this State picked up his rum-bottle and pipe and threw 'em to Tophet and got onto the wagon. You weren't born then. Let me tell you how it really happened. It was mostly politics. The disorganized mob of prohibitionists didn't do it—it was our party. We needed the cranks to swing the balance of power. They were all herded, ready to follow the bell. Needed a shepherd. Didn't know which one of the old parties to run to. It's a crime in politics not to grab in a bunch of the unbranded when it's that size. We put prohibition into the platform and carried the election. Then the boys went to the Governor and told him, privately, that they really didn't mean it, and framed it up that they'd pass the bill in the legislature all right and then he'd veto it—and the party would be saved, and he wouldn't be hurt, because every one knew that he couldn't be accused of acting in the interests of the rumsellers, but only stood on the constitutional law ground—and there was great talk those days, son, of personal liberty and inherent rights. But Vard picked up his pen and told us he wasn't much of a hand for playing practical jokes on the people. He signed it. And he was a license man, at that, those days. Guess he is now."

"I don't see how you can say he has played politics—not after he stood out like that."

Thelismar Thornton laughed silently. They were half-way up the long hill. The bland morning was already growing warm. The old man stopped for a moment, hat off, under a dewy maple.

"Bub, do you think Vard Waymouth, lawyer that he is, didn't know just about how much that act would amount to after it got to operating? About all it did was to proclaim the rum business contraband. No teeth, no claws, not much machinery for enforcement—and public sentiment cussing it, after it began to hit men individually. Reform in politics is popular just so long as it doesn't hit individuals."

"There's teeth enough in the law *now*", remarked Harlan.

"Oh, it's easier to put 'em in than it is to fight the mouths of the professional ramrodders who come down to the legislature. We put in the teeth right along and leave off the enforcement muscle. The old thing can't chew! Then the ramrodders have got the law to hoorah about and read over in the parlor, and they'll go right past such a place as we saw down the street there and not know it's a rumshop. After they get all the law they ask for, it's a part of their game to say that the rumshops aren't doing business. They're the kind that believe that just having the law makes every one good—they don't want to go back on their own scheme. Come along!" He went out into the sunshine. "I don't like to get talking prohibition. The play is not to talk it. It runs best when you don't talk

about it. It's running good now. Saloons open, and all the prohibitory law-frills the old fuss-budgets can crochet and hang onto the original bush! Both sides satisfied!"

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"It may be good politics—it may seem all right to you, because you were in the thing from the start and saw how the tricks had to be played," grumbled the young man. "But I haven't had that kind of training. I've been brought up in business, grandfather. And a State that will do what this State is doing now—I'm not saying who's at fault—but the State that will handle a law in this way is a blackleg. I believe in General Waymouth. I believe he's got something up his sleeve in the way of real reform. I believe he meant what he said. I don't want to see you hurt personally in your plans, grandfather, but I want to tell you frankly I'm with the other side in this thing."

The Duke glanced at him inquiringly.

"I mean, politics or no politics, I want to see a law enforced so long as it's a law. If a party cannot hold together and keep on top with any other system, then the party is 'in' wrong. I don't believe General Waymouth intends to straddle. He'll enforce the law."

"And kill his party?" inquired the old man, sarcastically. "Oh no, my boy. The party has looked out for that. It isn't taking any chances with a man who might get morally rambunctious. The Governor of this State hasn't anything to do with enforcing the prohibitory law. We've kept all the clubs out of his hands. When the W. C. T. U. converted old Governor Levett, he got ambitious and tried it on. And the only thing he found he could do was to issue a proclamation to the sheriffs 'to do their duty.' The most of 'em framed it and hung it up in their offices; it was too good a joke to keep hid."

They walked on in silence. Harlan did not find it easy to continue that line of talk. His deameanor did not accord with the fair face of the morning. But the old man sauntered on under the trees, plainly contented with the world and all that was in it.

"Let's see, you haven't met Madeleine, Luke's girl, since she was little, have you?" he inquired, stealing one of his shrewd side glances at his grandson.

Harlan was occupied with his own thoughts and shook his head.

"I was *thinking* she'd been away at school whenever you've been down here with me. Beautiful girl, my boy. Brains, too. Polish up your thoughts. These college girls are pretty bright, you know."

"I don't think she will notice whether I've got any thoughts or not," replied the young man, sourly. "She won't pay much attention to a woodsman—not that kind of a girl."

"What kind of a girl?"

"One that's full of society notions and college airs. I know the kind. Unless a fellow has wasted about half his life in dancing and loafing around summer resorts they treat him as though he were a cross between an Eskimo and a Fiji. Life is too short to play poodle for girls of that sort."

“Well, you are certainly on the mourners’ bench to-day, front row and an end seat,” said the old man, disgustedly. “You’d better go up and take a nap till breakfast-time, and use sleep, soap, a razor, and common sense and smooth yourself off. I reckon I haven’t got you out of those woods any too quick.”

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Only the earliest birds of the hostelry roost were about the big house at that hour. The new arrivals dodged scrub-women and sweepers in the office and on the stairs, and went to their rooms. The Duke, leaving his grandson at his bedroom door, suggested a bit stiffly that he would “call around about eight o’clock and open the den and lead him down to a little raw meat, unless he smoothed up his manners and his appetite in the mean time.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE DUKE’S DOUBLE CAMPAIGN

Presson came in with the Duke at eight o’clock, bringing cordial morning greetings to Harlan’s room.

The old man found his grandson much improved, both in spirits and garb. In his fresh, cool, summer gray, erect, stalwart, and clear-eyed, he won a grunt of approval from his mentor.

“There’s nothing like being young, Luke! I was just telling you that the boy was getting into the dumps—bound to study all the seams before he put the coat on. But the world looks better now, doesn’t it, son?”

“It’s the fit of the coat that counts in politics,” observed the chairman, sagely. “And the one that was built last night fits like the paper on the wall. Don’t bother with the seams, Harlan. The lining covers ’em.”

“Presson likes the frame-up, Harlan,” said the Duke, smiling broadly. “He isn’t even jealous because I thought of it first.”

“Who else could have pulled it off as you have, Thelismer? It would take more than straight politics to get Vard Waymouth out of his den. And I could have offered only politics.”

With an arm about each he pushed them to the door, saying that his wife and daughter were waiting below. When Harlan turned from his respectful greeting of the mother, whom he knew, he found Miss Presson looking at him with frank and smiling interest. He had heard vague reports that Madeleine Presson had blossomed into beautiful womanhood since he had seen her. He had been prepared to meet a rather vain and pampered young lady, conscious of her charms and attainments. He assumed a bit of reserve as armor for his sensitiveness. But this attitude responded so ill to her good-humored ease in renewing their acquaintanceship that he was momentarily embarrassed, remembering what he had said to his grandfather a few hours before.

“I think I have a most distinct recollection of Mr. Harlan Thornton. When I was ten years old you brought me some lumps of spruce-gum in a birch-bark box and I declined it, saying that young ladies did not chew gum. But I took it when you looked so sad, and I carried it away to boarding-school, and I found out that young ladies do chew gum—when no one is watching them. That gift made me very popular, sir, and now I thank you. I fear I did not thank you then.”

“It’s worth waiting all this time to hear you say that. I’m glad the gift found appreciation, for I culled the winter pickings of a whole logging crew for those red nuggets. I’ve been so distrustful of my good taste ever since that I’ve never dared to give anything to a young lady.”

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"I'm afraid you didn't realize what you were doing when you snubbed him," put in the Duke. "I haven't been able to get him out of the woods since—till now, and I've had to bring him almost by main force."

The carriage was at the door. The State chairman led the way to it. He had a home for his family apart from the big hotel, the mammoth hostelry of the State—one of his many business ventures.

"We are on our way home from our morning ride—it's the real jolly part of the June day, the two hours before breakfast," explained the girl, as they went down the steps. "When we called here for father you may imagine how delighted we were to find your grandfather. I know you understand, Mr. Harlan Thornton, what a dear old man your grandfather is!"

"He has been mother, father, brother, and sister and best friend—all those to me. He has seemed to have some of the elements of all.

"I know of the good things he has done, and how ungrateful some of the folks are he has helped. Your grandfather would be a real saint if it were not for politics. You know we folks at the State capital hear politics talked all the time. I suppose my good father has the same wicked things said about him—though, of course, I don't hear them."

"And I've been too deep in the woods to hear."

Presson ushered his wife and the young people into the carriage.

"Thelismar and I would rather walk," he said. "We have some more matters to talk over." And he sent them away.

Harlan took his seat opposite the ladies, and now, in this close proximity, he realized how charming the young girl was. From the close braids of her brown hair to the tips of her bronze shoes she was womanly grace and refinement personified. There was a cordial frankness in her tone and eyes that attracted him, and put him at his ease. Yet there was no hint of coquetry. He liked her at once and instinctively, because somehow she seemed to meet him on a manly plane of good-fellowship—and yet she was so thoroughly and deliciously feminine. There was just a bit of a drawl in her voice, a suggestion of jocoseness, continual appreciation of the humor of life and living. And her laugh was an inspiration.

He was a little surprised at himself when he found that he was chatting with her so easily. Later, when he reflected, he understood. She had almost a masculine breadth of view in addition to her culture. In that first day of their meeting she gave voice to some of his own unexpressed views regarding the trend of the times in public matters.



She apologized, half-humorously. "But as I said to you a while ago, we hear politics talked much at the State capital."

Following the after-breakfast chat, he walked back to the hotel with his grandfather.

"By-the-way, I didn't lie to you any about Luke's girl, did I?" remarked the old man, casually, and as though the matter had occurred to him in default of better topic. "But she's too advanced in her ideas for a woman. She'll be suffragette-ing it next."

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When Harlan began to defend the right of women to interest themselves in the larger affairs, only a twinkle in the Duke's eye betrayed his amusement. If Harlan, in his first quick suspicions, had secretly accused his grandfather of planning a matrimonial campaign in conjunction with his political one, he was now ashamed of those suspicions, for they concerned Madeleine Presson. Having met her, he realized that if he should dare to connect her in his thoughts with anything that his grandfather might be scheming he was making of himself a very presumptuous and silly ass. Now that he had seen her, now when he was spending days of waiting at the State capital and seeing her frequently, he found that Madeleine Presson's personality eliminated possible matchmakers. He felt very humble in her presence—and still ashamed. He had never taken stock of his own deficiencies very particularly. His environment had not prompted it. He had been superior to the men he had ruled. He realized now that the little amenities of life which make for poise and ease must be lived, not simply learned. In taking thought lest he err he found himself proceeding awkwardly. His training in the past had led him to set work and achievement ahead of all the rest. He understood now that those essentials in a life that is to yield the most appear better as superstructure. Mere achievement may attract respect. Erected on culture, it wins still more. Respect feeds only one appetite of ambition. True ambition is hungry for affection and friends, placing lovers ahead of sycophants. And the finer qualities, the softer virtues, attract more surely than mere fame.

These and similar reflections came to young Thornton rather incoherently. It was not that he desired the affection or the admiration of Madeleine Presson. But this young woman represented for him a new phase of the world he was meeting in its broader sense—and he was ambitious with the zest of youth. Often he was obliged to spur himself out of diffidence in her serene presence. At other times she put him at his ease with a tact which made him realize his own shortcomings. And under those circumstances ambition droops like a plant in a drought.

He had time to think during the two weeks he was at the State capital waiting for the big convention. His grandfather made no demands upon him.

Thelimer Thornton had quietly appointed himself the dominant figure in the back room at State headquarters. Under his big hand all the strings met. Even Luke Presson took subordinate post as a lieutenant.

The Duke of Fort Canibas *knew* that he was in control.

The Hon. David Everett *believed* that *he* was. Thornton blandly cultivated that belief in Everett. When Everett talked he listened. When Everett counselled he agreed. He invited all the confidence of that gentleman; he made sure that "the logical candidate" used him as repository of all his political secrets; he was careful to assure himself that Everett's strength was entirely in his hands and under his control—for he intended to

shatter that strength so instantly, so thoroughly, that not one fragment would be left to hamper his own plans.

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And yet day by day, word by word, hint by hint—his eye on the future loyalty of the Everett faction at the polls—he made the candidate understand that Arba Spinney was a man to be reckoned with—that the convention was not an open-and-shut certainty for the machine. Without realizing how it had come about, Everett found himself discussing “political exigencies.” Without knowing that he had been selected as a martyr for his party, he committed himself in lofty sentiments regarding the duty of a man in a crisis. Not that he suspected that his chances were endangered. He felt that he was truly the man of destiny; he was urging other men to forget their slights and their disappointments and rally to him. But the fact remained that—thinking wholly of other men—he had committed himself, and in a way that he could be reminded of when the time came.

The Duke planted that kedge well out, to serve in the stress of weather at the polls in the fall, should Everett and his men be silly enough to confound “party exigency” with treachery.

All men are forgetful. The Duke feared that some men had forgotten the details of Gen. Varden Waymouth’s notable life. The publicity bureau, obeying crafty suggestions and not understanding just what it was all about, began in the stress of that campaign to recall stories of the old days. And no man represented the old days as did Varden Waymouth, hero, scholar, and statesman. There were giants in the old days, and every machine newspaper in the State hailed General Waymouth as chief of the giants. They contrasted the present with the past. General Waymouth’s picture gazed forth in stately benignity from every broadside—his life story filled the columns of newspapers and the mouths of men.

With Arba Spinney’s activities Thornton was in touch at all times. More than ever before Mr. Spinney merited his title “Fog-horn.” He was striking the high places in the State, pouring language from under the mat of his mustache, warning all men off the political shoals of “the machine.” From those shoals he was scooping up mud in both hands, and spattering all men and all measures. He found plenty of listeners, for protest was abroad. But the persistent defamer irritates even his friends. He offends the innate sense of patriotism and loyalty which slinks even in the breast of the rebel. The Duke noted with satisfaction the outward symptoms of Mr. Spinney’s campaign; he was winning a following in those days of unrest. Through the columns of his newspapers the old politician exploited Mr. Spinney, seeing to it that he was well advertised as a man who persistently branded his own State as a den of infamy. Thus he made Spinney strong enough to play against Everett and weak enough to fall far in the estimation of men when the time came for him to fall.

And then at last, in the latter days of June, all roads led to Rome. The Republican Convention was called for the twenty-eighth, in the big hall of the State’s metropolis.

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On the day before, Thelismar Thornton emerged from the back room of headquarters at the State capital, and with Chairman Presson and Harlan journeyed to the scene of the conflict. Before their departure the Duke had been obliged, smilingly, to refuse a request of Mrs. Presson's.

She had asked that young Mr. Thornton be delegated as squire of dames to accompany herself and her party to the convention.

"I'm afraid you haven't realized for a week or so that the boy is in politics, Lucretia. I've let him run to pasture with a pretty long cord on him. He'll have to come in under the saddle now. We'll have one of the young beaus from the Governor's staff on the lookout for you at the hall. This fellow here"—he patted Harlan's arm—"he hasn't been broken to the society bridle yet. He was allowing to me the other day that he didn't propose to be, either."

Miss Presson had overheard.

Harlan, remembering, flashed a glance of rebuke and anger at the old man. It was a shock to him to have his own sentiments thrust back at him in that manner.

"We haven't found Mr. Harlan ungallant," protested Mrs. Presson. She treated the matter in jest, though the young man's face did not indicate that he especially appreciated the humor.

"Oh, he's probably just been playing 'possum—practising dissimulation, getting used to being a politician! You be watching out, Lucretia. He'll forget himself and make a bolt pretty soon. The test of the thing will be in seeing whether he holds out or not!"

In his indignation, Harlan was too confused just then to grasp the fact that his tormentor was craftily handing him over to the Presson womenfolk, bound, branded, and supple—unless he proposed to merit his grandfather's label in their estimation.

"Now, look here, grandfather"—he began, wrathfully; but the Duke pulled him away, drowning his protests in a laugh.

"You have placed me in a ridiculous position, and that's a mighty mild way to put it," complained the indignant victim, when they were outside. "I don't understand, grandfather, why you do something to me every now and then that knocks all the props out from under me. It isn't decent—it's vulgar—it's shameful, the way you do some things!"

"Operate in a queer way, do I?" inquired the old man, blandly.

"You certainly do."

“Did you ever stop to think, boy, that human nature is a queer thing?”

“Whose human nature are you referring to—yours or mine?”

“You know what the old Quaker said to his wife: ‘All the world’s queer, dear, except thee and me—and thee’s a little queer!’”

The angry young man would have liked to get a little more light on the question, but Chairman Presson was ready for them and hustled them into the carriage. And on the ride to the station, during the journey by train, at the convention city, there were other matters uppermost besides a young man’s pique.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE BEES AND THE WOULD-BES

Men—a swarm of men—a hiveful of men. Lobbies, parlors, corridors, stairways of the big hotel packed with men.

Men in knots, in groups, in throngs, pressing together, disintegrating to form new groups, revolving in the slow mass of the herd, shaking hands, crying greetings, mumbling confidential asides. An observer who did not understand would find it all as aimless as the activity of an ant-heap—as puzzling as the slow writhings of a swarm of bees. Clouds of cigar smoke over all—voices blended into one continual diapason; medley, and miasma of close human contact.

After supper, in the crowded hotel dining-room, Harlan Thornton accompanied his grandfather through the press of jostling men.

The night before a State Convention was a new experience for him. He walked behind the Duke, who made his slow, urbane way here and there, drawling good-humored replies to salutations. He had quip ready for jest, handclasp for his intimates, tactful word for the newer men who were dragged forward to meet him. Even the Governor of the State, a ponderous dignitary with a banner of beard, did not receive so hearty a welcome, for the Governor was accorded only the perfunctory adulation given to one whose reign was passing.

“Governors come and Governors go, Thornton, but you’ve got where you’re an institution!” cried one admirer. “I’ll be sorry to miss you out of the legislature this winter.”

“But here’s another Thornton—and you can see that he won’t rattle ’round in the seat,” returned the Duke, his arm affectionately about his grandson’s shoulders.

As he went about, in this unobtrusive way, varying his manner with different men, he presented his political heir.

At that hour there was no surface hint of the factional spirit that divided the gathering which had flocked from the ends of the State. Jealousy, spite, apprehension, rivalry were hidden under the gayety of men meeting after long separation. The political kinship of party men dominated all else in those early hours. It was a reunion. Food nestled comfortably under the waistbands. Tobacco—cigars exchanged, lights borrowed from glowing tips—loaned its solace. Bickerings were in abeyance. Men were sizing up. Men were trying out each other. Courtesy invites confidences. The candidates had not “taken their corners.” The suites that they had selected for headquarters were now occupied only by the lieutenants who were arranging the boxes of cigars and stacking the literature ready for distribution.

The Hon. David Everett, serene in the consciousness of approval by his party machine, held preliminary court in one corner of the spacious office lobby. The State chairman was with him—his executioner skilfully disguised.

Thelimer Thornton forged through the crowd in that direction. He paid his respects publicly and heartily. In that hour when congratulations sugared the surface of conditions, after he had pump-handled men until his arm ached, Everett forgot that he ever had entertained doubts.

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"There's nothing to this!" he had been assuring the State chairman over and over, catching opportunity for asides. "They're all coming into line. The sight of you and Thornton backing me has reminded them all that they can't afford to rip the party open. There's nothing to it!"

Presson agreed amiably. But studying his men, searching for insincerity, he saw what Everett closed his eyes to. He exchanged a significant glance with the Duke as the latter turned to resume his promenade.

Above the continual, distracting babble one sonorous voice rose insistently. Laughter and applause broke in upon it occasionally. There was a din in that corner of the lobby that attracted many of the curiosity-seekers in that direction.

"There's Fog-horn Spinney holding forth," Thornton informed Harlan, ironically. "Come along. We mustn't slight any of the candidates."

They made way for him. Men grinned up into his face as he passed. They scented possible entertainment when the big boss met the demagogue. Many of the men wore badges—long strips of ribbon with this legend printed thereon, running lengthwise of the ribbon:

HONEST ARBA

Candidate Spinney had a thick packet of ribbons in one of his gesticulating hands. He was flushed, vociferous, and somewhat insolent. Like Everett, he was not analyzing the acclamation that greeted everything he said; applause had made him drunk. But under the hilarity of his listeners there was considerable enthusiasm for the man himself. The Duke perceived it, for he realized what times had come upon the State. Spinney's bombast expressed the protest that was abroad. Rebellion, thirsty, does not seek the cold spring of Reason. It fuddles itself with hot speech, it riots—it dares not pause to ponder.

"The men that are running this State to-day are running it for themselves," he declaimed, as Thornton and his grandson came into the front rank of his listeners. "They want it all. I brand 'em for what they are. I could take glue and a hair-brush and make hogs out of every one of 'em!"

A shout of laughter! There was more zest for the mob in the point of Mr. Spinney's remarks, with the Duke of Fort Canibas, lord of the north countay, present to listen.

"I'm not ashamed of my platform. I'm willing to promulgate it. For I'm going to stand behind it. It ain't a platform fixed up in a back room of this hotel the night before convention, sprung at the last minute, and worded so that it reads the same backward and forward, and doesn't mean any more than whistling a tune! What kind of a system

is it that taxes the poor man's family dog, the friend of his children, a dollar, and lets the rich man's wild lands off with two mills on a valuation screwed down to pinhead size?"

Applause that indicated that the bystanders owned dogs!

"If you're hunting for something to tax, pick out bachelors instead of dogs. Dogs can't earn money. Bachelors can. There are forty thousand old maids and widows in this State who can't find husbands. Tax the bachelors. Give the single women a pension. Hunt out the tax-dodgers. There are things enough to tax instead of the farms and cottages of the poor men."

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He now fixed the Duke with his gaze.

"You don't dare to deny, do you, that the system in this State is screwing the last cent out of the exposed property and letting the dodgers go free? Tax the necessities of the poor, say you! I say, tax the luxuries of the rich!"

"In some countries, I believe, they get quite a revenue by taxing mustaches," stated the Duke, thus appealed to.

Spinney indignantly broke in on the laughter.

"You've carried off oppression so far as a joke, but you can't do it any longer, Squire Thornton. The people are awake this time. They've got done electing lawyers and dudes and land-grabbers for Governors. They're going to have a Governor that will make State officials work for fair day's wages, as the farmers and artisans work. No more high-salaried loafers in public office! No more dynasties, Sir Duke of Fort Canibas! You'll be having a coat of arms next!"

This last was said in rude jest—the public horseplay of a man anxious to win his laugh at any cost.

"I've got a coat of arms, Arba; I won the decoration when I retired from hard work at the age of fifty. That was about the time you were starting in life by selling fake mining stock around this State. My coat of arms is two patches on a homespun background, surrounded by looped galluses. And I can show you the mile of stone walls I built before you were born."

Spinney did not relish the merriment which followed that sally.

"You've outgrown that coat of arms, then, in these days," he retorted. "They all know you by a different stripe since you set the other chap at work, Squire Thornton. And the pendulum of power is swinging the other way! The people are behind *me*. You'd better get aboard." His style of humor depended most on its effrontery. He held out one of his badges. "Better put it on," he advised. "Get aboard with the rush! They're all for 'Honest Arba.'"

The Duke stepped forward and presented his breast.

"Pin it on, Arba. When a man shifts his business and is introducing a brand-new line of goods, different from what he ever carried before, he needs all the advertising he can get. Pin it on!"

But Mr. Spinney did not pin it on. He had been sure that the old man would indignantly refuse, and his discomfiture was evident.



“You’re showing your regular disposition, I see,” he growled. “Grabbing everything you can get hold of. But a joke is a joke—let this one rest right here! Thornton, I say it here to your face, where all the boys can hear me: the people want a change in this State. I am not going behind a door to talk with you—that’s been done too much! I stand in the open and say it! Open fighting after this—that’s my code. I fight for the people. The people shall be put wise and kept wise to all that’s going on.”

“It’s a good plan,” counselled the Duke, unperturbed. “I see I can’t tell you anything about advertising.” He tapped a badge on the breast of a man near him.

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"I'm for the people!" shouted Spinney. "The old wagon needs a new wheel-horse. I don't insist I'm the right one—or the only one. I merely say I'm willing to take hold and haul, if the people want me to. I offer myself, if no better one is found."

The crowd applauded that sentiment generously.

Thornton did not lose his amiability—his tolerant yet irritating good-humor.

"Speaking of wheel-horses, Arba—a man up my way started out to buy a horse the other day. He found a black one that suited—but the man who owned that horse was mighty honest, as most of my constituents are. 'You don't want him,' he told the man. 'He's too blamed slow.' 'That doesn't hurt him a bit for me,' said the buyer. 'I want him to mate another black horse to haul my hearse. I'm an undertaker!' 'Then you certainly don't want him,' insisted the fellow. 'The *living* can *wait*, but the *dead* have got to be *buried*.'"

The Duke had made his way out of the crowd before the laughter ceased.

"Apply it to suit, Arba!" he called over his shoulder.

Arm in arm with his grandson, the Duke traversed the lobby and went up the broad stairs to the State Committee headquarters—double parlors on the floor above. The men who were sitting in the main parlor saluted the old man in the offhand manner of intimates. He drew his grandson into the privacy of the rear room.

"Now, my boy, get your hat, take a carriage and meet General Waymouth at the nine o'clock train. I've had him on the telephone. He's coming here to-night. Between us, he's grown lukewarm on our proposition. I want you to talk with him after you meet him. Take your time on the way from the station."

"I'm a pretty poor agent to send on such a job as that," said Harlan, deprecatingly.

"You're just the one," insisted the old man. "Don't you suppose I knew what I was doing when I took you with me that night? Talk for the young men of this State! He's tired of politics and politicians. I am, myself, sometimes. He's got to dwelling on the political side. Get it out of his mind. Thank God, you don't know enough politics to talk it to him! You can talk from your heart, boy. The younger generation in this State does want a change. I realize it. But that change has got to be tempered with political wisdom. It must be managed through politics. I'll attend to that part. It's your task to make Vard Waymouth see that he ought to stand. You can do it. Begin with him where you left off."

Harlan hesitated.

"Well?" inquired the Duke, a bit petulantly.

"I've been used to talking straight out to you, grandfather. I'm willing to help as far as it's in my poor power. But I want you to tell me that I'm not being used as a decoy-duck in this thing."

"I reckon you'd better explain that, son," said the Duke, stiffly.

"It's your own fault that I'm saying a word about it. But you did some talking after we came away from General Waymouth's house. It wasn't so much what you said; it was what you intimated. I believe in General Waymouth. But if I'm any judge of what has been framed up, he isn't going to be allowed to do what he wants to do."

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"Did I say so?"

"No. But you did say that he would play the game with the chips that are on the table, not with sugar-plums."

"And you construe that to mean that I'm pulling him into this thing so as to be able to work him in the interests of the machine, eh?" inquired the Duke, putting into brutal speech even more than his grandson's vague suspicions suggested. "Now, look here! You remember Pod McClintock and his epileptic fits? You know he fell into a barbed-wire fence in a fit, and told around afterward how he had been to heaven, and the devil met him on his way back and clawed him for spite? Well, now don't you go to imitating Pod. There's more or less barbed wire in politics—any man gets afoul of it. But don't lay it to the devil. That will be elevating accidents onto too high a plane. If Vard Waymouth is the next Governor of this State there'll be some wire fences that he won't be able to sit on. There'll be too many barbs. We'll put top rails onto all the fences we can. But you can't make any fence safe for those that are bound to butt head-first into barbed wire. Waymouth isn't the kind to do any butting. I'll tell you this, Harlan, and it's straight: if I help to make Waymouth our next Governor, I'll help to make him a good one—provided he needs any of my help in that line. Now go and attend to your business."

There were few at the railroad station, and those few paid little heed to General Waymouth when he stepped down from the train. The young man greeted him with eager respect, and explained why he was there.

The General took his arm and walked to the carriage. "This is restful. I'm glad to see you here," he said. "But to-morrow," he added, bitterly, "if I am fool enough to be dragged back into politics, I'll be met wherever I go by men that fawn and men that seek—by that crowd I thought and hoped I had escaped forever. I was very hasty, Mr. Thornton, when I gave my word to your grandfather. I fear I must hold you responsible just because you were present." He smiled as the young man took his seat opposite. "But you constituted a new element in politics. I had been having my dreams in the peace of my home—and one of those dreams was to see the young men of this State breaking away from the political bondage of the fathers. But I'm afraid I am older than I thought. I have an old man's fears. I have had enough—too much—of the contact of men. Now this next idea is fanciful—another proof that I'm old—in my dotage, perhaps." His tone was gently playful. "I told you the other day that you seemed to typify the young strength of the State. So I'm going to appeal to you, young man—I cannot very well appeal to the rest, for they are not in the secret—I'm going to beg of you, Mr. Second Generation, to release me from my promise. What say you?—and remember that I'm an old man who has fought the good fight and is very weary."

“I’ve got to confess there isn’t much wit and humor in me—there doesn’t seem to be just now,” stammered Harlan, after groping some moments for suitable reply to what he accepted as badinage.

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"Oh, I don't want jest in answer to that, sir," protested the General. "I am in earnest." But his tone was still a bit whimsical. "You know, even so great a man as Caesar consulted the oracle and the omens and the soothsayers. Why should not I practice a little divination? Now answer me, young man—or I'll say, young *men* of the State?"

"Yet I can't think you really mean that, General," protested Harlan, wholly confused by this persistent banter.

"Call it in fun, call it in earnest, still I demand my answer." General Waymouth was serious now. "I came here resolved to tell Thelismer, face to face, that I could not sacrifice the last strength of my life in the way he has asked. But when you met me at the station all my ambitions for this newer generation, as I have dreamed them, came up in me. My boy, this State of ours is in a bad way. In one respect it is especially bad. We have one solemn law in our constitution that is made our own political football and the laughing-stock of the nation. We forbid the sale of liquor. Look at that saloon we are passing at this moment! It is a law that affects nearly every person in our State—comes near to every one, directly or indirectly. The manner of its breaking, publicly and protected by politics, has bred disrespect for all law in the boys who are growing up. And they are the ones who will run our State when we oldsters are gone. I'll not say anything about the other reforms that conditions are calling for. There's *one*—the big one that flaunts itself in our faces. I'm of the old school, Mr. Thornton. I don't believe in the prohibitory principle as applied to the liquor question. It hasn't the right spirit behind it—it is invoked by bigots and fanatics who refuse helpful compromise. But it's a law—our law! Every day that passes under present conditions adds its little to the damnation of the moral principle in our boys and girls, growing up with eyes and ears open. God, I wish I were twenty years younger! But I'm old enough to have fantastic notions; old enough to insist on an answer to my question, in spite of what you may think of my mental condition. Will you release me from that promise? I made it to the young men of this State—in my disgust at conditions, in my passion to do something to clean out this nest!"

The lights from the brilliant shop-windows shone into the carriage. Harlan leaned forward. The General's face was serious.

"Still, I can't understand it!" he cried. "I'm only—"

"I tell you, you typify for me at this moment the young men of my State! I choose to decide in this fashion. Do you feel that an honest Governor would help your self-respect?"

"I can answer that question, sir. I believe in you. Ever since you promised my grandfather that you would accept the nomination I have depended on that promise. I know what you can do for our State. If you are not to be our next Governor the heart has gone out of me, and the young men of this State have lost their best hope."

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The carriage wheels had grated to a standstill against the curb in front of the big hotel. The buzz of the crowded hive came out to them through the open windows. General Waymouth glanced that way and frowned. But when he turned and looked into the glowing face of the young man opposite, his countenance cleared slowly. His smile returned. There was a hint of pathos in that smile, but his eyes shone. He put out his hand and took Harlan's in a firm clasp.

"That sounds like my call to duty, Mr. Thornton," he declared. "I listen. I obey!" Then he dropped his earnestness. "Let this little talk remain a secret between us. These practical politicians wouldn't understand. A bit of an old man's weakness; perhaps that was it. A little eccentric, eh?"

The driver had opened the carriage door.

"I believe I understand, sir. I do now. And I'm sorry."

The remark was a bit cryptic, but the General understood.

"And you'll appreciate better what this means to me when you are as old as I. But that's the last of talk like this, my boy. There's one more fight still in me. We'll just go ahead and find out how much honesty is left in this State—and you shall help me hunt for it, for old eyes need the help of young ones, and I'm going outside the politicians to find honesty."

He led the way across the pavement to a side door of the hotel.

"We'll go in this way, quietly," he said. "I haven't any appetite for that kind of a stew just yet."

CHAPTER XV

SITTING IN FOR THE DEAL

On the second floor of the hotel Thelismar Thornton was pacing the corridor, hands behind his back, puffing his cigar. He was paying no heed to the men who were streaming past him in both directions, going and coming from the rooms of the candidates. Everett and Spinney were in their suites, extending hospitality with questionable cigars and ice-water.

Delegates were flocking up from the hotel bar in squads. They were meeting other delegates, forming new combinations which offered fresh opportunities for "setting 'em up," and after paying their respects were hustling back downstairs again to interview the gentlemen in white jackets.

Out from open transoms over the doors of sleeping-rooms floated cigar smoke and voices. There were boys running with ice-water and glasses to the noisiest rooms. From some of these rooms the familiar bacchanalian songs were resounding even at that early hour of the evening. The chorus of "We're here because we're here" mingled with the words of that reminiscent old carol, "When we fit with General Grant, by gosh."

The Duke, towering, abstracted, swaying along ponderously, close to the wall of the corridor, eyes on the head of the stairway, was as indifferent to the uproar as he was to those who passed.

A man who was somewhat flushed and a bit uncertain in his gait came out of the State Committee headquarters. He planted himself in front of Thornton.

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"Thelismer," he said, familiarly, "I've been trying to get something out of Luke. He won't say. Now what do you know about it? Is the party going to be honest? Are we going to get that resubmission plank in the platform this year?"

"They haven't asked me to write the platform, Phon."

"I tell you, the people want a chance to vote on this prohibitory question. It's been stuck into our constitution where the people can't get at it. I ain't arguing high license, but I tell you the people want a chance to vote on the question, and the Democrats are going to offer 'em a chance."

"That's a Democratic privilege," said the Duke, calmly, preparing to push past his interlocutor. "The Republican party stands for prohibition, and hasn't had any trouble in rounding up the votes for the last twenty-five years."

But the disputant caught hold of him when he started away.

"Look here, Thelismer, you ain't so much of a hypocrite as the most of 'em. Why don't you help us make a break in this thing? Damn it, let's be decent about it! Rum enough running in that bar-room downstairs to drive the turbine-wheel in my woollen-mill! Half the delegates to this convention with a drink aboard, and a third of 'em pretty well slewed! I am myself. But I'm honest about it. They're drinking rum in about every room in this hotel. And they're going into convention to-morrow and nail that prohibitory plank into the platform with spikes. By Judas, I'm honest in my *business*; now I want to have a chance to be honest in my *politics*!"

The Duke gazed down on him good-humoredly. He was accustomed to overlook the little delinquencies of his fellows on such festal occasions as State Conventions.

"You're asking too much out of party politics, Phon," he declared. "There are drawbacks to all the best things; seeing that the National platform won't let you vote as you think, you can hardly ask the State platform to be perfect and let you vote as you drink."

But his friend was not in the mood for jovial rallying.

"By the gods, if you old bucks that have been running things ain't going to give us a show—if we ain't going to get our rights from our own party—I know what I can do! I can vote the Democratic ticket, and I know of a lot more that will. You're asleep, you managers!"

"Well, Phon, when you vote as you drink—voting the Democratic ticket—you'll vote for a popocratic tax on corporations that will make your woollen-mill look sick. And that's only *one* thing!"

"I know what I will do," insisted the rebel.

The Duke took him by his two shoulders.

“So do I,” he returned. “You’ll have a bath, a shave, four hot towels, and a big bromo-seltzer—all in the morning, and you’ll go into the State Convention and stick by the party, just as you always have done. But as for to-night—why, Phon, I wouldn’t be surprised to see you pledge yourself to Arba Spinney.”

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He gayly shoved the man to one side and went on.

“Well, even Fog-horn is getting more votes corralled than you old blind mules realize!” shouted the other after him. “This party is sick! You’re going to find it out, too!”

“Sick it is, but I reckon here’s the doctor,” muttered the old man, hurrying toward the top of the stairs.

General Waymouth had appeared there, Harlan close behind him.

The Duke forestalled those who hastened to greet the veteran. Taking his arm, he marched him promptly across the corridor and into the rear room of State Committee headquarters. He locked the door behind them after Harlan had entered.

“I don’t think we’re exactly ready for that public reception yet,” he observed with a chuckle, turning from the door. He glanced at the General, anxious and keen in his scrutiny.

“Vard!” he cried, heartily, noting the resolution in the countenance, the light in the old soldier’s eyes, “you’re looking better, here, than you sounded over the telephone a few hours ago. You’re going to stand—of *course* you’re going to stand!”

“I’ll take the nomination, Thelismer—that is, providing you want me to stand as a candidate who will go into office without a single string hitched to him.”

“I guess the party isn’t running into any desperate chances, Vard, with you in the big chair. Sit down now and take it easy. I’ll call Luke in. After we’ve had our talk with him, we’ll begin to enlarge our circle a little—it’s a pretty close combination up to now.”

The porter at the door summoned the chairman of the State Committee.

“The Senator is just in from Washington,” he announced, after his enthusiastic greeting of the General. “I took him right up to Room 40, where the Committee on Resolutions is at work. He wanted to attend to that first. Then he’ll be down here.”

The chairman was referring to the United States Senator who would, by party custom, preside at the convention next day for the purpose of tinkering his own fences.

“Is Senator Pownal dictating the platform?” inquired the General, rather icily.

“He’s got a few little ideas of his own he wants to work in,” affably explained the chairman. “Nothing drastic. A little endorsement of some things he’s gunning for. It’ll be all safe and sane. We backed those resubmission fellows out of the room.”

“By-the-way, keep a sharp eye out for those chaps, Luke,” counselled the Duke. “I’ve been hearing around the hotel this evening that they’re going to introduce a resubmission plank from the floor to-morrow.”

“I’ll rush an early vote in the convention, providing that all resolutions shall be presented to the Committee on Resolutions without argument,” stated the chairman. “All that foolishness can be killed right in the committee-room. We’ve got trouble enough on hand in the party this year without letting the convention express itself on the liquor question, even if the split only amounts to a sliver.”

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He pulled his chair to the table, spread some papers there, and commanded attention by tapping his eyeglasses on the sheets.

“Here’s the programme for the routine: Called to order at ten-thirty by chairman of State Committee. Call read by secretary. On motion of Davis Bolton, of Hollis, proceed to effect temporary organization—Senator Walker Pownal, chairman—and so forth. On motion of Parker Blake, of Jay, ten minutes’ recess declared for county delegations to choose vice-president, member of State Committee, and member of the Committee on Resolutions.”

As he read on, Harlan opened his eyes as well as his ears. The convention of the morrow had been blocked out to the last detail. Every motion that was to be made, every step that was to be taken, had its man assigned to it—and that man had already been notified and tagged. Fifteen hundred men, assembled presumably as free and independent agents to take counsel for the good of the party, were here bound to the narrowest routine, with programme cut and dried to such an extent that one who dared to lift his voice to interrupt would be considered an interloper. And he knew that even then, from what Presson had said, the little band of the select were formulating the resolutions that the committee would take in hand as delivered—accepting that platform as the dictum of the party, and free speech on the convention floor denied.

“Now,” said the chairman, at the close, “let’s fill in the rest, and finish this thing now. Spinney’s name will be presented by Watson, of his county, and seconded by three other counties. I’m limiting the seconding speeches to three. And you know the men Everett has picked out! Of course, I’ve left the—the big matter in your own hands, Thelismers.” Presson glanced over his glasses at General Waymouth with a significant smile. “Have you decided? Are you going to let both the other candidates be put in nomination before you spring the trap?”

“Sure!” snapped Thornton. “I want that convention to realize how little good can be said of either of them. By the time that gets through those fifteen hundred skulls, they’ll be in a state of mind to appreciate the man of the hour!”

General Waymouth was leaning back in his deep chair, his head on the rest, his eyes upturned to the ceiling, fingers tapping the chair’s arm. He was offering no comment.

“Vard,” said the Duke, “we’ve got to let a few more into the case now. Overnight is short notice, at that, for a man to get his nominating speech ready. But we’re safe. It won’t be the speech that will take that convention off its feet. It’ll be your name—and the fact that you’re willing to stand. Who’ve you got in mind?”

“No one,” replied the General, briefly.

“Any choice?”

“No.”

“You’re willing to leave it to me?”

“I am.”

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"Then I'll admit I've picked the men in my mind. One is Linton, that young lawyer that's been taking the lead in the referendum and the direct primaries campaigns—both of them devilish poor political policies; but that doesn't prevent him from being the most eloquent young chap in the State. And he'll tole along the liberals. We'll need only one other—that's old Colonel Wadsworth. You see the scheme of that combination, of course! We don't need any more. The convention will be off its feet before the old Colonel gets half through his seconding speech. Linton is a delegate, Luke, and I saw to it that the old Colonel was fixed out with a proxy after I got here. Now, Harlan, you go out and hunt up those two gentlemen, and bring them here quietly. They're in the hotel. Come to the private door, there. You say you haven't suggestions, Vard?"

"Not now," said the General, not shifting his position. "The time for my suggestions has not come yet."

Harlan went out into the throng, searching, asking questions. The first man of whom he made inquiry recognized him as Thelismar Thornton's grandson, and invited him to the bar to have a drink.

"Busy?" he ejaculated when the young man declined. "H—I, there ain't any one really busy here to-night, except Senator Pownal and Luke Presson. They're running the convention. The delegates don't have to do anything—they are just here for a good time. Come on!"

As Harlan walked away from him, he remembered what Chairman Presson had just delivered from his papers, and decided that truth often spoke from the depths of the wine-cup.

He did not find either of his men in the Hon. David Everett's headquarters. The rooms were packed. Perspiring delegates were edging in and oozing out. Everett was industriously shaking hands, his rubicund face sweat-streaked, his voice hoarse after his hours of constant chatter in that smoke-drenched atmosphere. Harlan stood a moment, and looked at him with a sort of shamed pity. The plot seemed unworthy, in spite of its object. The sordid treachery of politics was turned up to him, all its seamy side displayed.

Two men crowded past him, talking low; but in that press their mouths were near his ear. They were halted by the jam at the door.

"What did you stab him for—how much?" asked one.

"Got ten," said his companion—"ten on account. I get fifty for the caucus."

"Too many machine Republicans in my town, and he knows it," said the other. "The best I could do was fool him out of twenty-five. But that's doing well—in these times."



This Spinney stir has made it cost Everett more than it has cost any candidate for ten years. I really didn't have the heart to crowd him for any more. He's been jounced down good and hard as it is."

Harlan took one more look at the unconscious and fatuous Everett, and went out of the room. Twenty feet away, as he knew, sat his grandfather, ready and able to smash the candidate's dreams and chances as a child bursts a soap-bubble. And the man's money—thrown to the winds when a word might have held his hand and closed his pocket-book! Harlan, grandson of Thelismer Thornton, tried to put the thing out of his mind.

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"Politics," said a man in the corridor in his hearing, "has got the pelt off'm second-story work, as they're running the political game in this State right now. But it's only petty larceny. And that's why the whole thing makes me sick."

"Me too," said his listener. "You could brag some about a political safe-blowing, but we all have to turn to and hush up this sneak-thief work."

Harlan, walking on, wondered whether the coup that was then in process of elaboration in State Committee headquarters would not be considered by Everett and his supporters as arising to the proper dignity of political crime.

To his surprise Spinney's rooms were practically deserted. The candidate was there, perched on the edge of a table, nursing his knee in his clasped hands and talking vigorously to a few of his intimates. The defection was not bothering him, apparently. Harlan promptly understood why. As he stood for a moment, making sure that neither Linton nor Wadsworth was there, he heard the mellow blare of distant band music. Spinney jumped off the table.

"The boys are coming!" cried one of his friends, and stepped out through the window upon a balcony. "Wait till after I call for the cheers, Arba!" he called back. "Step out when they strike up *Hail to the Chief*."

"This will make the Everett bunch sit up and take notice," said a man at Harlan's elbow. "There'll be a thousand men in line behind that band when she swings into the square, here! And a Spinney badge on every one of 'em!"

He was challenged promptly. The corridor was full of Everett men.

"Ten dollars to a drink that your man Spinney pays for the band! And when a band starts up street you can get every yag, vag, and jag in the city to trail it! You can't fool doubtful delegates that way, Seth! Go hang your badges on a hickory limb. They're only good to scare crows. You can't scare us!"

This speaker heard Harlan making inquiries for his men.

"The Colonel is down in the office," was his information, "over in the farther corner, behind one of those palms, telling war stories to Herbert Linton. Just came past 'em."

It seemed a rather happy augury to Harlan; that out of that throng his two men should have paired themselves struck him as an interesting coincidence. He found them, and quietly delivered his message.

Colonel Wadsworth stood up, gaunt, straight, twisting his sparse imperial, and blinking a bit doubtfully at the messenger. But Linton was not so much at a loss for reasons. He was an earnest young man with slow, illuminating smile.

“Has the committee seen new light regarding my two planks, Mr. Thornton?” he asked; and without waiting for answer, he led the way. The three were admitted at the private door.

United States Senator Pownal was there, evidently newly arrived from the committee-room.

The band was just coming into the square under their windows.

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Its deafening clamor beat in echoes between the high buildings, the mob was roaring huzzas. The bedlam blocked conversation.

Thelismier Thornton pulled down the windows and twitched the curtains together.

"Let 'em hoorah," he said. "With Spinney's band on tap, any fellows that try to listen at our keyholes will be bothered. I'm glad his band is out there. Now, gentlemen, I have something to say to you."

They listened to him, all standing. Only General Waymouth kept his seat, his head tipped back, his finger-tips together.

The Duke was brief, but he was cogent and he was emphatic. He explained what he had done and why he had done it. He was frank and free with that selected few. He delicately made known the General's reluctance, but stated in his behalf his willingness to step into the breach at this eleventh hour for the sake of his party. Then Thornton went first to Colonel Wadsworth, drew him along to Linton, and told them what their party asked of them.

Senator Pownal did not wait for this explanation to be finished. He was the first to reach General Waymouth with congratulations and endorsement.

"You cannot understand how immensely relieved I am to know this plan," he declared. "I have been here only a few hours, but I was just beginning to realize what the situation had developed into. I hadn't the proper perspective at Washington. Thornton is right. We're on the edge of an upheaval in this State; I'm afraid Everett would have plunged us straight into it."

Thornton had made no mistake in his selection of advocates. Colonel Wadsworth rushed to the chair of his old commander, and Linton, with a young man's loyal zeal, followed. The lawyer came back to Harlan, his eyes shining.

"We've got a *man* to follow now, Mr. Thornton, not a political effigy nor a howl on two legs! I was down there hiding myself. I hadn't stomach for either of the others."

There had been a brief silence outside. Then the band struck up *Hail to the Chief*, and the uproar broke out once more.

"That's our tune, and they don't know it yet!" cried the Senator, gayly. "Let's have the benefit of that to spice our little celebration, now and here!" He started for the window to open it, but General Waymouth put out his hand and checked him. He had stood up to receive their handclasps.

"One moment, Senator," he entreated. "I have a word to say for myself now. You have just come from Room 40. Have they finished drafting the platform?"

“It’s in shape—practically so.”

“Will you send for it?”

The Duke nodded to Harlan, and the young man arose. “Tell Wasgatt I want him to come down here with the resolutions,” he directed.

And while he was gone there was no conversation in the parlor. It might have been because the band was playing too loudly; it might have been because General Waymouth’s visage, grave, stern, almost forbidding, rather dampened the recent cordiality of the gathering.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE HANDS ARE DEALT

When Committeeman Wasgatt came into the room in tow of Harlan Thornton he found silence prevailing there. It was silence that was marked by a little restraint. The band outside was quiet now. A human voice was bellowing. It was Arba Spinney's voice—a voice without words.

Wasgatt, short, stout, habitually pop-eyed and nervous, clutched his papers in one hand and held his eyeglasses at arm's-length in the other.

The others were in their chairs now, ranged about the sides of the room. The General, alone, was standing near the table. Wasgatt turned to him after a rapid scrutiny of the make-up of the party.

"I'd like to have the resolutions read," remarked the General, quietly.

"Go ahead, Wasgatt," commanded Presson; and the committeeman advanced to the table under the chandelier and began to read.

The preamble was after the usual stereotyped form; the first sections endorsed the cardinal principles of the party, and Mr. Wasgatt, getting into the spirit of the thing, began to deliver the rounded periods sonorously. General Waymouth leaned slightly over the table, propping himself on the knuckles of his one hand. The light flowed down upon his silvery hair, his features were set in the intentness of listening.

"We view without favor the demagogic attempts to throttle enterprise, check the proper development of our State, lock up the natural resources away from the fostering hands of commerce and labor, thereby preventing the establishment of industries that will extend their beneficent influence to the workingman, dependent upon his daily wage."

"One moment, Wasgatt!" The General tapped a knuckle on the table, and the reader waited.

Waymouth turned his gaze full upon the Senator when he spoke.

"Gentlemen, understand me aright at the start. I'm not here to try to dictate. That would be presumptuous in me, for I am not yet your candidate. To-morrow is not here."

Wasgatt's pop-eyes protruded still more. He stared from man to man, and it became necessary for Thelismar Thornton to take one more into the secret. He did it a bit ungraciously. He had not expected the General to be so blunt and precipitate. The

candidate waited patiently until the brief explanation was concluded and Wasgatt had pledged fidelity.

“I want you fully to understand my spirit in this,” went on the General. “We’ll be honest with each other; we know that the floor of a convention is not the place to discuss the platform frankly; I don’t want to wash our linen in public. We’ll settle it now between ourselves. That plank, there, comes out of the platform if you expect me to stand on it.”

The Senator, challenged by his eyes, spoke.

“You don’t take exceptions to honest efforts to develop our State, do you, General Waymouth?”

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"I do not. But that proposition, no matter how good it sounds, is the sugar-coated preface to an attempt to steal the undeveloped water-powers of this State."

The Senator's fat neck reddened.

"You may be inclined to modify that rather rash statement, General Waymouth, when I tell you that I suggested the insertion of that resolution."

"I recognized it as yours, Senator. Some time ago my bankers gave me the personnel of the group behind the Universal Development Company. In making my statement, I understand perfectly what legislation that resolution is leading up to."

"Vard," broke in the Duke, conciliatingly, "don't take so much for granted. Why, there are folks suspicious enough to accuse Saint Peter of starting Lent and ticking off Fridays from the meat programme simply because he was in the fish business. Let's not get to fussing about a set of convention resolutions. They're mostly wind, anyway."

But General Waymouth was not appeased.

"I know what resolutions stand for—how much and how little. I'm taking this occasion, gentlemen, to set myself right with you. That resolution will do for a text! I want no taunts later that I led you on into a trap."

He struck the table with the flat of his hand.

"I'm laying my cards face up. Here's my hand! I halt right here on that resolution. I'm certain I know what it means, no matter how it sounds. I'm willing to take my hat and walk out right now. But if I stay—if you promise to nominate me—I propose to have the saying of what kind of a Governor I shall be!"

"That's rather blunt talk to make to gentlemen," protested the Senator, showing a spark of ire.

"At my age there isn't time to make long speeches to shade the facts," returned General Waymouth. He was calm but intensely in earnest.

"Then you are all for reform—one of the new reformers, eh?" inquired the Senator. He cast a look of reproach at Thornton, as though that trusted manager had loosed a tiger on their defenceless party.

The General smiled—smiled so sweetly that he almost disarmed their resentment.

"No, the Arba Spinneys of this State are the reformers. I'm not under salary to run round and make disturbances in settled order. I'm not a bigot with a single idea, nor a fanatic insisting that the world ought to follow the diet that my dyspepsia imposes upon



me. I'm merely an old man, gentlemen, who has got past a lot of the follies of youth and the passions of manhood, and has had a chance to reflect for a few years. I have not asked to return to public life. But if I do return, if you put power into my hands, I propose to render unto the people the things that are the people's, and that term includes every man in this room. It is not a programme that should alarm honest gentlemen!"

There was appeal in the tone—there was a hint of rebuke in that final sentence that troubled the conscience of even Senator Pownal. Thelismar Thornton was in a chair close to him.

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"Don't let a few little cranky notions about a platform scare you," he mumbled in the Senator's ear. "You know Vard Waymouth as well as I do. He's safe and all right. Give him his head. You don't want Spinney, do you?"

"But that was devilish insulting," growled Pownal.

"Tipping backward a little, trying to stand straight, that's all. Blast it, a Governor can't run the State. What are you afraid of? You've got a lobby and a legislature, haven't you?"

If Waymouth noticed this *sotto voce* conference he gave no sign.

"General," said Pownal, getting hold of himself manfully, even desperately, "the resolution is not essential. I fear you misunderstand what it really means, but we'll not discuss it now. I withdraw it."

The General bowed acknowledgment, and signed to Wasgatt to resume.

"We believe in dividing the burden of taxation equitably and justly, and will bend our efforts to that end."

"That is simply empty vapping!" cried the General. "And it has been in every platform for twenty years without meaning anything. The platform that I stand on this year must declare for a non-partisan tax commission, empowered to investigate conditions in this State—wild lands, corporations, and all—and report as a basis for new legislation."

In the silence that ensued they could hear Arba Spinney continuing his harangue.

"Gentlemen, you've got to do something in this party to stop the mouths of him and men like him," declared the General, solemnly. "You may make up your minds that you've either got to pay in money, or else you'll pay in votes that mean the bankruptcy of the party."

"I suppose you have the resolution all drawn," suggested Thelismer Thornton, dryly.

"I have, and drawn according to good constitutional law," replied the General. He drew the paper from his breast-pocket.

"Incorporate it, Wasgatt, ready for the final draft, and we'll all go over the thing tomorrow morning." The Duke was grimly laconic. That resolution whacked his pet interests.

Senator Pownal gave the proposer of this prompt surrender a glance of mutual sympathy out of the corner of his eye, but the Duke remained imperturbable. Wasgatt received the paper and went on.

“We reaffirm our belief in the principle of the prohibition of the liquor traffic, and pledge our earnest efforts to promote temperance.”

Across the corridor revellers were bawling over and over in chorus:

“Let’s take a drink,
Let’s take it now,
God only knows how dry I am!”

“That’s a good thing to reaffirm—I don’t mean the song they’re singing in that room across there! It’s a good thing to pledge ourselves to promote temperance,” said the General, “but that isn’t the point at issue. I have another plank that I’ve written for our platform.”

He drew a second paper from his pocket.

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“Gentlemen, some politicians, more than half a century ago, simply to use a temperance movement for bait in a political campaign, dragged into our party a moral, social, and economic question that belongs to the whole people—not merely to us as a party. Let the people, when the right time comes and they decide the matter differently, make a law that the majority desires and will stand behind. Just now we have in our constitution a law that forbids the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors in this State. There is no option in the matter. Just so long as our party, the dominant political power, uses that option, it is in disgrace with all decent men. I—”

There was a knock at the door—the private door.

Harlan started up, but his grandfather pulled him back into his chair.

“Go on, General,” he said.

“I have drawn a resolution. Here it is: ‘As a party, we deplore the fact that temperance, through the so-called prohibitory law, has become a matter of politics, its football to the extent that holders of public office, sworn to enforce the laws, turn from that enforcement in order to cater to public opinion which otherwise might deprive them of office. We declare against this intolerable system of protection of lawbreakers. Until the people shall repeal the law, we, the dominant party of the State and in control of enforcement, do pledge ourselves to faithfully enforce it, employing such law as we now have and invoking new powers through the legislature to assist us, so long as the prohibitory law shall remain in our constitution.’”

It was now Chairman Presson’s turn to look uncomfortable.

“Look here, Vard,” exploded Thornton, “I’ve been pretty patient while you’ve been amputating a few fingers and toes of the Republican party of this State, but I’ll be damned if I propose to see you cut its throat.”

There was fresh knocking at the door, but the group within the parlor had enough to think about just then without entertaining callers.

“Now you’re talking simply about yourselves and your office-holders and your dirty profits. You’re calling that mess of nasty confederacy ‘Our Party,’” declared General Waymouth, passionately. “When honesty kills a party, let it die—let its men get out and organize another one. But I tell you, you can’t kill it by being honest, Thelismen. The trouble is you’re sitting here and building for to-night—for to-morrow. I’m a Republican—you can’t take that name away from me. But the badge doesn’t belong on men who are using that name to cover up a rum-selling business.”

Chairman Presson was livid. He leaped from his chair and drove his fist down on the table,

“Now you’re insulting me personally!” he shouted.

“I deal in no personalities, sir. So long as I hide myself under the name of Republican and allow this thing to go on as it’s going, I’m in the traffic myself; and I don’t propose to continue in it—not when I have power placed in my hands.”

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"By the eternal gods, you won't have the power placed there!" roared the chairman of the State Committee.

Now some one called to them from outside the door, repeating the rapping.

"When you say that, you're confessing that the Republican party is a sneak, Presson," declared the General.

The Duke came along to the table. He ticked his forefinger against the paper that Waymouth was holding.

"Vard, you're pledging yourself in advance of election to the most rabid of the prohibition fanatics."

"I'm pledging myself to obey the one State law that occupies the most space in public attention, causes the most discussion, makes the most row. It's a damnable bloodsucker to be hitched on to any political party! But it's on ours, and I'm going to grab it with both hands!"

"Hold a proxy from the ramrodders, eh?" sneered the State chairman, thoroughly a rebel.

"No, nor from the State rumsellers. If the people of his State want to have rum sold, let 'em vote to have it sold. But as it now stands, they can't enlist me to head the lawbreakers and shield the lawbreaking. I'm through playing the hypocrite!"

"We've got to set ourselves above petty bickerings and personal differences," interposed the Senator, cracking the party whip. "I'm a Republican, first of all!"

"Talk sense, Pownal!" snapped the General, impatiently. "This isn't a political rally. We're grown men and friends that can talk plain. His principles make a Republican—or ought to—not his protestations! And establishing a system of low license and sheriff-made local option under a prohibitory law is unprincipled, and you know it!"

Thelismier Thornton, god of that particular machine that was then grinding so ominously and rattling so badly, felt that he needed a few moments in which to mend belts and adjust cogs. He wanted an opportunity to think a little while. He had discovered a new Waymouth all of a sudden. He wanted to get acquainted with him. He wished to find out whether he would be really as dangerous as his astonishing threats indicated.

The persistent man at the door was now clamorous. The Duke strode that way and flung it open. Whoever it might be, the interruption would give him time to think, to plan, to investigate.

The intruder was the Hon. David Everett. He stepped in, and Thornton relocked the door after him.

Mr. Everett was not amiable. His little eyes snapped from face to face suspiciously. It was immediately and perfectly plain to him that he had forced admission to a conference that had not expected him, did not want him, and was embarrassed at finding him present. In the state of mind they were in, the men in that room would have glowered at any one. Everett detected something more than mere personal resentment at his intrusion—he sniffed a plot against him. There was no hand outstretched to him, no welcome, no explanation offered why these leaders of the party had met thus without intimation to him that anything was afoot. Cholerick red suffused his face—it had been gray with passion when he entered, because a corridor filled with curious men is not a happy arena for a candidate shut out of committee headquarters.

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He realized that he had been a spectacle inciting interest and some amusement while he was hammering on the door.

One object of the Duke had been attained when he admitted Everett—the wrangling ceased. But the embarrassment was intensified. The situation was more complex.

“I beg your pardon, gentlemen, if I am interrupting serious business,” began Everett, intending to force some sort of explanation.

He waited. No one spoke. The others were waiting, too.

The candidate looked from one to the other, and then surveyed Wasgatt and the papers he was clutching. He eyed General Waymouth with much interest and some surprise. He had not been informed of that gentleman’s presence in the hotel. The General returned the gaze with serenity, creasing his sheet of manuscript on the table with his thin fingers.

“I expected to be called in when you were ready to go over the platform,” continued Everett, sourly. “I’m supposed to know as early as any one, I presume, what it is I’m going to stand on.”

Thelismar Thornton decided that it was up to him to speak. He leaned against the table, half sitting on it, and swung his foot.

“You have a perfect right, Dave, to inquire about any platform that you’re going to stand on. And when we get your platform ready for you we’ll call you in and submit it. But allow me to remind you that you haven’t been nominated yet.” The band was blaring again outside. “The convention is yet to be held, and has yet to declare its platform.”

“I don’t expect you to call Arba Spinney in here and consult with him—if that’s what your hints mean. But there’s no need of your using that ‘round-the-barn talk with me, Thelismar. You know that so far as the real Republican party is concerned Spinney is an outsider; I’m the logical candidate, and I demand to be taken into the conference. I don’t recognize that there are two Republican candidates before the convention.”

“I do,” said the Duke, firmly and with significance. He was preparing to resent this autocratic manner.

“Well, I *don’t*!” cried the State chairman. Secretly he had been offended by Thornton’s high-handed assumption of control, ever since their talk on the morning after the Fort Canibas caucus. He had promptly recognized the political sagacity of the old man’s plan. In his fear of the Spinney agitation—in his apprehension lest all control should be wrested from his faction of the party—he had been eager to compromise on General Waymouth, hoping that he would prove to be as amenable to party reason as he knew Everett already was. But this intractable old Spartan, with his dictation of party

principles that meant the loss of policy, power, and profits, had angered him to his marrow. He was ready to declare himself now, Thornton or no Thornton. He turned on the Duke.

“Perhaps you can lick me—that’s the only way you can get it!” he declared. “But you needn’t expect me to stand here and grin and hand it over.”

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Thornton stared at him understandingly, accepting the challenge.

"There was a man up our way, Luke, who fought two highway robbers a whole hour, and when they had finally torn his clothes all off him, he only had two cents in his pockets. He told the robbers, then, that he hadn't fought to save his two cents, but because he didn't want his financial condition revealed."

Candidate Everett was finding this conversation hard to follow.

"There's something here that isn't on the level, and I suspected it the minute I came into this room. Presson, is the State Committee behind me?"

"It is, and it's behind you to stay," declared the chairman. Again he turned to Thornton.

"It's up to you, now, whether Arba Spinney gets the nomination or not. If you keep on and split us, he gets it; but I shall make it mighty plain to the boys as to whose fault it was, Thelimer."

"What's all this about?" demanded Everett.

Presson hesitated only a moment.

"There was a movement on inside the party to run General Waymouth as a compromise candidate. It has been talked over. I declare myself now. I'm against it. The State Committee stands for you, Everett!"

The candidate revolved slowly on his heels in order to study the faces of all of them. He did not find much enthusiasm to back up Presson's declaration. He realized that he was in the company of those who had been plotting to shelve him, and he had the wit to understand that only their quarrel over some issue had availed to save him from being knifed.

His temper got away from him.

"You've held your nose up pretty high in this world, General Waymouth! Do you call a trick to steal my nomination away from me at the last moment gentlemanly or decent? I've put in my time and my money and my efforts. I've made a campaign. And I've waited for this!"

"You needn't insult the General in that fashion, Dave," broke in Thornton. "Address your talk to me. I'm responsible."

"I think I'm the one that is responsible at this stage," insisted General Waymouth. "I'll talk to you, Mr. Everett, if you please. You addressed me. Any Republican in this State is entitled to seek nomination as Governor. It is a worthy and proper ambition. It is an

honor that belongs to the people. It isn't a heritage to be passed on from one bunch of politicians to another. It isn't to be bought and bartered. I realize that precedent has given you that impression. But it's a pernicious precedent. It's time to do away with it. That's why I'm here to-night, dipping into slime that I hoped never to be soiled with again. I've been frank with these other gentlemen. I'm going to be frank with you, Mr. Everett. I know you stand for The System. I don't have to tell you what that is. You propose to continue the nullification programme, bar-rooms tolerated on payment of fines, tax reform slicked over, water powers and other State resources peddled out to favorites. It's useless to deny. We've all been in politics together too many years."

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Mr. Everett did not deny. It was too intimate a gathering for that.

"This is not the way I'd like to be called to the Governor's chair of my State," went on the General, "but it's the way of politics. I've got to meet you on the politician's level, so far as securing the nomination goes. But I stand here and tell you, Mr. Everett"—he took two steps forward and stood close to the other candidate, and his voice rose—"that I can be a better Governor of this State than you—in the sort of days that are on us now. This is not egotism—it's truth. I say it because I know you and the men behind you as well as I know myself."

"It's a sneak trick, just the same!" shouted Everett.

"So are many tricks in politics—and, God help me, I'm back in politics!" returned the General. He looked them over there in the room, from face to face and eye to eye. "You cannot accuse me of vanity, self-seeking, or ambition at my age, gentlemen. I've been Governor of this State once. I didn't enjoy the experience. I'm going into this thing again simply because I believe that I can put some honesty into public affairs. This State is calling for it. And that object justifies me in what I'm doing. I am a candidate!"

"By ——!" roared Everett, furious, realizing how this candidacy threatened his hopes, "run if you want to. But I'll see to it that these delegates know how you're running—cutting under a man that's made an honest canvass!" He started for the door, tossing his arms above his head—a politician beginning to run amuck.

Presson grabbed his arm and held him back.

"Don't be a lunatic, Dave," he buzzed in his ear. "If you go to advertising this around the hotel to-night you'll be giving Spinney the tip and starting Weymouth's boom for him. Damn it, you want to keep your teeth shut tight and your tongue behind them! There'll be no blabbers go out of this room—I'll see to that! I'll put a dozen members of the State Committee at work on the delegates to-night." He was walking Everett toward the door, getting him out of earshot of the others. "Weymouth has got a platform there that sounds as though it was drawn up by the House Committee of Paradise. He's got to be licked—great Judas, he's got to be licked! I've got five thousand that the liquor crowd has sent into the State for the campaign, but this is the place to use it—right here now! And it'll be used. Don't you worry, Dave! And keep your mouth shut!"

It was a colloquy that no one else in the room heard—Everett putting in suggestions as the chairman whispered hoarsely in his ear. Harlan Thornton, looking on, guessed what it might be. Linton, at his side, ironically hinted at the possibilities of that hurried conference in the corner. Senator Pownal walked about the room, chewing his short beard and incapable of a word—for his re-election came before the next legislature, and to jump the wrong way now in the gubernatorial matter was political suicide.

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Thelismier Thornton remained in his place on the corner of the table, staring reflectively at General Waymouth.

Presson ended his whispered exhortations with a rather savage reference to the manner in which the Duke had involved the campaign. Everett shot a baleful glance at the man who had so cold-bloodedly planned his undoing.

"Look here, Thornton," he called out, as he started for the door, "you and I will have our reckoning later. We use old horses for fox bait up our way, too, but we always make sure that the horses are dead first." He went out and slammed the door.

Thornton did not turn his head. He kept his eyes on Waymouth.

"Vard," he said, "I reckon I haven't been keeping my political charts up to date. I had you down as a peninsula, jutting out *some* from the Republican party, but still hitched on to it. I find you're an island, standing all by yourself, and with pretty rocky shores."

"Perhaps so," admitted the General.

"This has been a sort of a heart-to-heart meeting here to-night. In the general honesty I'll be honest myself. I can't support you."

"Then you lack honesty."

"No, but your scheme of honesty takes you right into the king-row of the ramrodders, and I can't train with the bunch that will flock to you. Your theory is good—but the *practice* will break your heart just as sure as God hasn't made humans perfect! You'll be up against it! You're going to test man to the limit of his professions—and it isn't a safe operation, if you want to come out with any of your ideals left unsmashed. If you start on that road you'll have to travel it without me."

"Well, there's a little common sense left in the Republican party," snapped Presson.

"General Waymouth, you've had considerable many honors in your life, and the party gave 'em to you. That calls for some gratitude. You can show it by keeping your hands off this thing."

"That would have been an argument once, when I was a wheel-horse with my political blinders on; it has been an argument that has kept a good many decent men from doing their duty. It will not work with me now." He put his folded paper into his pocket, and reached and took the other document that he had handed to Wasgatt earlier in the evening. "I'll not disfigure the perfect structure of your platform now, Presson, but I'll see how these sound from the floor of the convention, in spite of your resolutions to shut off free speech! Good-night, gentlemen." He turned to leave, still serene with the poise of one who has experienced all and is prepared for all. "I used to have pretty good luck

playing a lone hand in our old card-playing days, Thelismer. I'll see what I can do in politics."

"General Waymouth, have you a few moments to give me if I come to your room now?" inquired Harlan Thornton. "I want to offer my services!"

"I'll join the party too, if I may!" suggested Linton.

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Colonel Wadsworth was twisting his imperial with one hand and fingering his Loyal Legion button with the other.

"I'm not the kind that waits for a draft, General," he said. "I didn't in '61. I volunteer now."

General Waymouth smiled, bowed the three ahead of him through the door of the parlor, and softly closed it behind himself and his little party.

"Well, Thelismer," raved the State chairman, "you can certainly take rank, at your time of life and after all you've been through, as a top-notch hell of a politician. You start out to run a State campaign, and you wind up by not being able to run even your grandson!"

"What I started running seems to be still running," said the old man, undisturbed by the attack.

"And it's costing the Republican party something, this mix-up," Presson went on.

"You think it looks expensive, taking the thing right now at apparent face value?"

"Look here! I don't relish humor—not now! I'm not in a humorous mood. You can see what it's costing—blast that infernal band!"

Mr. Spinney's serenaders had not had their fill of music. There was din outside. The tune, "A Hot Time in the Old Town To-night," won a grunt of approval from Mr. Wasgatt, still holding his documents, more pop-eyed than ever.

"Pretty expensive, eh?" said the Duke, lifting his knee between his hands and leaning back on the table. "You heard about—"

"I don't want any more of your cussed stories! Not to-night!" Presson rushed out. He went into the main parlor, where the members of the State Committee were in informal session.

Wasgatt was left with the Duke, and the latter fixed him with benevolent gaze.

"Old Zavanna Dodge, up our way, got to courting two old maids, trying to make up his mind which he'd take—and the one he didn't take sued him for breach o' promise. After Zavanna put in his evidence in court, he sat across from the court-house in the tavern window, waiting for the arguments to be made and the case to be decided. Toward night Squire Enfield, his lawyer, came across. 'How did she end out?' says Zavanna. 'Agin ye—for eight hundred,' says the Squire. 'Pretty expensive, Zav!' Zavanna tucked a spill of whisker between his lips and chewed on it and rocked for a little while. 'Unh huh!' says he, figuring it over. And then he spoke up cheerful: 'Well, Squire, I reckon there's that much difference between the two women.'"

Wasgatt chuckled.

“The point to that is—but no matter! It was to Luke that I was going to show the point.”

The old man got his hat from the window-sill and trudged toward the private door, saying, partly to Wasgatt, partly to himself: “I reckon I’ll go to bed! Just at this minute the campaign doesn’t seem to be needing my help.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE ODD TRICK

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Thelismar Thornton was one of the first to stir next morning in the big hotel. All night roisterers had flanked his room, there had been the buzz of eager argument overhead, riot of dispute below, and continual thudding of hurrying feet in the corridors. He had gone to sleep realizing that the hive was in a state of upheaval extraordinary, but he slept calmly in spite of it, and woke refreshed.

He picked his way past cots in the corridors. Men were snoring there.

His grandson had not returned to their apartments. But the Duke divined his whereabouts. He had ascertained by the house telephone the number of Linton's room. He tried the door when he arrived there. It was not locked. He entered. Linton was asleep on the bed. Harlan was on a cot. They had taken off only their coats and waistcoats. They did not wake when he came in. He pulled a chair to the centre of the room and sat astride it, his arms on its back. In a few moments both sleepers woke, stirring under his intent regard. They sat up and returned his gaze.

"Well, my boys, what's the programme?" he inquired, pleasantly.

Heavy with sleep, perturbed, a bit apprehensive, neither answered.

"You didn't come back to your room last night, Harlan. You weren't afraid of this old chap, were you? Didn't think I'd be running around the room on all fours, eh, or climb the wall, or growl and try to bite you?"

"I didn't want to disturb you, and Mr. Linton and I wanted to talk after we left General Waymouth," said Harlan.

"It's all right if you weren't afraid of me, my boy. We can't afford to have politics put us in that state of mind. Now, own up! You thought I'd pitch in and pull you over to the machine—you were afraid of that, now, weren't you?"

"To be perfectly honest, I didn't want any argument with you, grandfather, but I wasn't afraid you'd convert me. You couldn't do that."

"Bub, 'politics before friendship' is all right for a code. I practice that myself, but it hurts me to have you put politics before relationship—the kind that's between us."

"Grandfather," replied the young man, firmly, "you remember that you told me you were going to put me into politics right. I consider that you've done so. I'm going to stay where you put me."

"Oh, you mean one thing and I mean another, my boy, as matters stand just now. You're in wrong. A man isn't in right when he's playing on the losing end."

"I stay where you put me," insisted Harlan, doggedly. "I'm with General Waymouth."

“General Waymouth was a winner till he committed hari-kari there last night. He had Luke’s machine, and he had my scheme. He kicked over the machine, and the scheme won’t work now; it could have been *snapped* through, but it can’t be *bulled* through—not with the bunch forewarned and on the lookout. Your political chances with Vard Waymouth, Harlan, don’t amount to that!” He clicked his finger smartly above his head. “You may as well go back up-country and boss the Quedaws.”

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“And yet you know that General Waymouth is right, Mr. Thornton,” broke in Linton, pausing in lacing his shoes. “There’s no chance for argument about that. Why is it the big men of this State—men like you, that have the influence to set things straight—won’t back the man that’s honest and right?”

“Linton, that’s the kind of a question that’s asked by the man whose experience in practical politics is limited to a term on the School Board and the ownership of a subscription edition of *American Statesmen*, bound in half morocco. I’ll tell you why we don’t: we’re dealing with conditions, not theories. The chap who writes for the ‘Kickers’ Column’ in the newspapers can tell you all about how politics should be run, but that’s the only privilege he ever gets. It’s the chap who keeps still and runs the politics that gets what’s to be got out of it. And that’s because mankind wants what it wants, and not what it says it wants.”

He went to the window, snapped up the shade, and let the morning light flood the room.

“Wake up, my boys! Dreams are rosy—I’ve had ’em myself. But they don’t buy the breakfast next morning. Martyrs get a devil of a reputation after they’re dead. It doesn’t do ’em a mite of good, not as human beings. As long as you’re taking the curse that belongs with a human being, get some of the good, too. I tried to operate on a different plan long ago—about the time I had the dreams—but I had to give it up if I was to get anything out of life. Vard Waymouth can’t build over the human nature in this State. I’ve had to drop him. I hadn’t realized he was in such a bad way. Get aboard with the winners this trip! Then at least you can be in the swim—you can find some good to do on the side, and be able to do it. But you won’t amount to anything sitting on the bank and bellowing.”

The vigils of the night had fortified their faith, the loyalty of youth was in them, and they were the disciples of one who had enlisted their enthusiasm. Linton, however, was less assertive than Harlan. The Duke did not lose his patience.

“Boys,” he said, at the end of his exhortations, “I see that you’ve got to have your little lesson (I’ll have to be going now, for I’ve a few things to attend to), and I’ll tell you frankly I propose to make that lesson a lasting one.”

A few hours later the young men went in to breakfast together. The early trains had brought other delegates and visitors. The great room was crowded with a chattering throng. The head waiter intercepted them; he seemed to be waiting for them. They followed obediently, and he led them to an alcove.

Here a breakfast-party was already installed.

Miss Presson was first to greet them, giving a hand to each—radiant, fresh, and altogether charming in her tailored perfection.

“We left word at the door,” she smiled, “for I wanted to behold you before the blood and dust of the arena settled over all.”

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Mrs. Presson and her ladies were cordial. They did not seem to remark that the State chairman kept his seat and was brusque in his greeting. Political abstraction excused general disregard to conventions among the men-folks that morning. The Duke was there. He patronized them with a particularly amiable smile.

"May I?" asked Linton, touching the chair next Madeleine.

"Yes," said the girl. "You know, Herbert and I are very old friends, Mr. Thornton." There was a hint of apology to Harlan behind the brilliant smile she gave him. He had moved toward the chair. He flushed when he realized that he felt a queer sense of hurt at her choice. It was another new experience for him who had made the woods his mistress—a woman had chosen another, slighting him. As he took his seat beside his grandfather he was angry at himself—at the sudden boyish pique he felt. He had not been conscious till then that he had been interested especially in Madeleine Presson. It needed the presence of this other young man, selected over his head, to make him understand that one may not draw near beauty with impunity, even though one may be very certain—telling his own heart—that love is undreamed of. He wondered whether he might not be afflicted with asinine pride.

He did not relish the glance that Linton bestowed on him; it seemed there was just a flash of triumph in it—that bit of a boast one sees in the eyes of a man who becomes, even briefly, the proprietor of a pretty woman.

"We were just talking over the latest news—or, rather, it's a rumor," said Miss Presson. With quick intuition she felt that something, somehow, was not just right. She hastened to break the silence. "They are saying that Mr. Spinney has withdrawn, and that his name will not go before the convention. Of course, you've heard about it, Herbert—and Mr. Thornton!"

They had not heard it. They looked guilty. They had been all the morning with Colonel Wadsworth, locked away from the throng, finishing matters of the night before. The expression on their faces was confession of their ignorance.

"If you're going to be early political fishermen you'll have to look for your worms sharp in the morning or you'll fetch up short of bait," suggested the Duke, maliciously.

"Three cheers and a snatch of band-music take on a hopeful color when they're lit up by red fire overnight," remarked the State chairman. "So do some other things. But a fellow with good eyesight usually comes to himself in the daylight."

"Is that true about Spinney?" asked Harlan, scenting mischief and treachery, and not yet enough of a politician to understand instantly just what effect this would have on the situation.

“I don’t know anything about it,” snapped Presson. “I don’t care anything about it. It isn’t important enough. The man’s strength was overrated. It was mostly mouth. Just as soon as the delegates got together last night and shook themselves down it was plain enough where Spinney stood.”

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"But you yourself and grandfather have been saying all along that he—" began Harlan.

"We say a lot of things in politics," broke in the chairman, testily. "But it's only the final round-up that counts. And be prepared for sudden changes, as the almanac says! I tell you, I don't know anything about this Spinney rumor—nor I don't care. But it's probably true. Everett has got pledged delegates enough to nominate him by acclamation."

"But last night—" persisted Harlan.

His grandfather interrupted this time.

"Don't you remember that old Brad Dunham wrote to New York one spring and asked a commission man if he would take a million frogs' legs? Commission man wrote that he'd take a hundred pairs; and the best old Brad could do, after wading in the swamp back of his house all day, was to get a dozen. Wrote to the commission man that he'd been estimating his frogs by sound and thought he had a million. That's been the way with Spinney and his delegates, Harlan."

Mrs. Presson took advantage of the merriment to change the subject from politics. It was a topic that did not interest her, and she had learned from her husband's disgusted growlings that morning that there had been trouble the night before.

Harlan did not join in the chatter that went about the table. Under cover of it his grandfather gave him a few words of compassionate counsel.

"You'll have to swing in with the new deal, bub. You can't cut party sirloin too close to the horn, and that's what Vard did. He wants to sit on the mountain and slam us flat under a rock with the new ten commandments on it. We can't stand for it. I didn't dream that he had grown to be so impractical in his old age. No one wants any such deal as he's framing up for the State. As I told you, he's trying to build human nature over, and he can't do it. I'm sorry it's turned as it has—he could have been just a little diplomatic and made us a good Governor. But Everett will make a good one—you needn't be afraid of him. We'll put through a few measures that will smooth things down a little. Now you've got to remember that you're going to the legislature. You might just as well not be there if you don't stand clever with the administration. I haven't put you in just as I intended. But get into line now, quick. I can smooth it all right for you. I've squared myself with Everett—he needed me!"

Harlan listened patiently, keeping his eyes on his food.

"Right after breakfast Luke is going to have a talk with you and Linton."

"It will do Mr. Presson no good to talk to me. I'm with General Waymouth."

“But General Waymouth has been eliminated, you young idiot. It was the combination of circumstances that made him a candidate. But those circumstances have been changed. I can’t explain to you how, Harlan—not here and now. But a brand-new trump has been turned. It had to be done. You stay behind here with Linton and talk with Luke.”

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The ladies were rising from the table.

Harlan did not reply. He did not remain. He stepped aside and allowed the ladies to pass, and followed them from the alcove. Presson stared after him angrily. Linton, obeying his request, sat down after Mrs. Presson and her party had retired.

"You've got a fool, there, for a grandson, Thelismer," stated the chairman with decision.

"He doesn't seem to be a politician," returned the old man, gazing after him. "There are a few joints in a man that he ought to be able to bend in politics, but Harlan seems to be afflicted with a sort of righteous ossification. He'll have to have his lesson, that's all!"

The young man was not in the mood to accept Miss Presson's invitation to accompany them to the hotel parlor. In the corridor he refused so brusquely that she stood and gazed at him, allowing the others to go on without her.

"You seem to be taking politics very seriously, Mr. Harlan Thornton."

"I'm taking honesty and my pledges seriously, that's all."

"Then your honesty puts you in opposition to my father, does it, sir?" It was said with a spark of resentment. "Do you realize how that sounds?"

"I do not say so, Miss Presson."

"But I have heard queer rumors this morning. Take a woman's advice once, Mr. Thornton: it may be worth something, because I have seen more of this game than you have. Don't kill your career at the outset by trying to realize an impossible ideal. It's bad enough in love, but it's much worse in politics!" She hurried away, joining the others.

Harlan paced the corridor impatiently, waiting for Linton to come out. Few men of the hundreds thronging past recognized him, and he was not accosted.

He caught fragments of talk. It was evident that the rumor concerning Spinney had found as many disbelievers as believers. Some charged that the story was started simply for the purpose of hurting the reform candidate by decrying his strength and inducing the wavering opportunists to come over to the winning side. Others said a trade had been effected, and that the story of it had leaked out prematurely. At any rate, the buzz of gossip showed that the situation was badly mixed.

Linton came alone. He had left the Duke and the chairman in conference. He took Harlan by the arm, and walked to the end of the corridor. They were alone there.

"Of course you know how I came to be in on the Waymouth side," he began, promptly. "Once I was in I didn't propose to quit so long as there was any hope. I did what mighty

few young men in politics would do, Mr. Thornton—I stood out last night against Presson and your grandfather when they dropped the General. I just say that to show you I'm not a cur. But it's hopeless. The thing has turned completely over."

"You're going to desert the General?"

"It isn't desertion. That isn't a word that belongs in this situation. General Waymouth will not call it that after I've talked with him."

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Harlan did not speak. At the breakfast-table he had been ashamed of that little gnawing feeling of rancor when he looked across at the young couple who seemed so wholly contented with their conversation. Now he indulged himself. He began to hate this young man cordially. He excused the feeling, on the ground that it was proper resentment on behalf of the General.

"I don't want you to think that I'm disloyal or a deserter in this matter, Mr. Thornton. But I'm going to the next legislature, and I'm interested in certain measures that will help this State if they're adopted. I can't help General Waymouth now; you can't help him. He has no one behind him, as the thing has turned."

"He's got the square deal behind him!"

"Meaning nothing in a political mix-up such as this is. I can't afford to dump all my future overboard and kill myself for the next legislature by an absolutely useless and quixotic splurge in to-day's convention. The General has made no canvass—he isn't even very much interested personally in the affair. I hope I stand straight with you now. I'm going up and tell the General exactly how I feel about the thing. I advise you to do the same. You'll be very foolish to butt your head against every political influence in this State that counts for anything. I told your grandfather—"

"I don't want your advice in politics," blazed Harlan, letting his grudge have rein, "and I don't thank you to tell me how to get along with my own grandfather!"

He hoped that young Mr. Linton would resent that manner of speech.

Young Mr. Linton, as stalwart as he, raised his black eyebrows, pursed his lips, and was not daunted by the outburst.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Thornton," he said, "but I fear you did not have enough sleep last night."

He started for General Waymouth's room, and Harlan followed him. There seemed to be no other haven for the latter just then. He was hung between the political sky and earth. He had no hope left that the General could prevail over the conditions that had so suddenly presented themselves. But his loyalty was not shaken. Now it had become unreasoning loyalty, dogged determination to stick to his choice; and as he looked at Linton's back preceding him along the corridor, he was more firmly determined than ever. Suddenly he was glad of the fact that this young man was on the other side, and he did not stop to analyze why he was glad it was so.

General Waymouth's parlor was crowded with men. The size of that levee astonished the two new arrivals. The General was not in sight. He was closeted with some one in the bedroom. Harlan and Linton noted that the men in the parlor did not wear the

demeanor of ordinary visitors calling to pay their respects to a “has been.” Some of them were talking eagerly in bunches, some were waiting—all were serious and anxious.

General Waymouth, coming to his bedroom door to usher out three men and admit others, saw his young lieutenants. He called them to him. He was straighter. He was stern. Fires within had given his eyes the flash of youth. All his usual gentle pensiveness was gone.

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"My boys," he said, earnestly, "a week ago I didn't think I wanted to be Governor of this State again. But I want that office now with the whole strength of my soul. The devil is running our State to-day through his agents. I've got a duty to perform. I haven't time now to tell you what I've discovered since you left my room. I want you to—"

"I ask your pardon for interrupting, General," said Linton, manfully, "but I want to be as square with you as I can. Interests that belong to others will suffer if I continue with you—things being as they are. I make haste to speak before you tell me any more. I ask to be released."

"As a soldier I might question a resignation on the eve of battle, but as a politician I want no half-heartedness in my ranks. Good-day, Mr. Linton." He stood very erect, and his air admitted no further explanation. Linton bowed, and went out of the room.

"There is no half-heartedness here!" cried Harlan, passionately. "Is there anything I can do, General Waymouth?"

"Go and bring Arba Spinney to this room at once. Understand the situation before you go: I have already sent men for him. He has refused to come. Tell him this is his last opportunity to save himself from such deep disgrace that it will drive him from his State. I wish I could tell you to take him by the collar and lug him here. I venture to say you have the muscle, young man. But minutes are valuable—bring him."

Harlan hurried away.

Mr. Spinney was not in evidence in the parlor of his suite, but Harlan heard his tremendous voice in the bedroom—that voice could not be softened even in an exigency.

Several men whom Harlan recognized as members of the State Committee were seated near the door; and when he approached to knock, one of them informed him that Mr. Spinney was too busy to be seen.

"But my business is important."

"What sort of business is it?"

"Is Mr. Spinney afraid of visitors?" demanded the young man. His mien impressed the men. They knew that he was Thelismar Thornton's grandson. They conversed among themselves in whispers. Without waiting, and before they could stay him, he flung open the door.

Spinney stopped in his discourse with several men, and faced about apprehensively. He, too, recognized the young man, and was unable to decide whether to class him with friends or foes.

“Mr. Spinney, I have been sent to bring you with me instantly. Will you come?”

“Where?”

“It’s a matter for your ear, sir. But you must come.”

The men with Spinney promptly counselled him to remain where he was, but the candidate was impressed by the young man’s determined appearance. Harlan strode to him, and took him by the arm. He had been used to the command of men since boyhood. “I have some very positive instructions. It will be a serious matter for you, Mr. Spinney, if you don’t come—and you can’t afford to take the advice of these men here.”

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He propelled his man toward the door, and Mr. Spinney went. It is likely that he concluded that no very serious damage could come to him in the presence of Thelimer Thornton's grandson. But when they arrived near the door of General Waymouth's parlor, Spinney recognized what it meant and resisted.

"It's a trap!" he gasped. "I thought your grandfather—"

The State Committeemen were following along the corridor, growling threats. Now they understood that this was practically an abduction. They hastened up to the scene of the struggle. But the young man was not deterred. He was obeying orders without question. With him it was not a matter of politics; he did not pause to wonder how the affair would be looked upon. The man to whom all his loyalty had gone out had commanded; he was obeying. But the others were resolute too. They were about to interfere. At that moment Thelimer Thornton appeared in the corridor.

"Let the boy alone," he commanded, thrusting himself among them.

The diversion gave Harlan his opportunity. Clutching Spinney with one hand, he threw open the door and pushed him in, followed him, and closed the door. He locked it, and stood with his back against it.

In that moment he did not reflect that in obeying General Waymouth so implicitly he might be playing traitor to his own flesh and blood. But the Duke, in his cynicism, had never attracted his grandson's political loyalty. That had seemed a matter apart from the family ties between them. His grandfather had set him on the trail of decency in politics, and had given him a leader to follow.

The frankness with which his grandfather had exposed the code by which he and his ilk operated in politics, making tricks, subterfuge, and downright dishonesty an integral part of the game and entitled to absolution, had divorced Harlan's straightforward sympathies when the question came to issue between his own relative, complacently unscrupulous, and General Waymouth, heroically casting off bonds of friendship and political affiliations, and standing for what was obviously the right. It was chivalrous. It appealed to the youth in Harlan. His manhandling of the amazed Spinney was an unheard-of event among gentlemen at a political convention, but there was more than impulse behind it. Harlan Thornton was a woodsman. Social conventions make the muscles subservient, but in the more primitive conditions the muscles leap ahead of the mind.

Therefore, he came with Mr. Spinney and tossed him into the presence of the chief, who had sent for him.

Then he set his broad shoulders against the door, for fists had begun to hammer at it.

It was evident at once that Spinney recognized the nature of the conference that had assembled in General Waymouth's room, and knew what the personnel of the group signified.

He looked around him and started toward the door.

"I've got witnesses to that assault, and you're going to suffer for it," he blustered. Harlan did not give way.

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"You can't leave here yet, Mr. Spinney—not until General Waymouth finishes his business with you."

The General had viewed Mr. Spinney's headlong arrival with astonishment. He stepped forward to the centre of the room. There was a note in his voice that quelled the man as much as had Harlan's resolute demeanor at the door.

"Spinney, it will be better for you if you listen."

The candidate turned to face him, apprehensive and defiant at the same time. The panels of the door against which Harlan leaned were jarred by beating fists. Harlan heard the voice of his grandfather outside, calling to him impatiently. A moment more, and Chairman Presson added a more wrathful admonition to open.

"Mr. Thornton, will you kindly inform those people at the door that this is my room, and that I command them to withdraw?" directed General Waymouth.

Harlan flung the door open and filled the space with the bulk of his body. Both parties stood revealed to each other, the young man dividing them, and disdaining intrenchments.

"What kind of a crazy-headed, lumber-jack performance are you perpetrating here?" demanded the elder Thornton. "You're not handling Canucks to-day, you young hyena!"

"This is a scandal—a disgrace to this convention!" thundered Presson. He started to come in, but Harlan barred the doorway with body and arms.

"Do you want any of these gentlemen inside, General?" he asked.

"Neither Mr. Presson, nor Mr. Thornton, nor any of the rest," declared Waymouth. "And I want that disturbance at my door stopped."

"You hear that!" cried the defender of the pass. "Now, Mr. Presson, if you intend to disgrace this convention by a riot, it's up to you to start it." And then the choler and the hot blood of his youth spoke. He did not pick his words. His opinion of them was seething within him. He talked as he would talk to a lumber-crew. "I'm keeping this door, and I'm man enough for all the pot-bellied politicians you can crowd into this corridor. And if there's any more hammering here, I'll step out and show you."

He slammed the door, locked it, and set his shoulders against the panels.

"Luke, keep away," counselled Thelismar. "The boy is just plain lumber-jack at the present moment, and he's a hard man in a scrap. We can't afford to have a scene."

“They’re going to turn wrongside-out that wad of cotton batting with two ounces of brains wrapped in it!” raved the State chairman. But the Duke pulled the politician away, whispering in his ear.

Spinney faced the General, blinking, doubtful, sullen.

The old soldier knew how to attack. He flung his accusation with fierce directness.

“Spinney, you have sold out. You’re a traitor. And you’re a thief as well, for you’ve sold what didn’t belong to you. You solicited honest men, in the name of reform, to put their cause into your hands. It was a trust. You’ve sold it.”

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"I'll prosecute you for slander!" roared the candidate. He hoped his defiance would be heard by those outside.

"You may do so, but I'll give you here and now the facts that you'll go up against. That's how sure I am of my ground!"

He shook papers at the man.

"Last night, or rather this morning at one o'clock, to be exact, you met Luke Presson and members of the State Committee, and for two thousand dollars, paid to you in one-hundred-dollar bills, you agreed to pull out. The secret was to be kept until it should be time for the nominating speeches to be made on the floor of the convention to-day. I have here affidavits signed by responsible parties who heard the entire transaction." It was accusation formal, couched in cold phrases, without passion.

Spinney started. The perspiration began to stream down his face. But in spite of the staggering blow the fight was not out of him. He thought quickly, reassuring himself by the recollection that his bedroom door had been locked, and men were on guard in his parlor. There could have been no eavesdroppers. This must be a bluff.

"That's a damnation lie!" he shouted.

"Don't you bellow at me, sir! I'm not trying to extort any confession. But you're wasting time, denying. I'm sure of my ground, I repeat. That's why I'm talking now. I'm an old man, and I was in politics in this State before you were born. And there were tricks and tricksters in the old days. And I knew them. I played one of those tricks on you, sir, last night. It's the last one I hope I shall ever play, for tricks are to be taken out of the politics of this State. The god of good chance lodged you in 'Traitor's Room,' last night, Mr. Spinney."

The man stared at him, frightened, not understanding.

"There's a false door and a slide in the wall of that bedroom, Spinney, and the old politician who put it there years ago passed the knowledge on to me. I'm willing every one should know it now. When you go back I will have it shown to you. It will convince you that these affidavits I hold in my hand are not guess-work. These men in this room now—for your own men brought me word that you were hiding from them—made those affidavits. Look at them, and deny—deny once more, Spinney!"

But the candidate had no voice now. He glanced furtively from face to face.

"Spinney," one declared, bitterly, "we've got you dead to rights. There ain't any use in squirming. We suspected you when you hid away from us, and General Waymouth put us in the way of finding out just who was with you. You might as well give in."

The General did not wait for Spinney to speak. He was in no mood then for listening. He was in command. He was issuing orders. The battle was on, and he was in the saddle.

“I propose to have your name go before the convention, Spinney. You must walk out of this room and deny the rumors that are afloat. I propose to have two of these men go with you and stay with you. And if you deny half-heartedly, or if you attempt any more sneak tricks, or if your name is not put into nomination to-day, I’ll stand out and declare what is in these affidavits. If you want to save yourself and the men who bribed you, obey my orders.”

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"I don't understand why you want me to go ahead now," Spinney ventured to protest.

"And I don't propose to take you into my confidence enough, sir, to inform you. I simply instruct you to do as I say, and if you obey, I and these men here will do all we can to cover up this nasty mess in our party. It's in your hands whether you go to jail or not."

The General signalled to Harlan, and the young man opened the door. Spinney went out with his watchful guardians.

"Now you ought to be able to hold your men together until we need them, gentlemen," said the General, addressing those who remained. "But you'd better get out among them and see that they stay in line. Defend Spinney! God knows, the words will stick in your throats, but show a bold front to the other side. Gather in your stragglers."

They filed out, plain and stolid individuals from the rural sections.

Harlan was left alone with the General.

"There go the kind that the demagogues always catch, Mr. Thornton. The demagogues understand human nature. They prey on the radicals who will follow the man who promises—sets class against class and eternally promises! Promises the jealous ascetics to deprive other men of the indulgences they seem to enjoy—promises to correct things for the great majority which dimly understands that things are out of joint in their little affairs, and as dimly hope that laws and rulers can correct those things and make the income cover the grocery bills. Spinney had them by the ears, that he did! But the knave was shrewd enough to understand that the machine would probably whip him in convention. They used my name to scare him into selling out—threatened to stampede the convention for me. That's why I'm so angry."

"Let me ask you something, General. It was Spinney, was it, Spinney and the kind I've seen training with him in this thing, that stirred up the opposition in this State—the kind of opposition we found at our Fort Canibas caucus?"

"From all reports, yes. I know some of the agents that have been working in the State. The men behind have hidden themselves pretty well, and I'm not exactly certain where their money is coming from. But I suppose the liquor interests are putting in considerable, as usual."

"The liquor interests! Backing reformers?"

The General smiled.

"Remember that I've had better chances to see the inside than you, young man. I've watched it operate from the start. In case of doubt you'll find the liquor interests on both sides. It's an evil that prohibition opens the door to. The saloons are to be tolerated

and protected, or they are to be persecuted—the programme depends on the men who get control. If they are to be tolerated, the wholesale liquor men have to stand in right, so that they may have the privilege of doing business with the retailers. If the saloons are to be closed, the liquor men want to stand in right, so that they can do business direct with the consumer; and then there are the increased sales through the legalized city and town agencies when the saloons are closed—the liquor men need that business. The liquor is bound to come in anyway, whichever faction is in control. So the big rumsellers cater to both sides.”

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“Isn’t there any decency anywhere, in any man, General Waymouth, when he gets mixed into such things?”

“Don’t lose your faith that way, my boy! You see, I’m even playing a few political tricks myself. Your grandfather is more than half right—we have to play the game! But I’m trying a last experiment with human nature before I die. I haven’t the things to lose that a young man has. I am forcing myself on my party—using some means that disgust me, but I have to do so in order to prevail. I want to be Governor of this State again, and I want to be Governor with more powers than I had before. You and I both know what the party managers want, I’d like to find out if the people are willing to be governed that way, after they’ve learned there’s a better system. I want to find out if every man in this State is willing to pay his own just share of taxes, if the people will wake up and stand behind a man who shows them how to keep from private greed what belongs to the people. And most of all, young man, this State is in a condition of civil war over this infernal liquor question. The radicals are away off at one side, and the liberals as far away from them as they can get, and both sides plastering each other with mud. There’s no common ground for a decent and honest man to stand on between; that is, he’s too much disgusted with both sides to join either. I want to see whether there’s good sense enough in this State to take the thing out of the hands of the fanatics so that we can get results that decent men can subscribe to—*results* instead of the ruin and rottenness we’re in now.”

He stopped suddenly with a word of apology.

“You mustn’t think I’m inflicting a rehearsal of my inauguration speech on you, Mr. Thornton. I talked more than I intended. But my feelings have been deeply stirred this morning.”

“It’s wicked business, General Waymouth! I don’t understand how you’ve kept so calm through it. But, thank God, you can show ’em all up now, as they deserve to be shown to the people of this State. I can hardly wait for that convention to open!”

The General put his papers into his breast-pocket and buttoned his close frock-coat. He gazed on the young man’s excitement indulgently.

“My boy, you have yet to learn, I see, that what would make a good scene in a theatre would be a mighty bad move in politics. This, to-day, is a convention that a good many thousands of voters are waiting to hear from. If they should hear the whole truth, I’m thinking that the Democratic party would win at the polls. So, you see, I must continue to be a politician. We’ll be going along to the hall, now, you and I. It’s near the hour. I want to be the next Governor of this State” (he smiled wistfully), “so you and I will go out and hunt for enough honest men to make me Governor.”

The hotel was pretty well deserted as they walked down the stairs and through the lobby.

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"Ours doesn't seem to be the largest parade of the day, Mr. Thornton," said the veteran mildly, when they were on the street, "but we'll see—we'll see!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SHEPHERD AND THE SHEEP

Like a beacon marking shoals, Thelismer Thornton stood at the head of the broad granite steps that led up to the convention hall. An unlighted cigar was set hard between his teeth. Men flocked past him with obsequious greetings, but he merely grunted replies. He was watching for some one. He swore under his breath when he saw his man. General Waymouth and Harlan came up the steps together. He swung between them, and went along into the hall.

From open doors and windows band-music blared, welded with the roar of two thousand voices, each man shouting his conversation to be heard above his neighbors. It still lacked ten minutes of the hour set for the opening of the convention.

Under the cover of the uproar, as they walked along, the Duke delivered some very vigorous opinions to his grandson, expressing himself as to the latter's state of intellect, judgment, and general fitness to be allowed loose among men.

Harlan did not retort. He took his cue from the General, who smiled and listened.

"I'll tell you what I ought to do with you, boy! I ought to skin you. I'd find a ready sale for the hide. They could use it to make bindings for New Testaments. You're too d—n—d righteous, altogether! I've been easy and patient with you, but I don't propose to stand at one side now, and see you ruin yourself politically. Why are you letting the boy do it, Varden?" he demanded, turning on the General. "You're old enough to know better. He's no help to you now. I supposed I had a grandson until you got hold of him!"

"You've still got a grandson, but you haven't got a political tool to use in prying open a new governorship deal every fifteen minutes," declared the young man. "You took me to General Waymouth, you pledged me to him—I pledged myself to him. I don't propose to discuss this matter any further. I'm my own man when it comes to politics!"

"Thelismer, I wouldn't say any more just now," suggested the General. "You are angry, and I've told you many times in past years that your judgment is not good when you are angry. But this is no place for talking these matters!"

The curious had already begun to throng about them. General Waymouth was a marked figure in a gathering. It had not become a matter of general knowledge that he was attending the convention. He had not appeared frequently in public since his retirement, and men were glad to see him. The early buzz that greeted his first

appearance in the hall grew louder and louder, and swelled into an uproar as delegates turned in larger numbers and recognized him.

The vast body of the auditorium was crowded with men. Posts supporting huge placards indicated the division of delegates into counties. The General's own county was nearest the door by which he had entered. At a call from some one these delegates climbed upon their settees. They gave three cheers for him. It was a spontaneous tribute to the one great man of the State—their county's favorite son.

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The word passed rapidly. Other counties came to their feet. The band was playing, the early enthusiasm of the day was fresh, men had not had opportunity to exercise their voices till then, and as the General passed down the side aisle of the hall he was cheered by every delegation. Harlan followed him closely, and the Duke was at their heels. Every man in the hall saw the little group. It seemed eminently fit that Thelismer Thornton should escort General Waymouth. But the Duke did not realize that the General was shrewdly using that opportunity of displaying Thornton, the elder, in his retinue. The accident fitted with some plans of his own.

Spurred by the excitement of that tumultuous moment, Harlan could not restrain a bit of a boast.

"How do you like the sound of that, grandfather?" he flung over his shoulder.

"There's no politics in that, you young fool. A hoorah isn't a nomination."

But he could not hide from himself the plain fact that Varden Waymouth was a tremendously strong figure in State affairs.

There was sincerity behind that outburst. Eyes glistened. Faces glowed with admiration and respect. The Duke wondered bitterly how much of that extraordinary tribute was inspired by the publicity work for which the State Committee had spent its good money.

The General led the way in at the side door that admitted to the stage. He was on familiar ground. Behind the stage there were several anterooms. He appropriated an empty one, hanging his hat on a hook.

"Not an elaborate lay-out for a candidate, Thelismer," he remarked, pleasantly, "but headquarters to-day is where we hang up our hat."

"Vard, you don't mean to tell me—seriously, at this hour—that you mean to be a candidate?" Thornton had put aside his anger. That had been bitter and quick ire, because his grandson had seemed so blind to his own personal interests. There was solicitude now in the old man's air.

"I got you into this myself," he went on. "I coaxed you in, for the situation was right and ripe. You kicked it over yourself. I haven't any compunctions, Vard. I stayed with you just as long as I could stay. But I'll be dod-jimmed if I'll shove a Governor onto my party that's a hybrid of Socialist and angel. Now you can't swing this thing. Everett's got it buttoned. I tell you he has! You're too big a man, to-day, to get before that convention and be thrown down. I've got a better line on the situation than you have. Vard, let's not have this come up between us at our time of life. It's bad—it's bad!"

"It *is* bad," returned the General, quietly; "but not for me! And it's too late to stop. I'm going through with it, Thelimer."

There was dignity—a finality of decision—that checked further argument. Thornton shifted gaze from Waymouth to his grandson, started to say more, snapped his jaws shut, and walked away.

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The door of the anteroom afforded a view across the stage. The hour had arrived. The secretary of the State Committee appeared from the wings and waited until the delegates were in their seats and quiet. He read the call, and then the temporary organization was promptly effected, the tagged delegates popping up here and there and making the motions that had been entrusted to them.

A clergyman invoked Divine blessing, praying fulsomely and long, beseeching that the delegates would be guided by the higher will in their deliberations.

"It's the only prayer I ever find amusing—God pardon me!" whispered the General at Harlan's side, watching the preliminaries. "To call a State convention, as the machine runs it, a deliberative body is a sad jest of some magnitude. The managers intend to hold the real convention the night before in the State Committee's headquarters at the hotel. But to-day I hope that prayer proves prophetic."

He studied the faces on the platform. The United States Senator, smug and now satisfied that he had chosen aright for his personal interests, sat in the chairman's central seat, and studied his people from under eyelids half lowered while the parson prayed.

After the prayer, the routine proceeded hurriedly. For five minutes the convention seemed to be in a state of riot. Men were bellowing and yelping, and standing on settees. The counties were holding simultaneous caucuses for the purpose of selecting, each its vice-president of convention, its State committeeman, and member of the Committee on Resolutions—the resolutions then reposing in the breast-pocket of the Hon. Luke Presson.

The secretaries were announced, the temporary organization was made permanent, and, advancing against a blast of band-music and a salvo of applause, the Senator-chairman began his address.

"Now," remarked General Waymouth, grimly, "I am ready to open headquarters in earnest. My boy, in that anteroom across the stage you'll find your grandfather and Mr. Presson, and certain members of the State Committee. David Everett will be there, too. Inform them I send my urgent request that they meet, at *once*, the Hon. Arba Spinney and a delegation in my room here. I think that combination will suggest to guilty consciences that they'd better hurry. If they show any signs of hesitating, you may intimate as much to them."

The plain and stolid men came in just then. They brought Mr. Spinney through the side door. The unhappy conspirator, jostled by his body-guard, was near collapse. He was now traitor to both sides. Circumstances hemmed him in. But more than he feared the recriminations of Luke Presson and his associates, he feared the papers in the breast-pocket of Varden Waymouth.

Harlan went on his errand, crossing the stage behind a backdrop. Senator Pownal had got well under way, and was setting forth the sturdy principles of the Republican party with all the power of his lungs.

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Harlan did not knock at the anteroom door; he walked in, and for a moment he thought that the enraged chairman was about to leap at his throat.

“Spinney, eh?” he blazed at the young man’s first word. “Explain to me, Mr. Thornton, what is meant by your assault on a decent and honest citizen? What do you mean by teaming him from the hotel to this convention hall with a body-guard to insult men who have business with him?”

The question was confession that the chairman had been unable to get at the political property he had paid dearly for. It indicated that he suspected but did not realize fully how deeply Spinney was in the toils.

“Explain!” shouted Presson, standing on tiptoe to thrust features convulsed with rage into the young man’s face.

“General Waymouth is waiting to explain, sir. He’s across the stage, there! And Mr. Spinney is with him. I’d advise you to hurry.”

“I don’t need any of your advice! If you’ve got him on exhibition at last where the public can be admitted, I can’t get there any too quick.”

He rushed out, charging like a bull, and the others followed.

The State committeeman who closed file with Harlan did not appreciate the gravity of the situation.

“You seem to be introducing new features into a State Convention to-day, cap’n,” he observed, sarcastically. “The way you’re handling Brother Spinney is like the song about

“‘Old Jud Cole, who went by freight To Newry Corner in this State; Packed him in a crate to get him there, With a two-cent stamp to pay his fare.’”

He added, “Spinney is light enough to travel on that tariff, but you’re going to find he’s got friends that are heavier.”

Young Thornton waited till all had entered the anteroom, and again took his post as guard on the inside of the door.

General Waymouth checked Presson at the first yelp of the outburst with which he had stormed into the room. Probably there was not another man in the State who could have prevailed by sheer force of dignity and carriage in that moment when the passions of his opponents were so white-hot. But he was, in intellect, birth, breeding, and position, above them all, and they knew it. There, boxed in that little room, they faced

him, and anger, rancor, spite, itch for revenge gave way before his stern, cold, inexorable determination to prevail in the name of the right.

“Gentlemen, I haven’t called you here for the purpose of arguing or wrangling. You’ll waste time by trying to do either. You are here to listen to what *must* be done. You represent the warring factions. There are enough of us to straighten the matter out. There are not so many that the secret of this shameful mess cannot be kept, and our party saved at the polls.”

He paused to draw the fateful documents from his pocket.

In the hush of the little room they heard Senator Pownal declaiming: “And it is upon these firm principles, bedrock of inalienable rights guaranteed to the people, upon the broad issues of reform, inculcation of temperance, and the virtues of civic life, that the Republican party is founded.”

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Harlan, at the door, younger than the rest, found a suggestion of humor in what the orator was saying compared with what the party managers had met to hear. But there were no smiles on the faces of the group. The demeanor of the stricken Spinney, anger fairly distilling in his sweat-drops, hinted the truth to Presson. Thelismor Thornton tried to get near Spinney, understanding it all even better than the State chairman, but the plain and stolid men flanked their captive with determination.

"I have here five affidavits from eye-witnesses, swearing that Arba Spinney was bribed to sell out his faction at the last moment to-day, leaving only David Everett in the field. I have no time to waste in giving the details of that transaction to men who know them just as well as I do. And I want no interruption, sir!" He brandished the papers under the nose of Presson, who attempted to speak. "I do not propose to have my intelligence insulted by denials from you or any one else. If you don't believe I have full proof of what I charge, you walk out of that door and put the matter to the test! And I hasten to assure you, sir, that you'll be eternally disgraced!"

He waited a moment, because a roar of applause that greeted one of Senator Pownal's utterances resounded even in the remote anteroom.

"It all means, gentlemen, that I'm to be the nominee of this convention to-day. It's time for a clean-up, and I'm going to start one. The men who are running our party are not fit to be in charge of it. The voters deserve a better show. I've called you here to give you an opportunity to save yourselves, personally. I'm willing to submit to a little by-play for that purpose. You are to allow Spinney's name to go before the convention, according to the regular programme. That's to divert the attention of the convention and the State-at-large from what otherwise would seem a split in the recognized management of the party. Spinney has been only a rank outsider, politically considered. We have to consider the campaign, gentlemen, and the material we may furnish our friends, the enemy. Then, you gentlemen of the State Committee, each in his county delegation, are to start a demonstration in my behalf. This is no time for me to be mock-modest. On the heels of that demonstration Everett's name is to be withdrawn with the explanation that such an apparently spontaneous demand from the voters should be recognized. Mr. Everett is to declare that under the circumstances he does not wish to stand in the way of popular choice, and he is to announce that much and present me to the convention. I assure you, Mr. Everett, that I ask this last with no intent of wounding your feelings or indulging in cheap triumph—it is necessary in order that the mouths of political gossips may be shut."

A rather stupid silence followed that declaration of programme. The voice of the Senator rose and fell without.

The General met their staring eyes calmly. "It may be a rather surprising development of the convention," he said. "But as soon as the surprise is over it will commend itself as a perfectly natural and graceful concession to public opinion—as public opinion can

be set in motion by the members of the State Committee on the floor of the convention. In fact, the plan commended itself to my friend Thelismar, here, and Chairman Presson some weeks ago."

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The State chairman was stirred as though galvanically by that statement. The bitter memory of how he had groomed the dark horse that was now kicking his master's political brains out rose in him.

"By the everlasting gods," he shouted, "I'll go down fighting! If the house has got to come down, I'll go down with it."

"Samson had two arms. I have only one," returned General Waymouth. "But I've got that arm around the central pillar of your political roof, gentlemen—and I've got the strength to handle it! You've stated your position as a politician, Presson. Now I'll state mine. Rather than see the Republican temple made any longer a house of political ill-fame I'll pull it down on you prostitutes."

It was bitter taunt—an insult delivered with calm determination to sting. Presson stamped about the room in his wrath.

"I'm making no pact or promise," went on the General. "I declare that you are the men who are wrecking our party. Now if you propose to wreck it completely, we'll go smashing all together in the ruins. It may as well be wrecked now as later!"

There was another hush in the room.

"So I call upon you, men of office, shop, and farm, bone and sinew of our grand old party," exhorted Senator Pownal from the forum outside, "to forget the petty bickerings of faction and stand shoulder to shoulder in your march to the polls. Nail the principles of justice, truth, and honesty to the flagstaff, and follow behind that banner, winning the suffrages of those who believe in the right."

"It sounds as though the Senator might be arriving close to his amen," suggested General Waymouth, ironically. "You have only a few minutes in which to decide. I hold the proxy of one of these delegates to the convention." He pointed to one of the stolid and plain men. "You know that I can get the ear of that convention—you can't work any gag-rule on me—I have been listened to too often by the men of this State when I've had something to say. And you know what effect these affidavits will have!"

There was further silence, broken only by the voice of the Senator without and Presson within, who was scuffling about, babbling disjointed oaths.

Suddenly a great outburst of applause signified that the Senator had concluded.

"Go ahead out and kill your party!" barked Presson. "Give it your strychnine! It may as well die right now, in a spasm, as to have a lingering death later with you at the head of it, Waymouth. You can't team *me*!"

“You let me say a word right here!” blustered Everett. “I wash my hands of any deal with Spinney. I’ve got the bulk of that convention behind me. I don’t propose to be shunted.”

“I supposed you all remembered the details of what you did last evening,” returned the General, coldly. “Is it necessary for me to remind you, Mr. Everett, that Chairman Presson turned over to Spinney a paper in which you agreed to appoint him to a State office? That transaction was noted along with the rest, sir.”

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"I'll have as many witnesses as you," declared Presson, "I'll—"

"Stop!" It was a tone that cowed the chairman, struggling with his guilty conscience. "I have warned you that I'm not here to argue this matter with you. I'll not be drawn into any discussion. What I have, I have!" He waved his papers above his head. "What I can do that I'll do! I would remind you, gentlemen, that the convention is waiting."

Thelimer Thornton caught the secretary of the State Committee by the arm and propelled him toward the door, ordering Harlan to open it. "Signal that band! Start it to going!" he directed. "Keep those delegates easy." He turned on the chairman. "Now, Luke, you're licked. And it's your own deadfall that's caught you. I know just how you feel, but here's a laundry-bag that you've got to draw the puckering-strings on. Shut up! I'm going to save you from yourself. You're running amuck, now. You're a lunatic, and not responsible." He dragged the defiant chairman back into the room. He held him in firm grip. "There's a new bribery law in this State. You haven't forgotten it, have you! It's State prison!"

"Look here, gentlemen," he went on, addressing the members of the State Committee, "you've got just five minutes leeway between a devilish good political wallop and striped suits. Get out on the floor. Get busy with those delegations. And the man of all of you who dares to say one word too much about what's been done here to-day will peek through bars and wish his tongue had been torn out by the roots before he talked! Presson, this thing is out of your hands. You shan't cut your own throat, I say! Get onto that floor, men!"

They went. It was the rush of men to save themselves. Each man as he passed out cast a glance upon the papers that General Waymouth clutched, and a second glance at Harlan, brawny guard, at his side.

"Take Everett across to the committee-room and call in the men who were to present him," directed the Duke, releasing the chairman. "And it's up to you two to give 'em a story that will hold 'em. It's short notice, but you've got General Waymouth for a text! Look here, Dave," he whirled on Everett, who was frantically protesting, "your strength was the strength the boys of the machine put behind you. It hasn't been personal strength. You can't afford to be a blasted fool now, even if you are crazy mad. You've been lecturing considerably the past few weeks on 'party exigencies.' This is one. It's an exigency that will put you before a grand jury if you don't tread careful. Get across there, you and Presson! I'm eating dirt myself. Get down on your hands and knees with me, and make believe you like it!"

He hustled them out.

The band was rioting through a jolly melange of popular melodies.

The old man hesitated a moment, and then walked across to the General.

“Vard, politics is most always a case of dog eat dog, but I want to assure you that I’m not hungry just now if you are not! And my grandson seems to have more political foresight than I gave him credit for. I’m getting old, I see!”

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He did not give them opportunity to answer. He swung about and went to Spinney.

"I reckon they'll raise your guard, now, Arba," he said, nodding at the stolid and plain men. "There isn't much more that you can do, either to harm or help. You'd better pull a chair out to the edge of the stage there, and listen to what a h—I of a fellow you are when your orators nominate you. Then before the applause dies away, you'd better start for home. It'll be a good time to get away while Presson is busy!" It was plain that, lacking any other object, the Duke was venting the last of his spleen on this wretched victim of the game. "Before you go, give me one of those 'Honest Arba' ribbons. I keep a scrap-book of jokes!"

The abject candidate had no word to offer in reply. He was white and trembling, for after Presson's early declaration it had seemed that the whole shameful story was to be thundered in the ears of those two thousand men sitting yonder.

"You can suit yourself as to your further movements, Spinney," said the General, noting the man's distress.

"There's a rear exit from this hall," remarked the Duke, significantly.

Spinney went out, hanging his head.

"Well, there's at least one cur eliminated from the politics of this State," blurted Harlan, gratefully.

"Eliminated!" sneered his grandfather. "The first man you'll meet in the legislative lobby next winter, sugar on his speech and alum on his finger, so that he can get a good firm grip of your buttonhole, will be Arba Spinney, drawing his salary as the paid agent of half-a-dozen schemers. He may seem a little wilted just now, but he's a hardy perennial—you needn't worry about *him*."

"I think you're the man to take these documents to the Committee on Resolutions, Thelismer," stated the General, drawing out the planks he had submitted the evening before. "You can explain why they should be inserted—and I have modified them somewhat. I have no desire to frighten the party at the outset."

The Duke took the papers, and departed without a word. The men of the affidavits returned to their delegations on the floor of the convention, gratification in their faces, as well as a sense of the importance of the secret they were guarding.

The band gave a final bellow, and the business of the convention proceeded.

General Waymouth and Harlan took chairs into their little room and sat down to wait. The sounds came to them mellowed by distance, but distinct. They followed the procession of events.

Spinney's name was presented by an up-country spellbinder who had copied logic, diction, and demagogic arguments from his chief. But all the thrill, swing, and excitement of the Spinney movement were gone. Red fire, hilarity, and stimulants could not be used to spice this daylight gathering of men ranged in orderly rows on their settees—and subtle suggestion had already gone abroad. Yet the undercurrent of opposition to the further dictation by the party ring was shown by the applause that greeted every reference by the speaker to the conditions that existed in the party. On the text of Spinney, personating Protest, the orator preached to willing converts who clamored for change, even though no better leader than Spinney offered. Spinney got perfunctory applause; suggested change was cheered tumultuously.

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The convention was ripe for revolution against dominant conditions, without exactly understanding how to rebel wisely and well.

Suddenly a clarion voice raised itself from the convention floor. They in the little room could hear every word.

"That's Linton," said the General, calmly. "He balked under my pat, but he's plunging into the traces handsomely under the whip!"

"Linton! After refusing? Is he presenting your name?"

"Oh, he's a politician, and one must allow a politician to weigh out his stock of goods on his own scales, and hope that he will give good measure. I'll be grateful in this instance, Mr. Thornton. They've picked out an able young speaker!"

In spite of his resentful opinion of Linton, an opinion into which he would not admit to himself that jealousy entered, Harlan, as he listened, had to acknowledge the ability of the young lawyer.

First he caught the attention of his auditors, then he skilfully suggested that he was preparing a surprise. With appealing frankness that won the interest and sympathy of the Spinney adherents, he agreed with them that the times demanded changes and reforms. He urged that these should be undertaken within the party, and then, earnestly but delicately, he hinted that the reformers had not picked the right leader. As delicately he suggested, next, that an extreme partisan, bound far in advance of nomination by factional pledges and trades that he must carry out, was not the right man to extricate the party, either. Lastly, he came to the crux of his speech, plunging into the theme with passionate eloquence that brought moisture to the eyes of Harlan. That young man was not thinking of the orator, then. His thoughts were on the old man at whose side he sat—the old man who listened in dignified patience.

Now the delegates sniffed the truth. A word had put them on the trail. They were not sure. But they suspected. And mere suspicion sent them upon their settees, cheering wildly. Distrust of Spinney, sullen disloyalty to the machine-created Everett, furnished a soil in which hope for another solution of the tangle sprang with miraculous growth.

Linton waited until the roar of voices died away. They again listened breathlessly, wondering whether their own hopes had beguiled them.

"From the storied past, gentlemen of the convention, we draw precept and example, lesson and moral, hope and inspiration. As nature has stored in the bowels of the earth the oil that serves the lighthouse beacons of to-day, so life has stored in various reservoirs human experience that can light the path through troublous times in these latter days. Written on the scroll of history, limned on the page of law, we find the words

of the fathers, sane and helpful thought and good counsel. In days of doubt and worry and despair we may meet the fathers on the written page. But, oh, how grand a blessing for the human race could

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we sit at their feet beholding them in the flesh and receive their teachings! If only they, the fathers, might take us by the hand and lead us through the devious tangles of public policy! To-day we meet here in perplexed division as to the standard-bearer for our next campaign. If up from that past of sage counsel and unfaltering faith there might come one who could stand forth and expound the lessons that we need, we might take heart and travel boldly on. But, gentlemen, I bring you a message of greater hope—more profound a blessing. Up from that past comes the standard-bearer *himself*! His wise kindliness meets every test of honest gentleman; scholarship crowns his brow, Law holds her torch aloft that his feet may tread the safe way; war from him has taken tribute, but to him has given a hero's deathless laurels. Once in her history this State welcomed him to her councils as her gracious overlord, and now—”

There was no doubt in their minds now. A window-shaking demonstration bore down his voice.

Linton seized upon the beginning of silence.

“Now once again his State, groping for a hand to lead her forth to stability and progress, sees his hand and seeks to grasp it, supplicating him: ‘O father, guide me! O wise man, teach me! O hero, save me!’ And I name to you, gentlemen, for the candidate of the Republican party—”

He leaped upon a settee and voiced the name of General Varden Waymouth with all the strength of his trumpet voice. But no one heard what he said. They all knew what he was to say. They did not need the spoken name.

That convention had been ripening for a stampede. Its component delegates had contained the stampede fever for weeks before they assembled. Men leaped and screamed. It was a storm of enthusiasm; two thousand feet furnished the thunder-roar; hats went up and came down like pelting rain; and voices bellowed like the bursting wind volleys of the gale.

Here and there, gesticulating men were trying to make seconding speeches, but the words were lost. The chairman of the convention, grim and pale and wondering just how much damage this overturn signified to his personal interests, nodded recognition to these speakers, and allowed them to waste their words upon the welter of mere sound.

He also recognized other men who arose. He knew them for Spinney's adherents and divined what they were trying to say. And having divined it, he was promptly inspired to get in with the rush of those who were climbing aboard the band-wagon.

He advanced to the edge of the platform, and by tossing his arms secured a moment of silence. He had his own salvation to look after.

"I am glad, inexpressibly pleased, that as chairman of your convention I can now declare myself for General Waymouth; for the convention has but one name before it—the name of Arba Spinney has been withdrawn!"

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When the tumult began again—almost delirium this time—David Everett appeared from the wings, white, stricken, overwhelmed by the suddenness with which the prize had been snatched beyond his reach, driven out upon the stage by the State Committee like a whipped cur forced to perform his little trick in public. He began to speak, but the delegates did not listen—they knew what he was saying, and were cheering him. Not all of it was enthusiasm for General Waymouth; men instantly realized that a nasty split in the party had been bridged; men felt that in this new candidate both factions had the ownership that puts one “in right.” A united party could now march to the polls.

The nomination was by acclamation!

They came to General Waymouth, where he stood patiently at the door of his room—the committee appointed to escort him before the convention. He signalled for them to precede him—his hand was inside the arm of Harlan Thornton, and he did not withdraw it even to shake the eager hands that were outstretched. He walked upon the stage with the young man, and, still holding his arm, faced the hurricane of enthusiasm until it had blown itself out.

It was a breathless hush in which he spoke.

“Our party, in State Convention assembled, has to-day declared for honesty.” They did not exactly understand, but they gave voice like hounds unleashed. That sentiment complimented them. “I pledge the last strength of my old age to the task you have imposed upon me. Give me your pledge, man to man, in return. Shall it be for all of us: honesty in principle and unswerving obedience to every party profession we make? I await your ‘Yes!’”

It came like a thunderclap—two thousand voices shouting it.

He stood there, his hand upraised, waiting again until the hush was upon them once more. They were ready for the usual speech of acceptance. But he said simply this:

“I accept the trust!”

He put his hand behind Harlan’s guarding elbow and retired.

“A carriage at once, Mr. Thornton,” he directed. “I must save myself for performance, not parade.”

They were away before even the eager platform notables could intercept them. The cheering was still going on when the carriage started. From the open windows of the hall the riot of the convention—voices and music—pursued them until the racket of the busy street drowned it out.



“At the present moment, Mr. Thornton, it is not likely that the Republican State Committee is in a mood for poetry,” remarked General Waymouth. Gayety that was a bit wistful had succeeded his sombre earnestness.

“But something in the sentiment of this old song might appeal to them while they are thinking of me just now:

“The mother may forget the child
That smiles so sweetly on her knee;
But I’ll remember thee, Glencairn,
And all that thou hast done to me.”

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Harlan did not reply. At that moment, strangely enough, something besides the fury and the results of that tremendous convention occupied his thoughts. While he had stood beside General Waymouth he had not looked down into the pit of roaring humanity. He had looked straight up into the eyes of Madeleine Presson, whose gaze, by some chance, caught his the moment he stepped upon the platform. She had leaned on the gallery-rail and studied him intently. In spite of all else that had happened and was happening, he could not help wondering why.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RAMRODDERS RAMPANT

Though Mrs. Luke Presson was not especially interested in the practical side of plain politics, yet it was a part of her social methods to make tame cats of men of State influence as far as she was able. She did this instinctively, rather from the social viewpoint than the political. Luke Presson did not take her into his confidence to the extent that he desired her to cultivate men of power for his own purposes. He only dimly and rather contemptuously recognized that women had any influence in political matters. But it did occur to him, after that State convention, that perhaps he needed his wife to assist him in beginning a reconciliation with General Waymouth.

Mrs. Presson came to him, directly the convention had adjourned. The few men who were lingering in headquarters dodged out, for they perceived that the chairman's wife had something on her mind.

He endured her indignant reproaches for some time. She taxed him with betrayal of her personal interests.

"I've never tried to pry into your schemes. I don't care about them. But when you make a fool of me in regard to the next Governor of this State, you shall answer for it to me!"

"I did no such thing," he protested, wanting to placate her for private reasons of his own.

"I say you did. You're chairman of the State Committee. You knew which man would be nominated—you must have known it all along. You wouldn't be State chairman if you didn't know that!"

The unhappy magnate was ashamed to tell her the bitter truth.

"You allowed me to come here to-day with Mrs. Dave Everett and her daughters. Here is the bouquet I brought to present to her husband!" She shook it under his nose and tossed it into a corner. "You never told me a word about the plan to nominate General Waymouth. It was deliberate deceit on your part—for what reason I cannot understand."



Presson tried to think of a story that would explain and shield him, but the convention had not been an affair to promote clear thinking.

“Here’s a legislative session at hand, and you’ve allowed me to stay entirely out of touch with the next first gentleman of the State! I’m like all the rest of the trailers, now. I haven’t any prior social claim on him. And I can’t even find him at this late hour to offer my congratulations.”

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"I haven't been able to offer mine, either," said the chairman, grimly.

"I'll endure no more of this foolery, Luke! If you propose to make a plaything of your own wife from now on—"

"I'm telling you the truth. General Waymouth hurried out of the hall before I could get to him. That devilish Canibas bull moose picked him up, like he's been picking up—"

But the astonishment in his wife's eyes stopped him. He was revealing too much of his secret.

"Why, Harlan Thornton went away with him—Thelismer's grandson! Some one told me who saw them in the carriage together. What do you mean by Canibas moose?"

"Can't you see that I'm all stirred up by the excitement of this convention?" he demanded. "I don't know what I'm saying. I'll explain to you later, Lucretia."

"I think you'd better. Where did General Waymouth go?"

"To the hotel, I suppose."

"No, he's not there. I have telephoned. Luke, we must have him at lunch with us. It's his place to lunch with us—you're the chairman of the State Committee! It's a late start for me—and it's your own fault because it is so. But you must find the General and make him come to luncheon. I have arranged for the party in the English Room at the hotel. You *must* have him there!" She hurried away to where the ladies were waiting for her.

Presson, the politician's instinct of self-preservation now getting the better of his rancor, promptly determined that his own interests would be helped by his wife's luncheon-party, provided the victor could be cajoled and coralled. He put pride behind him. It was not so easy to do as much with his shame and the downright fear that assailed him when he reflected on his plot and its outcome. But he decided that although little might be gained for him by making up to the victorious General, a great deal would be surely lost if the antagonism were emphasized.

He put on his hat and hurried to the street. Inquiry at the cab-stand afforded him the information that General Waymouth and his companion had not given a definite destination. "But there's the man who took them," said the manager. "He's just back. Ask him."

The driver said that he had dropped them at the park, at their request, and the chairman jumped into the carriage, directing that he be conveyed to the same place.

He found them sitting democratically on a bench, taking the air.

Without preliminary the chairman extended Mrs. Presson's invitation. "There will be a very small party of us, and it may save you from the annoyances of the public rooms," added Chairman Presson, humbly.

The General arose and accepted with cordiality, somewhat to Harlan's surprise, for his unbending youth could not yet understand how political hatchets could be buried so quickly.

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"I want to congratulate you, General," said the chairman on the way to the carriage. "And I want to tell you that the State Committee will swing into line behind you for the campaign. You'll find us loyal. There's a good deal more I'd like to say, but there'll be time enough for that later. I'll merely say this: both of us have been in politics years enough, I believe, to be able to wash a convention slate clean, when it's a question of a State campaign against the opposite party."

"I'll meet you frankly on that plane, Mr. Presson. I have too much ahead of me to waste time in quarrels. It isn't my nature to retaliate. I have understood the situation better than some men would."

Harlan, hoping that the chairman appreciated that magnanimity, gave Presson a look that expressed much. But in his new humility the latter was getting rid of ancient grudges as fast as he could. While the General was entering the carriage, the chairman offered rather embarrassed apology. "But you introduced some original specialties in politics that took me off my feet, young man!" he added, with a sickly smile.

Harlan was still a little stiff. It was not easy for him to get into the state of political pliability that he saw others assume so readily.

"I'm a countryman, and pretty awkward in most everything I undertake," he said. "I have no business meddling in the big affairs of this State. I'll take my place where I belong, after this, Mr. Presson. If I don't, I'll not have a friend left—not even my own grandfather."

The chairman glanced at him curiously, scenting something like duplicity under this bitter frankness. He was not used to seeing men throw aside such advantages as this young man had gained.

The three entered the hotel through the side door, and at the General's request the chairman accompanied him and his young lieutenant to their headquarters. It was near the luncheon hour, and Presson had suggested that he conduct them to Mrs. Presson.

A party of men had taken possession of the General's suite. They rose when he entered. They paid no attention to Harlan, but surveyed Chairman Presson with disfavor that was very noticeable.

Several of the men were clergymen, advertised as such by their white ties and frock-coats. Those who attended them had the unmistakable air of zealots. Their demeanor showed that they had come on business that they considered serious.

General Waymouth knew them. He addressed one or two by name, and was gracious in his greeting of the others.

"We wait on you," began their spokesman, one of the ministers, "as a committee from the United Temperance Societies."

"My time is not my own just now, gentlemen," explained General Waymouth. "I have a luncheon engagement with Mr. and Mrs. Presson. I will see you at some other time."

The faces of all of them grew saturnine at that announcement. For Chairman Presson was not recognized as the especial friend of prohibition by the fanatics of the State.

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The clergyman, following his line of duty, was not in a mood to accept delicate hints regarding social engagements. He stood his ground.

“Our business will occupy but a short time, and I suggest that it will be for your personal interest to listen now, sir.”

It was an unfortunate bit of obstinacy.

“I regulate my own hours for engagements, Mr. Prouty. You have come on your own business, and it must await my convenience.”

“It’s *your* business I come on, General Waymouth, and I advise you to listen! And I will add that it will not help you with the temperance people of this State if they are told that within two hours after your nomination you are consorting with the arch-enemy of temperance reform in our midst!”

With two strides the General was back at his door. He opened it.

“Be so kind as to leave the room, gentlemen,” he invited, icily. “I’ll not detain you even to have you apologize for your intrusion on my privacy or ask pardon of a guest whom you’ve insulted!”

They obeyed him, sullenly. Even their effrontery could not withstand that dignity. But they muttered among themselves, and one man called back over his shoulder: “It isn’t the first time, General, that a man brave enough to lead battle charges hasn’t shown that he’s got the spirit to declare for the right against the wrong, when politics stands by with open ears!”

“There go some of the reformers you were asking your grandfather about a few weeks ago, Harlan,” sneered the indignant chairman. “Those are the men who are holding themselves up as examples for all the rest of men to follow. Every one else is a rummy and a hellion, according to their ranking.”

“As bad an element as the rumsellers themselves,” declared the General—“men of that type! I’m speaking now of the interests of true reform—reform that gets to the individual and is something else than this everlasting wrangle and racket between factions. I like fighting, but I like to have a natural fighter admit he’s in it just for the sake of fighting—not claim it’s all for morality’s sake!”

“Then what are you?” blurted Presson, but checked himself in evident confusion.

“Eh?” inquired General Waymouth, mildly.

“I—I don’t know what it was I had in my mind—guess I was thinking about something else.”

But the General smiled as though he understood. Then he went into the inner room, explaining that he wished to make himself presentable to the ladies.

The chairman took a crafty survey of Harlan.

“Between you and me, my boy,” he said, getting back upon his old-time footing with Thornton’s grandson, “the General has got both of my eyes put out, so far’s his politics go. Did you hear him just rip into those ramrodders? And yet he’s been stiffer and straighter than the worst of ’em since he struck this city. I’d like to know who in thunder he *is* playing with, anyway! What does he say to you, on the side?”

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"You'd better get General Waymouth's plans from himself, Mr. Presson."

"I'm not asking you to betray anything. But he's got a policy, of course. I only want to know it, so that I can grab in with him. But I can't figure anything, so far."

"I thought he made himself pretty plain last night."

"He made himself plain, I'll admit that. Plain that he's against everything that the party management stands for. But now he turns around and kicks out the other crowd! He's got to pick his gait and take a position somewhere!"

"That's something I know nothing about, sir."

The chairman grew testy. He felt that he was being played with.

"Seeing that you're in close to the Amalgamated Order of Angels, you'd better drop him a hint that running a political campaign isn't like stampeding a convention. The State Committee stands ready to help, and before he gets much further along he'll find he needs the help. You'd better make that plain to him."

His guest of honor reappeared then, and the chairman led the way. Harlan had been included in his invitation, and attended his chief.

With old-fashioned gallantry, General Waymouth made his compliments to the ladies whom Mrs. Presson had assembled to grace the occasion. Her little crust of social earth had been tossed alarmingly by the political earthquake, but she felt that now she was finding safe footing once more.

Thelismar Thornton was there, so were Senator Pownal and the secretary of the State Committee, and a few other favored ones whom the hostess had sought as being close to the new order of things. She led forward Linton.

"And now, General, we're all wondering just how nice a compliment you'll pay to the orator whose eloquence makes you the next Governor of our State," chattered the good lady, poorly informed as to real conditions, but anxious to force a situation for her favorite. "Herbert has been so modest about it! We've been telling him just how grand we thought it was."

"I thank you, Linton, for what you said." The General took the young man's hand. "You have wonderful gifts of eloquence."

But there did not seem to be the enthusiasm which the importunate Mrs. Presson desired.

“With all due respect to your greatness, General, isn’t it true that he turned the convention—has made you Governor?” she insisted, half in jest to cover her earnestness.

“If it comes about that I’m the next Governor of this State,” he returned, gently, “it will be due entirely to this young man.” He patted Harlan’s shoulder affectionately. “Just how he has accomplished it is a very deep political secret between us two. I present my grand vizier, ladies and gentlemen!” They understood that seriousness lay behind his whimsical manner of speech.

Two very round eyes testified to Mrs. Presson’s amazement. But once more she found her social feet after this echo of the main quake. She took Harlan’s hand, and placed it on the chair next to that of her daughter.

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"You'll sit here, if you please, Mr. Thornton," she said, urbanely.

For a little while a trifle of embarrassment shaded the few words the young couple addressed to each other, under cover of the general conversation about the board. Then Harlan, glancing down the table, saw Linton staring gloomily in his direction. And at that look his spirits leaped like a steed under the spur. What he had not dared, considering himself on his own merits, he ventured now. If vague, hidden sentiment, as he had thought of Clare Kavanagh, had restrained him in the past, it no longer restrained him now.

The excitement of the day had given him a queer exaltation. He had been one of the chiefs in the arena where all the great State looked on at the combatants. The overlord had just given him soul-stirring proof of his affection, half in jest as Harlan realized, remembering the occasion for it, but it was none the less gratifying. Madeleine Presson had looked at him with strange, new interest in her gaze when the General spoke out. It had occurred to Harlan that it was not the same good-humored tolerance which she had so frequently shown in her past relations with the bashful woodsman. His unquiet grudge against Linton spiced the whole.

He turned to the girl.

She seemed altogether desirable. Something in her eyes responded to his own feelings. And after that he seemed to be listening to himself talking—and wondered at the new man he had become.

When it was over, and the ladies rose from the table to follow Mrs. Presson, he tried, feeling guilty for a moment, to remember the look that Linton had given him and to excuse himself as one who had simply shown the proper spirit of revenge. But when he took her hand he said: "My grandfather carried me away from you and your mother in very ungallant fashion yesterday. And he tried to put ungallant words into my mouth. I trust you'll allow me to disprove them. I'd like the privilege of being your obedient squire on the trip home."

"So now that you've become a very big man you've decided that grandfathers shall no longer be indulged in tyranny?" she asked, with a dash of malicious fun.

"I view matters in a new light," he replied.

"And there's a wonderful psychology in light, so they who have studied the matter tell us," she said, mischief in her eyes. "But we'll not go so deeply into the matter. Let it be a light that will guide your footsteps to our rooms at train-time. You will find us awaiting our squire!"

General Waymouth excused himself as soon as the ladies had retired. The little group of men had promptly begun to canvass the outlook and plans, but he demurred politely when they desired to drag him into the discussion.

“Not yet, gentlemen! We have had enough of talk in the last few hours. Let me escape to the old brick house up in Burnside for a while. My train goes shortly. Will you accompany me, Harlan?” It was the first time he had used the young man’s christian-name Harlan flushed with pleasure. “I will see that you get back here in good season to bring that guiding light,” he murmured, to the other’s confusion.

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"I do not like to seem too exacting—too persistent in requiring your attendance," protested the General, as they returned along the corridor. The great hotel was nigh deserted. The delegates had hurried away on the convention specials. "But you have protected me from a great many annoyances, to put the situation mildly. I am calling you away now to make a very special request of you. We will speak of it on the way to the station."

Ranged in front of the door of his suite was the delegation from the temperance societies, patiently waiting, more saturnine than before.

The Reverend Mr. Prouty intercepted them with determination.

"I do not like to seem too persistent in this matter, but we feel that we have a right to a few moments of your time, sir. You are accepting public office, and—"

"I do not care to have any lessons in politics read to me, Mr. Prouty. State your business."

"We prefer to see you in private."

"And I prefer to have you talk before a reliable witness. Mr. Thornton is such, and he is entirely in my confidence."

He did not invite them into his room.

"We represent the united temperance societies of this State," began the clergyman.

"I understand perfectly," put in the General. "And in order that we may thoroughly understand each other I will inform you that I know exactly what corporate interests are furnishing money to you and your campaign managers. I have been very careful to keep posted on these matters, gentlemen!"

For a moment Mr. Prouty was visibly taken aback.

"It is necessary to finance even righteousness," he said, at last.

"Beyond question," admitted the General. "I only ask you to meet me on the business basis where you belong. I'll not allow you to mask factional interests behind religion or a moral issue. I don't mean to be curt or disobliging, gentlemen, but you must get out in the open. You have something to ask me? Ask it. You'll receive a plain answer."

"Do you intend to enforce the prohibitory law?"

"I question your good taste, Mr. Prouty, in selecting one law and asking a prospective Governor whether he intends to do his sworn duty in regard to it."

“But other Governors have not done so. We propose to have pledges after this. We’ll vote for no more nullifiers.”

“Other Governors have had no direct power to enforce the law, sir. I had no power when I was Governor. But I’ll assure you that if I am the next Governor I shall demand that power from the legislature, and I’ll enforce that law with all the resources of the State treasury. If it’s in the power of man to accomplish it, the sale of liquor shall be stopped in this State.”

They plainly had not expected that. His attitude toward them, his association with the nullifier Presson had suggested that he intended to carry out the usual “let it alone” programme. They applauded.

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“One moment, gentlemen. That doesn’t mean that I or any other man, or that the prohibitory law, as we have it, or any other mere law, can stop the drinking of liquor in this State. I’m speaking only of the open sale of it. I know perfectly well that my attempt to make men sober by law alone will fail miserably. As it is administered now, the law still caters to appetite and public demand for privileges, and the public goes along without especial disturbance. But as I shall enforce the prohibitory law, conditions will be so intolerable in this State that the way will be paved for a common-sense treatment of the liquor question. I shall enforce in order to show how wrong the prohibitory principles are. They have not been shown up so far, for the law has not been enforced.”

The delegates were disconcerted. The spokesman’s face grew red.

“Do you dare, sir, as a candidate for Governor of a prohibition State, to stand up here before these representatives of the temperance societies and say you are opposed to prohibition?”

“I certainly do,” declared the unruffled General. “For this State is not a prohibition State! It fatuously thinks it is when the citizens can get all the liquor they want without trouble. I merely propose to put it to the test of honesty.”

“You declare yourself an enemy, then, do you?”

“Mr. Prouty, there you launch yourself into your usual intemperance! At the first word of another man’s dignified difference of opinion you shout ‘enemy’ and prepare to fight! I want to ask you and your supporters here a question: Will you meet with representatives of all the interests concerned in this matter, including the liquor men and those who use liquor in its various forms, and endeavor to arrive at some compromise in this State which shall put a stop to what is practically civil war, in which we are expending all our energies without accomplishing any real betterment of conditions? Will you agree to some middle ground, if it can be shown that more men can be made sober and less men hypocrites?”

“I stand solely for the principle of prohibition, unswerving till death,” announced the clergyman. His partisans applauded.

“You won’t stop and listen to what may be for the actual best interests of our State, then?”

“I’ll not license crime nor compound felonies with criminals.”

“Mr. Prouty, as Governor I signed the first prohibition law passed in this State. It was on trial. I was liberal enough to bend my own personal views to give it that trial. When I’m thinking of my State I don’t insist that *my* way is the *only* way. Now, sir, if you knew that, as citizens, not mere partisans, we could all get together and frame something better

than a law that has bred evils of political corruption through all the years without altering the appetites of the people—if you knew that, wouldn't you remould some of your opinions and help us bring about the best good for the whole of us?"

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"I'll not abate my loyalty to prohibition one jot or tittle!"

"In your case and in the case of the kind of fanatics who train with you," declared the General, with disgust in tone and mien, "that word 'prohibition' is simply a fetish—a rally-call for a fight. It is you, sir, and such as you, who are holding this State back from real progress. I'm not discussing the liquor question alone. I haven't patience to discuss it with you. I'm referring to the spirit that actuates you. Your kind sat as judges in the Inquisition. Prohibition now offers an opportunity for your bigotry—that's why you cling to it. You cling to it in spite of the fact that it has made more than drunkards—it has made liars and thieves and perjurers and grafters out of men who would not otherwise have been tempted. When men arise to tell the truth about it, you get behind your morality mask and accuse them of the basest motives and claim immunity for yourselves from attack in return. I fear I am a little severe, sir, but your attitude showed that you came to me with appetite for a quarrel."

"I'll see to it," declared Mr. Prouty, hotly, "that five hundred ministers in this State denounce you from their pulpits as an enemy to temperance."

"You don't know what temperance is!" General Waymouth brushed past them. "Your definition slanders the word. I shall be glad to have your support, gentlemen, at the polls. But I am for the State, not for your faction or any other faction. I know you are not used to hearing a candidate tell you the truth—it has not been the style in this State. If the truth from me has shocked you, blame the truth, not me."

He ushered Harlan before him and closed his door upon the delegation.

"It's a sad feature of public affairs in this State, my young friend," said he, when they were alone, "that so large a mass of the people, who naturally are sane and moderate, allow those paid agents of so-called reform to serve as popular mouth-pieces. Reform for reform's sake supersedes reform for the people's sake. Candidates have been afraid of those mouths. Such mouths as those outside there assert that they are talking for the whole people in the name of morality, but there are only a few mouths of that kind. It is time to test it out. I propose to see whether the people will not follow the real thing in honesty instead of the mere protestation of it."

On the way to the station the General preferred his request. It was that Harlan become his executive officer in the approaching campaign—his chief of staff, his companion, his buffer, protecting him from the assaults of the politicians.

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"Before the campaign really opens there will be three weeks or so in which you may attend to your own affairs. You remember that it was you that dragged me into this, young man!" It was the old jest, but it had taken on meaning within twenty-four hours. "You have seen with your own eyes, heard with your ears, how I stand alone between factions which are willing to sacrifice the State in order to win for their own interests. I have planted my standard between 'em! I'll try to rally an army to it that will leave the extremists of both those sides hopelessly deserted by the rank and file of the honest citizens. I need you with me, for you have been with me from the start, and you have shown your fitness" (he smiled), "even to securing an audience with the Honorable Spinney. Is it yes, my young friend?"

"It is yes, General Waymouth. I question my ability—I know it is poor. But of my loyalty there is no question."

The General grasped his hand. They were at the car steps. "It shall be 'Boots and saddles!' three weeks from to-day!"

Linton was in the parlors of the hotel with the Presson party when Harlan arrived, glowing with his new enthusiasm, confident in his new elevation in the affairs of men. In the affairs of women he was not quite as sure of his desires or his standing, but his mood was new, and he realized it. He went straight to Madeleine Presson. Twenty-four hours before the presence of Linton at her side would have held him aloof.

He put out his hand to the young lawyer, and Linton took it.

"I extend my congratulations rather late, but they are sincere. It was a noble speech. You put in words my own thoughts regarding a noble man."

"Perhaps you could have expressed those thoughts just as well as I did." Linton was not cordial.

"No, sir, not with a woodsman's vocabulary, though with such a text I certainly should have felt the true inspiration."

"You'll have to claim considerable political foresight, even though you cast doubt on your eloquence," said Linton, rather sourly. "I'll confess that I jumped wrong. But I had my interests to protect. Let me ask you—is General Waymouth offended, very much so, because I withdrew my support this morning?"

"General Waymouth has not made any comments on the matter in my hearing."

"I know you can explain to him—"

Harlan broke in, impatiently:



"I am not cheeky enough to advise such a man about picking his political support. I beg your pardon, Miss Presson!" He bowed. He turned to Linton. "I hope you won't open this subject with me again, Mr. Linton. I am so loyal to General Waymouth that you cannot explain satisfactorily to me any reasons why you should have deserted him to-day! You will see now why the topic should not be referred to again between us."

Linton bristled.

"If you take such an unjust view of it as that, I certainly feel that the matter should be referred to again between us—at the proper time!"

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"I'd advise you to take my hint," retorted Harlan.

They stared at each other, eye to eye, both plainly wishing with all heartiness that no feminine presence hampered them.

The girl laughed.

"Coffee and pistols for two! If each other's company makes you so impolite, I'll be compelled to separate you. Come, Mr. Harlan Thornton, baron of Fort Canibas, you have volunteered to see me safely home."

He offered his arm, and they followed Mrs. Presson, who had already started for the carriage. He rode with them to the station, flushed and silent, and the girl studied his face covertly and with some curiosity.

On the train, in the first of their *tete-a-tete*, she sounded him cautiously, trying to discover if his feelings toward Linton were inspired wholly by political differences. She seemed to suspect there was something more behind it, even at the risk of flattering herself. But she had detected certain suggestive symptoms in the demeanor of Harlan at the breakfast-table that morning. He did not betray himself under her deft questioning. But he promptly grew amiable, and before the end of their railroad ride that day she had proved to her own satisfaction that her ability to interest young men had not been thrown away upon him. The light in his eyes and the zest of his chatter with her told their own story. He left her at her home with a regret that he did not hide from her.

And yet, when he was at last in his room at the hotel that night, he wrote to Clare Kavanagh the longest letter of all those he had written to her since he left Fort Canibas.

It might have been because he had so much to write about.

It might have been because a strange little feeling of compunction bothered him.

But Harlan did not have the courage to examine his sentiments too closely. Only, after he had sealed the letter and inscribed it, he lay back in his chair awhile, and then, having reflected that after three weeks he would no longer be his own man, he decided that he'd better run up to Fort Canibas and attend to his business interests.

And he departed hastily the next morning, in spite of the Duke's puzzled and rather indignant protests that business wasn't suffering beyond what the telephone and mails could cure, and that he himself would go home the next week and see to everything.

There are some men who are strong enough to run away from weakness. Not that Harlan Thornton admitted that he was weak in the presence of Madeleine Presson. But he felt a sudden hunger for the big hills, the wide woods, the serene silences. He

wanted to get his mental footing again. He had been swept off in a flood of new experiences. Just now he found himself in a state of mind that he did not understand.

“I’ll go back and let the old woods talk to me,” he whispered to himself.

Then he tore up the letter he had written to Clare Kavanagh.

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It had occurred to him that he could tell it to her so much better.

So when he came to Fort Canibas in the evening of the second day he mounted his horse and rode across the big bridge.

He went before he had read the letters piled on the table in the gloomy old mess-hall. And he brusquely told the waiting Ben Kyle to save his business talk until the morning.

CHAPTER XX

A GIRL'S HEART

He walked his horse when he reached the farther shore. He was wondering just what he was to say to Dennis Kavanagh. They had not parted in a manner that invited further intimacy. From twin windows of the house on the hill lights glowed redly, as though they were Dennis Kavanagh's baleful little eyes. Fear was not the cause of the young man's hesitation. But he dreaded another scene in the presence of the girl. Kavanagh and his grandfather had brutally violated an innocent friendship. They had put into insulting words what neither he nor Clare had dreamed of—he hastily assured himself that they were not lovers. More than ever before he now felt infinite tenderness toward her—compassion, sympathy—an overpowering impulse to seek her. He had much to tell her. He could not think of any one in all the world who would listen as she would listen. The red eyes glowering out of the summer gloom did not daunt him; they suggested tyranny and insulting suspicion, and he pitied her the more. He rode on past the tall cross of the church-yard. A voice out of the silence startled him. A white figure stood in the shadow of the church porch.

"Come here, Big Boy," she said. "I'm not a ghost. I'm only Clare. I've been waiting for you."

He left his horse, and hurried to her.

"Waiting for me? I did not write. Have you second sight, little Clare?"

"No, only first news. This isn't one of the big cities where the crowds rush by and do not notice each other. It's only a lonesome little place, Harlan, and gossip travels fast. I heard you were home five minutes after the stage was in. So I came here and waited."

He took both her hands between his broad palms, caressing them.

"And you knew I'd hurry to come across the long bridge? That makes me happy, Clare, for you must have been thinking about me."

"I haven't many things to do these days except think," she returned, wistfully. "You'll understand why I came down here. I'm not trying to hide away from my father, and I know you are not afraid of him. But lectures on the subject of not doing the things you don't have any idea of doing are not to my taste, and I know they don't suit you. So we'll sit here in peace and quietness, and you shall tell me all about it."

He turned his back on the two red eyes of the Kavanagh house, and sat down on the step below her, and began his story, eagerly, volubly.

Once in a while he looked up at her, and she gave wise little nods to show she understood. In relating the early episodes of his journey, he ventured to leave out details. But she insisted that he give them.

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"I want to know about the world—how they all look, and how they speak, and what they do. I've been lonely all these weeks. I've been wondering all the time what you were doing. Now I want it to seem that you've come to take me with you, back through it all. I want it to seem just as though I were travelling along with you—that will make me forget how lonely I've been, waiting here on the edge of the big woods."

And he humored her whim, for he had always understood her child's ways. The woods had trained him to note the details of all he saw; his experiences had been fresh and stirring, and he told his story with zest.

Then he came to his mention of Madeleine Presson. "Her father is the State chairman—the man you saw at 'The Barracks.' I was at their house a few times. Her mother—"

"But about her! You are skipping again, Big Boy."

"There is not much about her," he said, stammering a bit. "I saw her here and there, and talked with her, that's all."

"But I'm seeing with your eyes and hearing with your ears as I go along with you," she insisted. "I want to know how other girls are in the world outside. I have been waiting to have some one tell me. You saw her, you heard her. Begin, Harlan: her looks, her clothes, her manners, what she said, what she talks about. I have only you to ask."

His self-consciousness left him after he began. He drew his word-picture as best he could.

"That makes her beautiful," she said, when he paused, searching his mind for some word of description. "I think I can see her with your eyes, Big Boy. Tell me what she knows; and how does she talk?"

In the dusk he could not see the expression on her face. He knew that she listened intently, leaning above him. He was not conscious that he praised Madeleine Presson's gifts of mind or person. But as he had found her, so he portrayed her to the isolated girl of the north country, describing her attainments, her culture, her breadth of view, her grasp of the questions of the day, her ability to understand the big matters in which men were interested.

She made no comment as he talked. She did not interrupt him when he had finished with Madeleine Presson and went on to relate how he had been forced into the forefront of the State's political situation.

"So, then, you have become a great man," she faltered. "I remember. I was selfish. I did not want you to go away."



“No, I am not a great man, little Clare,” he protested, laughingly. “I’m only a little chap that a great man is using. And you were not selfish. It was you that first put the thought into my mind that I ought to use my opportunities. That night at the end of the bridge, you know! I was sullen and obstinate. But you talked to me like a wise little woman. All the time I was with my grandfather later that evening, trying to be angry with him, I kept remembering your advice.”

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"I lied to you!" she cried, so passionately that he leaped to his feet and stared down on her. "I said it. I remember. But I lied. I was punishing myself because I had been selfish about you. But I didn't believe what I was saying—not deep in my heart. I wanted you to say you wouldn't go—but I didn't want you to look back ever and blame me for my selfishness. You see now how wicked and wrong and weak I am. I didn't want the world to take you away from—from us up here: from the woods and the plain folks. You'll hate me now. But I have to be truthful with you!" Her voice broke.

"The world has not won me away from my friends, dear. You must know me too well for that suspicion to shame me."

She crouched on the step before him. Her hands, fingers interlaced, gripped each other hard to quiet their trembling. In her girlish frailness, as she bent above her clasped hands, huddled there in the black shadow of the porch, she seemed pitifully little and helpless and forsaken. The woe in her tones thrilled him. She was trying hard to control her voice.

"You see, Harlan, I can look ahead and understand how it will be. A woman does understand such things. That's the awful thing about being a woman—and looking ahead and knowing how it must be before it ever happens!"

"Before what happens, Clare? I'm trying hard to understand you."

He leaned forward, and could see her eyes. He had seen that look in the eyes of a stricken doe.

"The world is all outside of this place, Harlan. You know we have always spoken of all other places than this as 'outside.' You have stepped through the great door. Now you see. You can't help seeing. It's all outspread before you. No one can blame you for not looking back here into the shadows. The great light is all ahead. I am—I ought not to speak about myself. I have no right to. But you'll forgive me. I didn't have any one to tell me! I didn't have any mother to advise me. I have played through all the long days, I don't know anything. Other girls—"

"Clare! God save you, little Clare—don't—don't!" he pleaded.

"You have been away only a few days, and yet you have found out the difference. You told me about her. She is beautiful, and she is wise. She has not wasted the long days. She can help you with knowledge. She can—"

He put out his arms and tried to take her, cursing himself for his thoughtless cruelty. Infinite pity and something else—fervent, hungry desire to clasp her overmastered all the prudence of the past. But she eluded him. She sprang away. She retreated to the upper step of the church porch, and he paused, gazing up at her.

“Oh, Blessed Virgin, put your fingers on my lips!” she gasped. “Why did I say it?”

“Listen to me, Clare,” he urged, holding his arms to her. “I know now that I’ve been waiting for you. I thought it was friendship, but now I—”

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She cried out so loudly, so bitterly, that he stopped.

"If you say it—if you say it now, Harlan, it will shame me so that I can never lift my eyes to yours again. I realize what I have said. It is I that have put the thoughts into your mind—almost the words in your mouth. Don't speak to me now. Oh, you can see how little I know—what a fool I am, forward, shameless, ignorant about all that a girl should know! Do not come near me—not now!" He had started to come up the steps—he was crying out to her. "Oh, Harlan, don't you understand? Don't you see that I can't listen to you now? I have driven you to say something to save my pride. I say I *have*! You are good and honest, and you pity me—and my folly needs your pity. But if you should tell me now that you love me, I'd die of shame—I'd distrust that love! I couldn't help it—and I've brought it all on myself. Oh, my God, why have I grown up a fool—why have I wasted the long days?"

She ran down past him. He did not try to stay her. He understood women not at all. He obeyed her cry to be silent—to keep away from her.

She turned to him when she reached the ground.

"I haven't even known enough to understand how it stands between us. Between us!" There was a wail in her voice. She sobbed the rest rather than spoke it: "That river out there is between us! I don't even belong to your country!"

She pointed at the great cross of the church-yard. It stood outlined in the starlight.

"Religion stands between us! My father and your grandfather are between us!"

She came back two steps, her face tear-wet, her features quivering with grief.

"But there's something else between us, Harlan, blacker and deeper than all the rest. Don't try to cross it to come to me. You will sink in it. Fools for wives have spoiled too many men in this world. I understand now! Your grandfather knew." She raised her eyes, and crossed herself reverently. "Mother Mary, help me in this, my temptation!"

She turned, and ran away, sobbing.

Harlan hurried a few steps after her, crying appeals. But he did not persist. Her passionate protests had come from her heart, he knew. He did not dare to force himself on her when she was in that mood.

He sat down again on the church steps. He remained there in deep thought until the red eyes in Dennis Kavanagh's house blinked out. He did not find it easy to understand himself, exactly. His feelings had been played upon too powerfully to permit calm consideration. He felt confident in his affection for her. But her youth and the obstacles he understood so well put marriage so out of immediate consideration that he merely

grieved rather than made definite plans for their future. With moist eyes he looked up at the dark house on the hill and pledged loyalty to the child-woman, knowing that he loved her. But that the love was the love that mates man and woman for the struggles, the prizes, the woes, and the contentment of life he was not sure—for he still looked on Clare Kavanagh as more child than woman.

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Marriage seemed yet a long way ahead of him. He rode slowly back to "The Barracks." His problem seemed to be riding double with him. The problem, one might say, was in the form of a maid on a pillion. But he did not look behind to see whether the maid bore the features of Clare Kavanagh or Madeleine Presson. At that moment he was sure that only Clare's image rode with him. But in thinking of her he understood his limitations. For, woodsman and unversed in the ways of women, he had not arrived at that point in life where he could analyze even a boy's love, much less a man's passion.

The next morning he left Fort Canibas with big Ben Kyle, to make a tour of the Thornton camps. It was a trip that took in the cruising of a township for standing timber on short rations and in the height of the blackfly season, an experience not conducive to reflections on love and matrimony.

But when he returned to Fort Canibas, on the eve of his departure to take up his duties as General Waymouth's chief of staff, he saddled his horse and rode across the long bridge.

This time there was no white figure on the church porch and no wistful voice to call after him. He kept on up the hill. He was not thinking about what Dennis Kavanagh might say to him. He had resolved to ask Clare manfully if she would continue to trust him for a while until both could be certain that their boy and girl love signified to them the love that life needed for its bounty and its blessing. That seemed the honest way. It seemed the only way, as matters lay between them and their families.

Dennis Kavanagh was seated on his veranda, smoking his short pipe and inhaling the freshness of the shower-cooled summer air along with the aroma of his tobacco.

"I would like to see your daughter, Mr. Kavanagh," announced the young man, boldly. "And I have not come sneaking by the back way. It will be a good while before I can see her again."

"That it will," responded Mr. Kavanagh, dryly, "and it will be a good long while before ye'll see her now—that may be mixed, but I reckon ye'll get the drift of it!"

"It will be better for all our interests if I have a few words with her," persisted the young man, trying to keep his temper.

"Will ye talk to her through the air or over the telephone?" inquired the father, sarcastically. "She is not here, she is not near here, and if ye wait for her to come back ye'll best arrange to have your meals brought."

He did not pause for Harlan to ask any more questions. He came down from the porch on his stubby legs and handed up an envelope. The flap of the envelope had been opened.

“She left this,” he said; “and having opened it and seen that it held nothing but what ye might profitably know, Thornton’s grandson, I here give it into your hand, and ye needn’t thank me.”

Harlan, wondering, apprehensive, fearing something untoward, took out the single sheet of paper. He read:

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"BIG BOY,—Go on and let the world make you a great man. I'm groping. Perhaps I'll see my way some day and can follow. But just as there's a cure for ignorance, so there's a cure for hearts, maybe. Your friend, CLARE."

Harlan looked over the edge of the paper into the twinkling little eyes of the father. Mr. Kavanagh seemed to be getting much satisfaction from the expression on his victim's face.

"Can't you tell me what this means, Mr. Kavanagh? I beg of you humbly, and in all sincerity."

"The Kavanaghs are never backward in politeness, Mr. Harlan Thornton. It means that my girl is done playing child and riding cock-horse. She's off to learn to be the finest and knowingest lady in all the land—she's off because she wanted to go, and she's got all of Dennis Kavanagh's fat wallet behind her!" He slapped his breast-pocket.

"Off where?"

"Where they know things and teach things better than they do over in your Yankeeland of airs and frills. And now good-day to ye!"

He climbed the porch steps, and relighted his pipe, gazing with much relish past the flame of the match, studying Harlan's dismay.

The young man suddenly came to himself, struck his horse, and galloped wildly away.

The next morning he departed to offer political hand and sword in the cause of General Waymouth.

CHAPTER XXI

STARTING A MULE TEAM

Some men are extremely good and loyal politicians so long as the machine runs smoothly, and they are not called upon to sacrifice their interests and their opinions. Luke Presson and his associates on the State Committee were of that sort. But Thelismar Thornton was a better politician than they.

The Duke had saved the chairman and his committeemen from themselves at that critical moment in the little room off the convention stage, when they were ready to invite ruin by defying General Waymouth. It had been as bitter for Thornton as it had been for the others. Beyond question, he would have gone down fighting were the question a private or a personal one. But when the interests of his party were at stake he knew how to compromise, taking what he could get instead of what he had

determined to get. After the convention he gave fatherly advice to the committee, and then Presson went up to Burnside village with the olive-branch. But while he extended that in one hand, he held out his little political porringer in the other. He couldn't help doing it. The chairman was no altruist in politics. He didn't propose to cultivate the spirit.

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He put it plainly to General Waymouth—that while he sympathized to some extent with the latter's desires for general reform, there were certain interests that propped the party and must be handled with discretion in the clean-up. He had already drawn some consolation from the fact that General Waymouth had modified in a measure the planks that he submitted for the party platform. He followed up this as a step that hinted a general compromise, and at last frankly presented his requests. He asked that tax reform be smoothed over, that the corporations be allowed an opportunity to "turn around," and finally that the prohibitory law should be let alone. He argued warmly that General Waymouth could not be criticised by either side if he left the law as he found it. The radicals were satisfied with the various enactments as they stood, and if there were infractions it became a matter of the police and sheriffs, and the Governor could not be held accountable. And he laid stress on the fact that the people did not want a Governor to tarnish the dignity of his office by fighting bar-rooms.

But Chairman Presson found an inflexible old man who listened to all he said, and at the end declared his platform broadly and without details. Those details of proposed activity he kept to himself. The platform was: That it behooved all men in the State to be prompt and honest in obeying the law. That the man who did not obey the law would find himself in trouble. Moreover, position, personality, or purse could purchase no exceptions.

That was a platform which Mr. Presson could not attack, of course.

He listened to it sullenly, however. He was angry because common decency prevented him from expressing his opinion. He had heard other candidates pompously declare the same thing, but he had not been worried by fear that saints had come on earth.

This calm old man from whose fibre of ambition the years had burned out selfishness, greed, graft, and chicanery was a different proposition. His words sounded as though he meant what he said. And when he asked the chairman if he had any objection to offer to a system of administration that carried out exactly what the party had put in its pledges to the people, Presson glowered at him with hatred in his soul and malice twinkling in his eyes, and could find no language that would not brand him as a conspirator against the honor of his State.

But he went back to headquarters swearing and sulking.

In this spirit did candidate and managers face the campaign.

It is not easy to hide family squabbles of that magnitude. The men concerned in the principal secret of the State Convention kept their mouths shut for the sake of self-preservation. But unquiet suspicion was abroad. The Democrats nosed, figured, guessed, and acted with more duplicity than had characterized their usual campaigns against the dominant party. Their leaders gave their party a platform that invited every

one to get aboard. Every question was straddled. It was a document of craft expressed in terms of apparent candor. It elevated a demagogue as candidate for Governor, and promised every reform on the calendar. These were the rash pledges of the minority, more reckless than usual.

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An united dominant party could have met the issues boldly and frankly without fear as to results.

But General Waymouth promptly discovered that he had a loyal army with rebel officers. He was soldier enough to understand the peril. He had more faith in the inherent, unorganized honesty of "The People" than Thelismer Thornton had. But, with just as shrewd political knowledge as the Duke, he held with him that the "The People" amount to mighty little as a force in politics unless well and loyally officered.

A campaign will not run itself. Left to run itself, the issues are not brought out to stir up the voting spirit. "The People" have to be poked into the fighting mood—their ears have to be scruffed—they need speakers, literature, marshals, inciters—hurrah of partisanship. It was the off year for the national campaign. No money came into the State from the Big Fellows.

The State Committee was looked to by the county and town committees to start the ball rolling and guarantee the purse to push it. "The People" were, as usual, too busy getting daily bread to be spontaneous in political movements.

General Waymouth sat in the old brick house in Burnside village, and did the best he could during the long hot days of July and the sultry first fortnight of August. Harlan Thornton worked with him. The library resounded with the click of typewriters, and men came and men went. But there was no up-and-moving spirit to the campaign.

An old man writing letters—even such an old man as General Varden Waymouth was in the estimation of his State—is a small voice in the wilderness of politics.

The Democrats had vociferous orators. Those orators had for text State extravagance, unjust taxation, and all the other charges "the unders" may bring against the reigning rulers. They were not answered on the stump. Even the Republican newspapers were listless and halfhearted.

At last came Thelismer Thornton. It was one afternoon in middle August, barely three weeks before the day of the State election in September. It was his first visit to the brick house in Burnside. He had been sojourning at the State capitol. Men had told Harlan, from time to time, that he was spending his days sitting on the broad veranda of Luke Presson's hotel, apparently enjoying the summer with the same leisurely ease that the State chairman was displaying. Men were sometimes inquisitive when they mentioned this matter to Harlan. They did not presume to ask questions of the General. But the young man had nothing to say. It must be confessed that he did not know anything about it.

He obeyed the instructions the General gave him and toiled as best he knew, but that the main campaign was hanging fire he did not realize. For the General, who knew

politics, did not complain to him. The veteran was a little whiter, a bit more dignified, and directed the movements of his modest force of office assistants with a curtness he had not shown at first; but no other sign betrayed that he knew his State Committee had "lain down on him."

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The Duke sauntered up the walk, whipping off his hat and swinging it in his hand as soon as he arrived under the trees of the old garden. He came into the house without knocking. The front door was swung inward, and only a screen door, on the latch, closed the portal.

"I'm making myself at home as usual, Vard," he said, walking to the General and stroking his shoulder as the veteran leaned over his table above his figures. "I've been waiting for an invitation to come up here. But I didn't dare to wait any longer. It's getting too near election."

General Waymouth looked up at his old friend, studying his face. He found only the bland cordiality of the ancient days.

"I've been waiting, myself, Thelismer," he returned. "And I'll add that I don't intend to wait much longer. I'm not referring to you, now. I refer to Presson and his gang. I presume you are still close to them. Will you inform them that I don't intend to wait much longer?"

Thornton did not lose his smile. He sat down. He nodded across the room to Harlan with as much nonchalance as though he had been seeing him every day.

"I would have run in before this, Varden, but somehow I got the impression from you and the boy that you were fully capable of operating things yourself. But with election only three weeks off I'm getting ready to change my mind. What are you going to do with that steer team—no, mule team—that's better?"

"Meaning?"

"Meaning Luke Presson and the members of the State Committee. I'm a politician, Varden. I'm out of a job just now. Both crowds of you seem to think you can get along all right without me. Probably you can. Luke knows *he* can, so he says. He doesn't seem to like my management or my advice—not after that convention! But I can't help being a politician. I can't sit on that hotel piazza any longer and see this mess scorch. I'm too good a cook to stand it." He hitched forward in his chair and spoke low.

"Varden, it sounds like the devil making a presentation copy of the Ten Commandments on asbestos, but I can't help that! I'm giving it to you straight. We've got body-snatchers for a State Committee. They'd rather see the Democrat the next Governor than you. That's how mad they are. That's how sure they are that you propose to put their noses to the grindstone. That's how rotten politics is in this State. The Democrat won't give us reform. They know it. They'd rather see the State officers go by the board than have the kind of reform you've promised 'em. They can get rid of their Democrat after two years. Your reform may hang on a good while, once get the laws chained. Now what are you going to do?"



"I know exactly what I'm going to do."

"Yes; but, grinning Jehosaphat, how much time have you got to do it in? Three weeks to election now!"

"This campaign, Thelismer, will be started, as it ought to be started, within the next twenty-four hours. As to how it will be started I'll have you present as a witness, if you'll accept an invitation."

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The Duke was obliged to be contented with only that much assurance and information.

"There's a train back to the State capital in half an hour, Thelismer," the General stated. "I'll be pleased to have you go along with Harlan and myself. If you'll excuse me now, I'll finish signing these letters."

The old man was not disturbed by this abruptness. He rose.

"I reckon you know how to play the game, Vard," he said. "I'm perfectly satisfied, now that I know you are playing it. But you'll excuse me for being a little uneasy about your starting in."

He did not interrupt Harlan, who was busy at his desk. He picked up one of the newspapers that covered the General's table, and marched out into the garden.

He joined them when they came out. The General's old-fashioned carryall conveyed them to the railroad station. They made the journey to the capital without a word of reference to the purpose of their trip. Unobtrusively chatting about the old times, the Duke and his friend made their way back to their old footing. It was mutual forbearance and forgiveness, for they were old enough to be philosophers, and especially did they understand the philosophy of politics.

Chairman Presson was in his office at his hotel when they entered. He came out to greet General Waymouth, suave but circumspect, and furtively studied word and aspect of his visitor.

"Mr. Presson," said the General, breaking in upon the chairman's vague gossip regarding the political situation, "this is short notice, but I presume you can reach a few members of the State Committee by telephone. I wish to meet them and you at my rooms in the hotel at nine this evening. It is important."

They came. There were half a dozen of them—men who hurried in from such near points as the chairman could reach; and at the appointed hour Presson ushered them into the General's room. Harlan Thornton was waiting there with his chief. The Duke arrived in a few moments, alone. He sat down at one side of the room, bearing himself with an air of judicial impartiality. The chairman scowled at him. Judged by recent experience, Thelismer Thornton was a questionable quantity in a conference between the machine and General Waymouth.

The committeemen took their cue from the chairman. They were sullen. They bristled with an obstinacy that betrayed itself in advance.

The General got down to business promptly. It was not a gathering that invited any preamble of cheerful chat. He understood perfectly that the men were there only because they did not dare to stay away.

“Chairman Presson, it is now close upon the election. I have canvassed the State as best I could through the mails. With Mr. Harlan Thornton’s assistance and through my friends in various towns, I have secured a pretty complete list of doubtful voters. I will say in passing that I have tried to enlist the help of your town committeemen, but they seem to be asleep. I have thanked God daily that I have personal friends willing to help me. I have the names at last. I have accomplished alone the work that is usually attended to by the State Committee.”

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Presson started to say something, but the General stopped him.

"One moment, Mr. Chairman. Let me tell you what *I* have done. One of us at a time! When I've told you what I've done, you can tell me what *you've* attended to. I have those names, I have pledges of support, I have plans for getting out the vote. But I have no literature for distribution to those doubtful voters, I have no speakers assigned by the State Committee to help the men who are trying to get the vote out, I have no fund provided for the usual expenses. Now I will listen to you, Mr. Chairman. Will you tell me what you have done?"

"It's an off year, General Waymouth," said Presson. "I asked the Congressional Committee for money, but I couldn't interest 'em. And I'll tell you frankly that the regular sources in this State are dry. There isn't the usual feeling. You're a good politician. Perhaps you know why it's so."

"You haven't answered my question, sir. I asked you what your State Committee has done."

"What is there we can do when every interest in this State sits back on its wallet like a hen squatting on the roost, and won't stand up and let go until some assurances are given out? It isn't my fault! I went to you! I laid the case down! You didn't give me anything to carry back to 'em."

"I'm here to talk business, Mr. Chairman. You are too vague."

"Well, I'll talk business, too." Presson snapped out of his chair. He stood up and wagged his finger. He was too angry to choose words or gloss brutal facts.

"You want to be Governor, don't you? You're asking men to support you and back you with money? That's what it amounts to. Campaign funds don't come down like manna—there's nothing heavenly about 'em—and you know it as well as I do, General. You've scared Senator Pownal's crowd with that anti-water-power-trust talk; they've got money to put into the legislature, but none for you. The corporations won't do anything; your tax commission talk has given them cold feet as far's you're concerned. Even the office-holders are sore; you've been talking about abolishing fees, and if that's the case they'd just as soon give up the offices. And where's your party, then? You say you're going to enforce the prohibitory law! I can get a little money out of the express companies, the jobbers in gallon lots, and the fellows that get the promise of the State liquor agency contracts. But the big wholesalers, the liquor men's associations, the retailers—the whole bunch that's got the real money and is willing to spend it haven't a cent for you—they'll even back the Democrat against you! You wanted business talk. There it is."

He strode up and down the centre of the room in agitation, and then sat down.

The other committeemen sighed with relief. Their chairman had said what they wanted to say, said it bluntly and boldly, and they were glad it was over.

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"That is," drawled Thelismier Thornton, "the State Committee says, as the fork says to the cook: 'I'm willing to be used for all reasonable purposes, but not to pick your teeth with or pull out carpet tacks.'"

The pleasantry did not relieve the gloom.

"The State Committee can't do anything without money, General Waymouth," added the chairman, getting bolder as he allowed his rancor full play. "You've fixed it so that we can't get the money."

"Then the State Committee would be able to go ahead and do what it ought to do if I should assure Senator Pownal that he and his crowd may help themselves to the water-powers of this State—if I let the rumsellers sell and the office-holders filch? It's on those terms, is it, that I'm to get the help of the men the Republican party has selected as its executives?"

"That isn't a square way to put it," objected Mr. Presson, with heat. "I simply say it was all right to open this campaign with prayer, as we did at the State Convention, but as to carrying it through on the plane of a revival meeting, that's a different proposition! You've asked for business talk, General. I've given you straight business. You're asking something from some one else, just now. In politics it's nothing for nothing, and d—n-d little for a dollar! You know it just as well as I do. Now suppose we have some business talk from you!" There was a sneer in the last sentence.

General Waymouth swung one thin leg over the knee of the other. He leaned back in his chair. His elbow rested on the chair-arm, his fingers were set, tips on his chin, and over them he surveyed his listeners with calmness. He did not raise his voice. It was his mild manner that made what he said sound so balefully savage. Bluster would have weakened it.

"The legitimate expenses of a campaign are considerable, even when the party organization, from you, Mr. Presson, down to the humblest town committeeman, does full duty in time and effort. But if one has to buy it all, it needs a deep purse. From what you say, it is plain to me that I am now left to run my own campaign. I tell you very frankly, gentlemen, my means are limited. I have not made money out of politics. One course only is left open to me. I notify you that I shall issue a statement to the people of this State. I shall inform them that I have been abandoned by the State Committee and the party machine. I shall state the reasons very plainly. I shall say I am left to defeat because I refused to betray the people's interests. Then I shall appeal to the people as a whole—to Republicans and Democrats alike—for support at the polls. If there are enough honest men to elect me, very well. If the majority wants to hand the thing over to the looters and tricksters after the fair warning I give them, they will do so with their eyes open, and I'll accept the result and leave this State to itself."

Chairman Presson pushed himself slowly up out of his chair, his arms propping him, his face shoved forward.

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"You mean to say, General Waymouth, that, being a Republican, a man who has had honors from our hands, you'll advertise your party management as crooks simply because we don't cut our own throats, politically and financially?"

"I say, I shall state the facts."

"Let me inform you that I've got a little publicity bureau of my own. I'll post you as a deserter and a sorehead. I'll fix it so you can't even throw your hat into the Republican party and follow in to get it. I'll—"

"One moment, Luke," broke in the elder Thornton. "For some weeks now, when things have come to a crisis, you have set yourself up as the whole Republican party of this State. But when you get to talking that way you represent it about as much as Parson Prouty represents the real temperance sentiment. There's quite a bunch of us who are not in the ramrodding business. General Waymouth is the nominee of our convention. No one has delegated to you the job of deciding on his qualifications. It's your job to go ahead and elect him. If you don't propose to do it, then resign."

"No, sir!" shouted Presson.

"Then get busy—collect a campaign fund and make these last three weeks hum! This is largely a matter between friends, right here now. I've told Vard what I think of him, and I haven't minced words. It's bad enough for a man to try to be absolutely honest in politics. That's where he's making his mistake. But he can get past with the people—they'll think it more or less bluff, anyway, even it's Varden Waymouth talking. But the kind of dishonesty you're standing for, Luke, won't get past. They'll ride you out of this State on a rail—and I'll furnish the rail."

"I'll furnish something more!" cried Harlan, unable to restrain himself any longer. "Tomorrow morning I shall put ten thousand dollars into General Waymouth's campaign fund—my own money."

"You see, Luke," drawled the Duke, "it really looks as though Vard would be elected anyway. I might subscribe a little myself if only I had a rich grandfather, the same as Harlan has."

The unhappy chairman sat down in his chair again and struggled with his anger. He could not give it rein—he realized that. Party and personal interests were all jeopardized. But he knew he could not afford to have utter personal disgrace accompany his defeat. Desertion of the party candidate, if advertised in the fashion the General threatened, meant ruin of his name as well as his fortune. He could have sulked and excused himself, but there was no excuse for inaction after demand had been made upon him in this fashion.

There was silence in the room.

“Fellow up our way used to be a mighty good mule teamster,” said Thelismer Thornton, tipping his great head back into clasped hands, and gazing meditatively at the ceiling. “Had a gad for the wheel mules, whip for the swing team, and a pocketful of rocks for the leaders. One day the rocks gave out just as the wagon sunk into a honey-pot on a March road. But being a good teamster, he yanked out his pipe and threw it at the nigh leader just at the critical second. Sparks skated from crupper to mane along the mule’s back, and he gave a snort and a heave, and away they went.”

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Chairman Presson, deep in his trouble, was disgusted by this levity, and growled under his breath.

"If a fellow had been off ahead of the team with a bag of oats perhaps the pipe wouldn't have been needed," pursued the Duke, meditatively. "Anyway, gentlemen, I'll tell you what I'll do. I've been waiting to be called on for my contribution for the fund, but for some reason business hasn't been started in this campaign as soon as I hoped. Harlan was a little excited just now. I think, seeing that the State Committee is now going to take hold of the campaign, he'll be able to get out of it a little cheaper. A lot of the other boys will chip when they're asked. For the Thornton family I lead off subscriptions with a pledge of five thousand dollars. I'm that much interested in seeing my—my original choice for Governor elected by a good majority."

Presson got up, and stamped down his trousers legs.

"I know when I'm licked," he admitted. "And I've been licked in the whole seventeen rounds of this campaign. Look here, General Waymouth, I'm done fighting. I simply throw myself on your mercy. I know how you feel toward me. But I've got just this to say: it's a poor tool of a man that won't fight for his own interests and his friends. I've done it. And I'm no more of a renegade than the usual run of the men who have to play politics for results. I don't believe you are going to get results, General. But that's neither here nor there. There's no more squirm left in me. I'll take hold of this campaign and elect you. If there's any crumbs coming to me after that, all right! I'm at your mercy."

"I tell you again I've no time or inclination for petty revenge. That is not my nature." General Waymouth was as cold and calm as inexorable Fate itself. "I accept your pledge, Chairman Presson. Not one interest of yours that is right will suffer at my hands. On the other hand, not one interest that is wrong will be protected. It's simply up to you!"

"I don't suppose you care to go over the plans with me to night?"

"I shall ask you to confer with Mr. Harlan Thornton on all matters. He knows my wishes and plans. He will remain here at headquarters as my representative."

If the chairman felt that he was being put under guard and espionage, his face did not betray it. He took leave of the General, and escorted out his associate committeemen.

"Reminds me of the time Uncle Stote Breed went with the boys on a fishing-trip," remarked the Duke, after they were gone. "They ate the sardines out of the tin before Uncle Stote got in off the pond, and put in raw chubs they'd been using for live bait. Uncle Stote ate 'em all. 'Boys, your ile is all right,' said he, when he cleaned 'em out,

'but it seems to me your leetle fish is a mite underdone.' But Luke will eat anything you hand him after this, Vard."

He took his grandson by the arm, and started him toward the door.

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“Let the General get to bed,” he advised, jocosely. “He ought to have pleasant dreams to-night.”

Harlan expected that his grandfather would have some rather serious talk for his ear. But he merely remarked, leaving him at the door of his room: “If you keep on, son, I’ll be passed down to posterity simply as ‘Harlan Thornton’s grandfather.’”

CHAPTER XXII

FROM THE MOUTH OF A MAID

Under a sudden stimulus of rallies, red fire, and band-music, the campaign blossomed promisingly. Democracy’s dark hints that the dominant party had been rent by factional strife were suddenly answered by an outrush of spellbinders from Republican headquarters, a flood of literature, and an astonishing display of active harmony. Chairman Luke Presson received compliments for the manner in which he had held his fire until he “had seen the whites of the enemy’s eyes.” He replied to such compliments with fine display of modest reserve, and in private gritted his teeth and swore over the statement that General Waymouth issued to the voters of the State—a document that bound the party to a professed programme of honest reorganization. The treasurer of the State Committee drew checks amounting to more than fifteen thousand dollars to pay for the printing, postage, and mailing of those statements—a bitter expense, indeed, considering the nature of the promises. Presson saw only gratuitous stirring of trouble in the hateful declarations the General made. It was his theory that in politics voters never arose and demanded reforms until some disturber shook them up and reminded them that reforms were needed.

General Waymouth did not take the stump. His age forbade. He remained away from headquarters. But Harlan Thornton was posted there, his vigilant representative and executive. In his attitude toward Harlan the State chairman ran the gamut of cajolery, spleen, wrath, and resentment—and final disgust. It was a situation almost intolerable for Presson. But a chain of circumstances—events unescapable and unique in politics—bound him to the wheel of the victor.

Harlan understood the chairman’s state of mind. Day by day he made his discourse with that gentleman as brief as possible, and he kept away from the Presson home. His action was dictated by a feeling of delicacy, in view of the father’s sentiments. Presson treated him in business hours as a prisoner would treat his ball and chain. And Presson showed no desire to take that badge of his servitude home with him. Enduring Harlan in the committee headquarters strained his self-possession daily.

So the young man lied brazenly in reply to the blandly courteous notes of invitation from Mrs. Presson, who continued alert to the promising social qualifications of General

Waymouth's chief lieutenant. He pleaded work. It was true in a measure. The day was filled with duties to which he applied himself unflaggingly.

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But from the supper-table he hurried out each evening into the country, escaping from the city by the side streets, tramping miles of lane and highway and field. His muscles craved the exertion. The city oppressed him. His unwonted toil within four walls sapped his energy.

One evening he stepped aside from the highway. A horse, trotting smartly, was overtaking him. But the horse did not pass him. It slowed down to his stride, and Madeleine Presson called him from her trap. She was alone.

"As this is the campaign of 'honesty,' I'll be honest with you," she said. "This is not an accidental meeting. I have been guessing at the roads you might take, and have been on your trail for days. That's a bold confession for a girl to make; but I've got even a bolder request: please climb up here and ride."

He climbed up. He went up with alacrity. From the first of their acquaintance the girl had interested him—and yet it was more than mere interest or feminine attraction. Her culture, her keen analysis of events and men, her knowledge of conditions informed and instructed him. Her subtle humor and droll insight into the characters of those who attempted to pose in the public eye entertained him, for he lacked humor. But, most of all, her satire gave him a truer perspective. Fresh from the north country, where his knowledge of public men had been limited to the information which newspapers had given him, he had classed them wrongly. His own gravity had given them too eminent qualities. The girl, knowing them, had pricked their assumptions with good-humored satire, and he looked at them again and found them as she said. As he sat beside her and the horse walked on, he was conscious that in avoiding her he had been depriving himself both of entertainment and valuable instruction. It was a rather selfish reflection, but he could not help it.

"Now, Mr. Harlan Thornton, from what my father says about the house, when he's so angry that he really doesn't know what it is he's saying, I understand you're playing hob with all the traditions of politics. In order to be honest, do you find it necessary to oppose all the things my father wants to do? If you dare to say so you'll be called on to have some very serious conversation with my father's daughter!"

"I don't want any differences with your father—or with you, Miss Presson," he declared, earnestly. "I honestly don't! It all seems to be a mighty mixed-up mess. I sometimes wish I'd stayed back home in the woods. I'm too little a fellow to be in such a big game. I'm afraid I'm so small I can only see one side of it."

"You admit there are two sides?"

"My grandfather and your father have impressed that on me pretty strongly."

“Isn’t there any good in the other side? Do you mean to tell me that all the men in politics in this State are wrong except you and old General Waymouth?”

“No, but it’s the way of doing things. I guess it’s that.”

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She drew her horse to a stop. The country road was quiet. The hush of the starry August night was over all.

"Mr. Thornton," she said, looking him squarely in the eyes, "with all due respect to the mighty masculine, I believe you are in need of a few suggestions from a woman's standpoint. You haven't acquired the art of flattery. If so, you'd be gallant and say I have just as much acumen as you have honesty."

"I'll say it! It's so!" he protested.

"No, you're too late. I very unmodestly gave myself the compliment. Now I'm going to tell you where you are wrong in this whole matter, Mr. Thornton. You are reckoning without the human instruments that you must employ. I'll wait just a moment and let that remark sink into your mind. You are a bit slow about grasping the full purport of remarks, Mr. Harlan Thornton." There was a touch of her satiric humor in her tone. "Now, you don't fully understand, even yet. I think I'll have to illustrate. I've already told you that I've watched matters pretty closely at the capital. I like to see young men come here with ideals and succeed, but, alas, they do not."

"They let themselves be bought or bribed or bossed, probably," blurted Harlan.

"I'm not talking about that kind. They are too obvious and too common. I complimented my own self. Now you are insulting yourself by jumping at conclusions. You should have a better opinion of yourself, sir. I have. I do not believe you could be bought or bossed or even coaxed from what you considered your honest duty. You do not need to assure me. But you might be *convinced*, Mr. Thornton—convinced by good reasons—that it is not a young man's duty to ruin his own prospects and his own influence by undertaking something as impracticable as though he tried to be a meteor by holding a candle in his hand and jumping off a roof. I could praise his imagination, but not his judgment."

She waited a moment. She gazed at him with sudden sympathy.

"You are a straightforward young man, used to winning your way by direct means—axe to the tree, cant-dog to the rolling log, but that isn't the way in politics. I know this preachment from me sounds strange. It may offend you, but you mustn't allow yourself to be offended. You have simply quarrelled with the men who have tried to tell you—it's no use for your grandfather or my father to talk with you. Men do quarrel too easily. I am taking a woman's advantage of you, sir. I said I would illustrate. I will. One of the finest young men I ever knew came down to the legislature and started in to expose and hold up every appropriation measure that had the least appearance of being padded. Just straight-out and blunt honesty, you understand. A little affectation, too. A bit of self-advertising as well. But we all excuse a little self-consciousness in youth. Well, he

simply became a red rag to the House. They sneered and hissed when he stood up.
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in blind rage they voted for every appropriation he opposed. He did much more harm than he did good. He didn't get his own appropriations for the district he represented. And it killed him in politics and in his law business. The happy people did not acclaim him as their faithful watchdog of the treasury. They merely pronounced him a bore with a swelled head. You see, I can talk political talk with all the phrases, Mr. Thornton."

"But he was right, wasn't he—fundamentally right?"

"He *meant* to be right—that's the term to use. But he forgot that he must use human instruments in order to accomplish anything. And he just failed miserably."

"What would you expect him to do—join in, and be just like the others? Where would any good come out of anything?"

"Now, you are insisting again that there is good only on one side of the question. That's bigotry. It's what I'm trying to warn you against. Some one has said that life is compromise. It's true of politics, if you're going to get the most out of it. I know what you are undertaking. General Waymouth hasn't left much to the imagination in his letter. And I've talked with others. And so I know how visionary you are."

"You've talked with Linton—that's the one you've talked with!" declared Harlan, indignantly. "And if he's told you what I have told him in confidence he's more of a sneak than I've already found him out to be."

"Mr. Linton did not consider that you were making any secret of your principles. And you'll excuse me, but I think his principles are exactly as good as yours. You are talking now like the ramrodders. Their first retort to any one who differs with them is to call names."

"But he deserted General Waymouth under fire. He promised, and went back on that promise."

"According to all political good sense and in any other times but these, when men seem to be running wild, General Waymouth was politically out of the game. It's all fine and grand in story-books, Mr. Thornton, for the hero to sacrifice everything for his ideals, but in these very practical days he's only classed as a fool and kicked to one side."

"You defend Linton, then? Is that the kind of a man you hold up as a success, Miss Presson?" His grudge showed in his tone.

"You will please understand, sir, that we are not discussing theories just now. This isn't a question of what the world ought to be. It's the plain fact about what a man must be if he's to get results. You and I both have heard your grandfather say many times that

he'd like to play politics with angels—if only he could find the angels. It's hard to own up, when you're young, that human nature is just as it is. I understand how you feel. I know you feel it's a very strange thing for me to do—talk to you like this. But I want you to understand that my father has had nothing to do with it.”

He turned to her accusingly.

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"But I know perfectly well," he said, bitterly, "that it isn't any personal interest you take in me that makes you say it. You don't think enough of me for that." It was resentment so naively boyish that her astonishment checked her remonstrance. He rushed on. "You hold up Linton for me to follow. That's the kind of a man you admire. He's an orator, and he's smart, and he wins. I'm only an accident. You meant that when you said that General Waymouth won out only because matters were mixed up in politics. You don't care anything about me, personally. But you're talking to me because my grandfather asked you to. That's it." He guessed shrewdly.

That outburst betrayed him. This young man from the north country was very human after all, she decided.

"I have said before, this is a campaign of honesty. Your grandfather did ask me to talk to you. I didn't have the heart to refuse him, for I'm very fond of him."

It was an acknowledgment that stung his pride. But more than all, it stirred that vague rancor he had felt the first time he had seen Linton appropriate her.

He did not choose gallant words for reply.

"He has set you on me, has he, to pull me away from what I think is right? He wants me to be like the rest of 'em, eh? I can be an understudy for Herbert Linton and an errand boy for the State machine! I didn't think, Miss Presson, that you—"

"You'd better not go any further, Mr. Harlan Thornton. My affection for an old man who has set his heart on your success has brought me into this affair, and I assure you I don't enjoy the situation. You are not asked to betray any one, or desert any high moral pinnacle, or do anything else that the moralists say all these fine things about without knowing what they mean half the time. You are reminded of this: that there's only one General Waymouth. There's a sudden big call for him because factions have got into a row with each other. Folks will rally around him for a little while—it's a sort of revival sentiment. But you are not a General Waymouth. He'll be excused by sentiment, you'll simply be branded as one of the common run of ramrodders who try to achieve the impossible with human nature—a disturbing element in State politics—and your career will be spoiled. Now I've delivered my message, and done what I promised your grandfather I'd do."

She turned her horse, and started him back toward town.

There was silence between them for a time.

"So, if I weren't Thelismar Thornton's grandson you wouldn't take any interest in me at all?" he inquired, sourly.

“A very impudent and unnecessary question, Mr. Harlan Thornton. I’m afraid your grandfather is right—you have stayed in the woods too long.”

Longer silence.

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He was more humble when he spoke again. "I don't want you to think I'm what I may seem to be, Miss Presson. But what is there I can do in politics, just now, different from what I'm doing? I have taken my side with the General. I propose to stay there, of course. But I do not want to have people think I'm a fool. And I haven't heard much else from any one since I started out." There was wistfulness in his voice. He suddenly felt drawn to her. He craved her counsel. It was the mastery of the woman, more worldly-wise. He was bewildered and ashamed. The image of Clare Kavanagh was not dimmed in his soul. She had been with him daily in his thoughts. He knew that he felt affection for her. It was tenderness, desire to protect, the real impulse of the man toward his mate. But the feeling was all unexpressed and incoherent.

And yet Madeleine Presson, more than ever before, attracted him powerfully. She had the elements that he had never seen and experienced in womankind. Just at that moment she dominated, for his passion had betrayed him into a rather puerile outbreak.

Subtle analysis of the emotions was beyond him. He did not understand. His life had trained him along more primitive lines of selection. But he realized now that he was trying to probe something in his soul that defied his rather limited powers of judging. He had not given his heart unreservedly, he had not pledged himself. Clare Kavanagh had repented of a child's weakness and had run away from him, vaguely hinting that she would forget him. This masterful young woman, driving him back to town, her determined profile outlined against the gloom as he gazed shyly at her, did not appear to be interested in him, except as a rebel to authority and needing chastisement.

The child of the woods, as he thought of her, stirred all his tenderness, his sympathy, and the soft ties of long intimacy and understanding bound him.

But this girl, with beauty and brains, on his own level of independence of thought, stirred new desires and ambitions in him. She was helpmate and counsellor. He wondered if newer times and conditions did not demand stronger qualities than mere womanhood in the wife who was to accompany a man into the vicissitudes of public life. Not that he felt that he was more than an humble instrument of the real power. But he fell to considering the subject from the general viewpoint. His own experiences had awakened new ideas that he pondered, having a very provocative suggestion at his side.

Still more humbly he asked her: "If you have been thinking the matter over, Miss Presson, what advice do you give me?"

"I advise you to have a serious talk with your grandfather. He has had much experience. Use your own judgment, too, but be ready to hear the evidence. You have not shown that willingness, yet, so far as I can determine. I haven't any advice of my own to offer. I'll not presume. Only this: be as honest as you can, but don't be so

impractically honest that you chop down all your bridges behind you and neglect to gather timber for the bridges ahead of you.”

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Even in the gloom she understood that he was puzzled.

“Really, you know, I haven’t written any handbook on practical politics, Mr. Thornton,” she said, her humor coming to the rescue. “I have talked to you as though I had. But I’ve only talked to you with a woman’s intuition in such matters—and you remember, too, I’ve seen much of legislative life. You can be good in politics—but, oh, don’t be impractical! I want you to succeed.”

“You do?”

“I most certainly do.” She said it heartily.

No other word passed between them until they arrived in front of the hotel.

He reached up, after he had alighted, and grasped her hand. She had impulsively put out her own to meet his.

“I’ll try to be—” he began, and then hesitated. He had been pondering. But his thoughts were still so confused that he could not think of the word that expressed exactly what he desired to make himself.

“Be human,” she said, smiling down on him. “You won’t find yourself of much use in the world unless you cultivate the faculty of personal contact, and you musn’t try to leap into politics in this State right from the pedestal of a demigod. You may be able to elevate yourself later, but just now, my dear young friend, you should be *reasonable*. That’s a word that means much in handling men and affairs. Now I hope I’ve softened you so that you will listen to your good grandfather when he has advice for you.”

She did not allow herself to be too serious. There was the delicious drawl in her tone that had attracted him at first.

He went to his room and sat down to digest that political philosophy. If some one beside Madeleine Presson had said it, it would have seemed to him like the voice of the temptress. But she had already won his confidence in her sincerity. He wished that he could feel that her interest in him had more of a personal quality than she had admitted. He did not like to remember that it was simply affection for his grandfather that prompted her. He did not understand very well what he was to do to obey her suggestions. He did not understand himself exactly at that moment. But along with his loyalty to General Waymouth a new desire sprang into life within him. He wanted to show Luke Presson’s daughter that Harlan Thornton could play the game of practical politics as well as Herbert Linton, and in the end would be more deserving of her respect.

CHAPTER XXIII

A TRUCE

Gen. Varden Waymouth was elected Governor. In spite of the sullen torpor of his party managers and the snarls of the Reverend Prouty and his radical ilk, he surmounted by mere momentum of his party a certain bland and trustful and destructive indifference of the general public, and won at the polls. The narrow margin by which he won would have scared a really loyal and conscientious State Committee. But the before-and-after gloom of Chairman Presson and his intimates was not caused by any worriment over the size of the plurality. They were languid spectators. They felt like dispossessed tenants. They took little interest in the temple of the party faith.

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“When they buried old Zenas Bellew up our way (Zenas weighed three hundred and fifty, and lived in a cottage about the size of a wood-box) the undertaker found he couldn’t get the coffin into the house or get Zenas out—not through doors or windows. A half-witted fellow we call ‘Simpson’s Rooster’ spoke up, and said they’d better bury the old man in the house and move the family out into the coffin.” That was Thelismor Thornton’s comment on the political situation in the Republican party on the morning after the election. The chairman heard it with the gloom of a mourner. He could see nothing bright in the jest or the prospects.

There was a frigid truce during the four months that elapsed between the election and the assembling of the legislature.

General Waymouth retired to the brick house in Burnside, and gave ear to those who promptly made his home the Mecca of the State. There were office-holders who wanted to hold to their jobs, office-seekers who suspected that there would be a break in the plans of party patronage; there were officious gentlemen suggesting new legislation for the next administration to consider; there were crafty gentlemen trying to discover what the administration would recommend. The day was full of cares, duties, annoyances, and the nagging pleadings of persistent petitioners.

Harlan Thornton, now representative-elect from the Fort Canibas district, became still more indispensable in General Waymouth’s daily life. Duties at a desk had worn upon him. This everlasting mingling with men was more to his taste. He had natural adaptability. He was a good judge of human nature. He had serene good nature. Physique and manner made him master of many situations at the old brick house that otherwise would have sadly tried the General’s strength and temper. Therefore, his chief placed greater dependence upon his lieutenant with every day that passed, solicited his opinions as his knowledge of men increased and his judgment became worth more, relied upon his instinctive estimates of character, and shifted many burdens to the broad shoulders that seemed so well fitted to carry them.

Harlan Thornton was slow to realize what a tremendous power, as chamberlain, he really exercised in the State.

He awoke to that fact more slowly than did the men who came to solicit. He did not try to use his power for his own ends. He promptly noted the deference that men paid him; as promptly he penetrated certain plans men made to corrupt him, if they could. These attempts were made slyly, and did not proceed very far. Something in his demeanor prevented the plotters from openly broaching their desires and their willingness to make their interests worth his while. They knew that one of the Thorntons could not be won by money, but they were rather surprised to find out that he could not be beguiled by other inducements. He was so big and manly, and he had rapidly become so self-poised, that they did not realize that in experience he was only a boy, with the ingenuous faith and simple aims and candor of boyhood. He perceived what he might

win. But the pride of serving General Waymouth loyally was worth more to him than anything they could offer.

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His duties took him often to the State capital. The chairman of the State Committee was coolly courteous, often gloomily deferential, sometimes frankly cordial—uneasily trying to find the proper level to stand on in his intercourse with one who was the grandson of Thelismer Thornton, and also the chosen confidant of the man who had wrested from him control of State affairs.

In the case of Madeleine Presson, there was none of this embarrassment. He saw her often. She met him half-way with a frank interest in his work and a sympathy which, in those days of truce, did not question his ideals.

He became a welcome intimate of the Presson household. When he was there the master himself put aside all the brusqueness he displayed in their down-town discourse on politics. The girl welcomed him. There were many hours when they were alone together, in the home or on long drives into the country. She did not refer to their talk on that evening when she read to him his lesson on practical politics. He avoided that subject. He did not want to risk any further disagreement between them on the matter of ideals—or, for that matter, on any other subject. Association with her had become too delightful to be put to the test of discussions of political methods. He was still drawing upon her fund of worldly wisdom. There was a little touch of the cynic in her. He became secretly ashamed of some of his ingenuous beliefs, after she had deftly shown him the other side of things. She did show him the other side, quite in a matter-of-fact way. It was not that she was trying to break down his faith. There was nothing sly nor crafty in her methods of improving his views. But by informing him, she made him wiser, and, at the same time, more distrustful of motives, more searching in his investigations of methods. He began to doubt some of his earlier ideas of what a public man should be. He felt that his views were broadening. That was a comfortable way of excusing certain surrenderings to her ideas.

The more he drew from her the more he was drawn to her.

It was not the love that comes with a rush of the emotions and sweeps a man away.

Through the intellect, through his hunger for information and wider views, she was making herself indispensable to his welfare and his ambitions.

And yet Madeleine Presson was not trying to make this young man of the north country fall in love with her. Her interest in him was first of all based upon his winning earnestness and the elements of success that she divined in him, were they properly cultivated. She had studied men at the capital from childhood. The development of men in public life and service had been the one theme that she had heard most discussed. Her impulse of assistance had been directed toward this grandson of Thelismer Thornton.

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But as the days went by, and opportunity gave them their hours together, they were drawn more closely, each insisting in secret meditation that it was not love. He found himself gradually rebuilding his creed of living on the foundation she had laid in that first long talk of theirs. He had arrived at such a point of belief in her that he was glad that she had opened his eyes. He was finding men—meeting them by the hundred—even as she had pictured them to him: selfish, scheming, crafty, and not understanding in the least his occasional attempts to meet them on the upper level of perfect candor. For her part, she found more in this young man than she had expected to find.

Harlan considered Herbert Linton the single jarring note in this new symphony of mutual interests.

Linton came to the capital with more or less regularity, and called on the Pressons with fully as much appearance of being entirely at home as his newer rival. When they were together the girl treated both with impartial interest and attention. She listened to each in turn, and if they chose to sit and scowl at each other she did the talking for all three. Deftly she arranged that they should leave together, and they always promptly separated as soon as they reached the sidewalk, as though they were afraid to trust themselves in each other's company.

So the new year came in, and the hordes of lawmakers, lobbyists, lookers-on, and laymen descended on the State capital.

The first few days of a legislative session, though packed full of politics and business, rush, and routine, are festival days, after all. There are the old friends to greet and the new friends to meet. There are ten spectators to every legislator, and the spectators are on hand for a good time. Outside of the factional clinches of the House and Senate caucuses the early days have little serious business.

Presson's great hotel and the lesser lights of the capital's houses of entertainment were packed to their roofs. The State House on the hill sent sparkling radiance at night from all its hundreds of windows out across the snow which loaded the broad lawns. Senator Pownal, renominated in joint caucus, spoke to crowded floor and galleries on the second evening. Harlan Thornton, in his seat in the House, listened and wondered if that convention had not been a dream.

This later convocation seemed so entirely harmonious.

The Republicans ruled House and Senate by safe majorities. Presson, sauntering about hotel or State House lobby, seemed bland and contented again. The wounds in the party seemed to have been healed.

On inauguration day Governor Waymouth added to the general spirit of harmony.

He came unobtrusively to the State House from the modest mansion he had leased in the capital city for the legislative winter and took his oath of office before an admiring throng. He had made a confidant of no one regarding his inaugural speech. There were vague rumors that the Governor would follow his hand, as he had shown it in his letter of acceptance, and deliver an inaugural address which would blister the ears of the politically unregenerate.

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In that ancient State House, its accommodations for spectators limited, there were no hard-and-fast rules regulating admission to the floor. Harlan Thornton had a chair placed in the aisle beside his seat, and entertained Madeleine Presson there. He had anticipated Linton, who came with a similar invitation. Harlan was still enough of a boy to feel delight in the discomfiture of his rival, and to be gratified by the open admiration his fellow-members showed for the girl at his side. He relished the sour looks which Linton sent in that direction.

Under cover of the general buzz and bustle that accompanied the convening of the joint session of House and Senate for the purpose of the inauguration the girl rallied him a bit.

"The beginning of the righteous reign seems to be sane and sweet, after all," she said. "Even my father is complacent and purring this morning. Which has he eaten, do you know—the raven of contention or the dove of peace?"

"I think every one understands that Governor Waymouth has straightened matters out for all of us," he replied.

"How? By simply talking about it? As one who should say, 'Let it be done,' and it was done, and just what was done nobody, nobody knew—but it was done—something was—and all the folks felt better and went on in the same old way! Is that it?"

He smiled at her while she teased him; the nature of the armistice that prevailed, according to outward appearances, was not understood by him. For several weeks his intimacy with General Waymouth had not been as close as at the first. Not that there was distrust or even coolness between them. The veteran still depended on the young man for the services a trusted lieutenant could render. His plans, however, his future programme of reorganization—if he had any definite plans—the General kept to himself. It was not mere reticence. But there was an atmosphere about the old statesman as though he had withdrawn himself to a higher altitude to think his thoughts and formulate his plans alone. If he had heard of the intimacy of Harlan Thornton with the family of Luke Presson he made no comment on that fact.

"Now what is he going to say in his address?" she asked. "Every one will know in a few moments. Tell me ahead—tell me the big utterance that will make the people sit up. I want to be ready to watch their faces!"

"Why, I haven't a single idea what he will say," he blurted.

"Oh, safe repository, I salute you!"

"But I haven't! The Governor hasn't opened his mouth to me!"

“Have a care! One very easily steps from polite diplomacy into very impolite falsehood. You must always be truthful with me, Harlan.”

His eyes grew brighter and his tanned cheeks warm. It was the first time she had addressed him without hateful formality.

“I propose to tell you the truth, always,” he assured her. “But I mean what I say—the Governor has kept his address to himself.”

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"I should resent that. It would have been a delicate compliment, and he owed that much to you. I'm afraid he has been a politician long enough to be like all the rest—to walk up to power on men as one uses a flight of stairs, and then to put the stairs behind his back; for one doesn't walk up-stairs backward."

He flushed more deeply.

"I'm not that kind of a fellow—jealous, or petty, or expecting a great deal for what little service I can render."

"Put a value on yourself, though," she advised him. "It really isn't human nature, you know, to pick up the things that are thrown away by the owners—to pick them up and keep them and value them, I mean. That applies to purses and all other possessions, including hearts and loyalty."

He started to say something to her—even though the throng pressed about them he would have said it; but the voice of the crier at the door announced what all were waiting for.

"His Excellency the Governor, the Honorable Council, and his Excellency the Governor-elect and party!"

They filed along in dignified procession down the centre aisle, the uniforms of the officers of the staff giving a touch of color and brightness to the formal frock-coats.

The Secretary of State announced the official figures of the vote electing Varden Waymouth as Governor, and after his sonorous final phrase, "God save the State of -----," Governor Waymouth repeated the oath of office administered by a gaunt, fallow lawyer who was the president of the Senate.

The clerk of the House set a reading-desk on the Speaker's table and arranged the Governor's manuscript. As the old man read he made a striking picture. He stood very erect. His snowy hair, the empty sleeve across his breast, the lines the years had etched on cheeks and brow gave those who looked on him a little thrill of sympathetic regret that one so old should be called from the repose of his later years to take up such public burdens as he had assumed. But his voice was resonant, his eye was clear. Nature seemed to have given him new strength to meet what he was now facing. And yet, thought some of those who listened, it might be that he did not propose to make a martyr of himself, after all. His address did not threaten or complain. The radicals who sat there with set teeth and bent brows, hoping to hear denunciation after their own heart, were disappointed. The politicians who had feared now took new grip on their hope—it probably was not to be as bad as they had anticipated.

Harlan Thornton listened to the calm, moderate statement of the State's general financial and political situation with growing sense of mingled disappointment and relief. His fighting spirit and his knowledge of conditions, as they had been revealed to him, made him hope that at last an honest man proposed to clean the temple—entering upon his task with bared arms and a clarion call. This mild old man,

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confining himself to the details of the State's progress and needs, was not exactly the leader he had expected him to be. And yet Harlan was relieved. He looked at the girl beside him, and that relief smoothed away his disappointment. As matters were shaping themselves he no longer anticipated that he would be driven into pitched battle, forced to fight intrenched enemies of reform—Luke Presson's face most conspicuous of all those behind the party wall of privilege. As he listened to the address he comforted himself with the thought that probably political disagreements loomed more blackly as a cloud on the horizon than their real consistency warranted. He was not in retreat—he would not admit that to himself as he listened. But he felt that compromise and a better understanding were in the air. There would be no more occasion for troubled arguments between himself and the girl at his side. He did not understand exactly in what way it would be done, but he felt that Governor Waymouth knew how to win his reforms without such party slaughter as the first engagements hinted at. He put himself into a very comfortable frame of mind, and the girl at his side, by her mere presence, added to his belief that this was a pretty good old world, after all.

He had lost some of his respect for "reform." It had been exemplified for him mostly by such men as Prouty and his intolerant kind—by Spinney and his dupes. He felt that he might call decency by some other name, and arrive at results by the calm and dignified course which Governor Waymouth now seemed to be pointing out. He suddenly felt a warm appreciation of the wisdom of Madeleine Presson as she had made that good sense known to him in their talks.

"For it is by my works, not my words, that I would be judged," concluded the Governor, solemnly, and bowed to the applause which greeted the end.

Neither Harlan Thornton nor any other listener in the great assembly hall took those words as signifying anything more than the usual pledge of faithful performance.

After the dissolving of the joint caucus he escorted Madeleine to the council-chamber, where the new Governor was holding his impromptu reception. There were no shadows on the faces which pressed closely around him. All the politicians of the State were there, eager to be the first to congratulate him. Their fears had been somewhat allayed. In political circles it was well understood that Waymouth stood for a clean-up. It had been hinted that his programme would be drastic. The members of the machine, more intimately in the secrets of the convention, had expected that the old Roman would sound the first blast of the charge in his inaugural address. His moderateness cheered them. Harlan found congratulation sweetening every comment.

The General received the young couple with marked graciousness.

“Governor Waymouth, you have convinced me to-day that you are the apostle of universal salvation for the wicked—in politics,” said the girl. “I hope the doctrine will be accepted.”

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"In that belief you are safe companion for my first disciple," he returned, humoring her jest. The crowd carried them on.

"I believe that, too," Harlan murmured.

"Universal salvation according to the new political creed?"

"I'm not thinking about politics. I'm not thinking much about anything else just now except you. During the Governor's address it came over me suddenly what wise counsel you gave me. If I had you for an adviser all the rest of my life I could amount to more in the world than I ever can without you."

She glanced at him sharply.

"I mean that," he insisted. "Will you be my adviser for the rest of my life?"

It was crude, blunt, and sudden proposal. The throngs were eddying about them. They were jostled at the moment by the Toms, Dicks, and Harrys of the legislative concourse. Curious eyes surveyed them. Ears were near by.

"I can't help saying it here and now," he rushed on. "I—"

"My dear Harlan, you don't mean to say that you are proposing to me here in the face and eyes of this crowd?" She said it with sudden amazed mirth dancing in her eyes, but with a note of satire in her tone.

"I do mean it!" He cried it so loudly that men turned their heads to stare at this earnest young man who was protesting his faith to the handsome daughter of Luke Presson.

"Hush!" she cried, sharply, and then pulled him along. She spoke low. "I don't think you have enough humor in you to realize just what you have done, Harlan. I have found humor lacking in you. You have picked out the lobby of the State House, in the middle of the biggest crowd of all the year, as the 'love's bower' for an offer of marriage. You say you mean it as an offer of marriage. But what you really did was to ask me to attach myself to you as general adviser. You can hire a clairvoyant who will do that much for you, and I doubt if you would engage the clairvoyant as publicly as you have just tried to engage me."

"I understand just what a fool I made of myself," he muttered, huskily. "But I couldn't wait—and I mean it."

"No, you don't realize just how much of a fool you are where women are concerned," she returned, judicially. "A woman—a young woman—is generally interested in hearing first of all a little about love and devotion and loyalty, all unselfish and uncalculating. Now be patient! Listen to me! A woman can detect real love. And real love seeks its



opportunity sweetly and shyly. It doesn't preface itself with remarks about a woman's brain and advisory ability. I believe it has a lot to say about eyes and hair and lips and such things. However, since you admire me in my capacity as adviser, I'll advise you to be sure that you love a woman before you propose to her, and then when you propose pick out some place that's suitable for convincing her that you do love her. I see mother yonder. Take me to her."

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Turning away, flushed and angry, from her demure smile, he became bitterly conscious that even had they been alone, under most favorable circumstances, he would have lacked speech for real love-making. He felt that conviction inwardly. He wondered whether he had the capacity for loving as he had read of men loving. It made him a bit ashamed to think of himself as violently protesting, hungrily pleading. A moment before he had been angry because she doubted his love. He knew that he admired her, respected, desired her. Now he argued with himself, and convinced his soul that his emotions constituted love. And having convinced himself, he determined to seek further opportunity of convincing her. It was truly an academic way of settling matters so riotously impatient of calculation as affairs of the heart, and his determination would have appealed to Miss Presson's sense of the humorous more acutely still had he undertaken to explain his emotions of that moment.

Thelimer Thornton, strolling amiably through the lobby throng, came and put his hand on Harlan's shoulder.

"The best way to make good sugar is to simmer the sap slowly, my boy." Harlan glanced sharply at him, but the Duke was not discussing love. "Vard has got into the simmering stage at last. I reckoned he would. He's too good a politician to boil the kettle over as he started in doing. What's the matter with you? You look as though you'd been listening to a funeral oration instead of an address that has put the party back on Easy Street."

His grandson was careful not to explain the cause of his gloom. He was willing to let politics be answerable.

Chairman Presson, more cheerful than he had been for weeks, came and crowded between them in a cosey, confidential manner.

"Say, the old fellow is getting smoothed down," he chuckled. "That address was milk for babes. He's got good sense. The thin edge of that plurality made him think twice. I reckon he's going to play a safe game after this. I don't know what he wanted to throw such a scare into us early in the game for! But as we get old we get cranky, I suppose. I may be that way myself when I grow older."

"Vard preached the theory to us for all it was worth," commented the Duke, "but I reckon he's up against the practice end of the proposition now—and he was a politician before he was a preacher."

"Hope he'll stay a politician after this. He got onto my nerves. It wasn't necessary to be so almighty emphatic about things going wrong in this State."

"Old Pinkney up our way is always careful to keep an eye out for the drovers," said the Duke. "When he sees one coming he hustles out into the pasture and shifts the poker

off'n the breachy critter onto the best one in the bunch. And that's the way he unloads the breachy one. Vard has been wearing the poker the last few weeks, but I don't believe he intends to hook down any fences."

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In the eyes of the politicians, therefore, Governor Waymouth had become safe and sane. They construed his earlier declarations as the ambitions of an old man dreaming a dream of perfection. The legislature swung into the routine of its first weeks in the usual fashion. The business consisted of the presentation of bills, acts, and resolves. The daily sessions lasted barely half an hour. The committee hearings had not begun, and the legislators found time hanging heavy on their hands.

Harlan Thornton continued to be a frequent caller at the Presson home. But he did not seem to find an opportunity for a *tete-a-tete* with Madeleine. She did not show constraint in his presence. She did not avoid him. She treated him with the same frank familiarity. But he did not find himself alone with her. He did not try to force such a situation, in spite of the provocation she had given him once. He was not yet sure that he could command the words that real love might demand for expression. That was his vague excuse to his own heart for delaying—for his heart insisted that he did love her. He had to admit to himself that this was not the headlong passion the poets described, but he consoled himself with the reflection that he was not a poet. So he made the most of her cordial acceptance of him as he was, and felt sure that Herbert Linton had won no more from her.

CHAPTER XXIV

A GOVERNOR AND A MAID

The Honorable Arba Spinney was in the lobby as usual that winter. The Duke's sarcastic prediction was fulfilled. He appeared promptly at the session's opening, and was the most insistent and persistent member of the "Third House," as the paid legislative agents were called. Most of the men who wormed their way here and there operated craftily and tried to be diplomatic. Spinney strove by effrontery. As usual, he made the country members his especial prey. The story of his knavery at the State Convention had been smothered in the interests of the party. He reappeared among men with as much assurance as ever. He even approached Harlan Thornton to solicit his support of one bill. It was a measure to grant State subsidy, through exemption of taxation, to assist a railroad to extend its lines into the timber-land country.

Harlan checked him promptly. "I don't propose to discuss that question or any other with you, Mr. Spinney."

"If that road is built it will double the value of half your lands," insisted the lobbyist. "It's business for you and it's business for us, and there's no reason why you shouldn't talk business, is there?"

"It doesn't interest me, Mr. Spinney." He went on, hotly: "I know just as much about the matter as you do. It's an attempt to evade the State constitution, which forbids

subsidizing railroads. Governor Waymouth has explained it to me. I don't propose to profit by any such methods. And I'll inform you, further, that it's just about the sort of a scheme I'd expect to find you working for. Do you understand me?"

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"I know what you're referring to. But that matter is over with. I got the worst end of it. You helped to pass it to me. You can't afford to carry on any quarrel with me, Thornton. Holding grudges is bad business; so is making a fool of yourself by playing little tin saint in public matters."

"I hold no grudge against you. That would be getting down on your level. I'm simply disgusted with you as a man, Mr. Spinney. That's all. You know why. Now leave me alone."

But Spinney boldly intercepted him. Harlan had started to leave. The lobbyist realized what a powerful foe young Thornton could be to his project, and he was desperate.

"I've been up through your country, Mr. Thornton. I've been spending some time at Fort Canibas. I've been posting myself generally on railroad and other matters—*other* matters! I don't want to say too much, but I'd like to have you run over in your mind what those other matters might be. Now, you and I can't afford to be enemies. I got the tough end, and I'm willing to overlook and forget. You owe me a little something. I hope you're going to square it. Let me remind you that I'm a bad man with my tongue. I'm free to say it, I depend on my tongue for what I get out of life."

It occurred to Harlan that this brazen threat referred to the scandal of the Fort Canibas caucus.

"Bring them on," he sneered: "Ivus Niles and his buck sheep and Enoch Dudley and the rest of the petty rogues that you hired with your corporation money to defeat me."

"You're on the wrong trail," replied Spinney. "I can hit you harder than that, and in a tenderer spot."

He returned Harlan's amazed stare.

"I've been keeping my eyes open down here, Mr. Thornton, and I kept my ears open up in Fort Canibas." His face grew hard. "D—n you, I'll never forget what you did to me! I'm coming right out open with you. I'd like to do you in return. I can do it. But I'll give you a chance; it's for my interest to do so, providing you buy the let-off. If you don't stand by me in that tax rebate, I'll launch the story. What I lose in support I'll more than make up in seeing you squirm. I'm pretty frank, ain't I? Well, I play strong when I've got enough trumps under my thumb."

"Spinney, I've had enough of that kind of talk. What do you mean?"

"Don't you have the least idea?"

"Not the slightest."

“A good bluff! Well, I know about the girl up country! See? It’s a bad story to be passed up to another girl. And I know how to get the details to my friend Presson’s daughter in time to spoil your ambition in that quarter. Now, how about that?”

They were in one corner of the State-House lobby, and the presence of a hundred men about them probably saved Spinney from a beating there and then. Harlan quivered with rage. He did not grasp the full purport of Spinney’s hints. He only understood that the man had grossly intruded on his private affairs. He could not speak. He dared not trust his voice.

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"Now do you want to let it go further?" inquired the lobbyist. He felt that the proximity of others protected him.

"I'll meet you alone—I'll hunt you out, and I'll mash that face of yours into pulp!" choked the young man, and hurried away before he lost control of himself. The most he could make out of the episode was that Spinney was seeking cheap revenge by offering insult to his face under circumstances that prevented him from retaliating. He did not understand the reference to Clare Kavanagh. His friendship for the girl was no secret in the north country. That Spinney had made so much account of it by his insinuations was the astonishing feature, in Harlan's estimation.

Fortunately for his peace of mind at that moment, he was not allowed to dwell upon the matter. The Governor's messenger came seeking him. He followed the man into the presence of his Excellency.

Harlan had not recovered his self-possession, and the Governor surveyed him with some interest.

"Cares of State, young man?" he asked. "And the session still as calm as a millpond?"

"That cur of a Spinney has just insulted me—no politics, sir, but just plain, personal insult. Why, he went out of his way to do it!"

"You make much out of nothing if you allow that blatherskite to disturb you," said the Governor, with mild reproof. "Pay no attention to him. Now to my business with you! I'd like to have you dine with me this evening. I have some serious matters to talk over with you alone—and the executive chamber, here, is no place for a quiet talk."

Harlan hesitated a moment.

"Have you another engagement?"

"I was to dine with the Pressons."

"I am sorry to ask you to do it, my boy, but if it is merely a social engagement, will you not beg to be excused? I assure you that my business is such that it cannot well wait another twenty-four hours. I am ready to leave the State House now. We'll ride past the Presson door, and I'll wait while you present your regrets. Tell the fair Madeleine that duty calls." He smiled. "I hear interesting reports, young man. Again I say I'm sorry to keep you from your engagement, but Miss Presson has been near enough to politics to understand what a duty-call means. Come!"

The young man flushed. Reply failed him. He followed the Governor to his carriage. It was late afternoon, and the State House was emptying.

As Harlan ran up the steps of the Presson house, Spinney's ugly threat came to him. The man dealt in gossip. It was an incredible form of attack. It was slander of the innocent. He could not forewarn Madeleine Presson. That would be caddish.

But he felt a sudden panic. The impulse of admiration; covetous desire to win her away from Linton, a desire pricked by his increasing dislike of that young rival in love and politics; the charm she possessed for him who had met in her his first woman of intellect and culture—all drove him to her. The other love was a vague something that troubled him. Madeleine Presson was near and visible, and he did not dissect the emotion which prompted him to seek her.

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She came down to the reception-room. He had sent up an urgent request.

"No," she said, with a smile, after she had listened, "I think I'll put your loyalty to the test! If I'm always to be the minority report in your estimation, Mr. Legislator, it's time now to find it out. You put Governor Waymouth and your politics first, do you?"

"But you haven't given me the right to put you first," he returned, boldly.

"Just how was I to go about giving you that right?" she inquired, with demure sarcasm. "Memorialize you, Mr. Representative, or throw it at you from the House gallery, concealed in a bouquet?"

In spite of the waiting Governor outside he started toward her, his arms outstretched, his heart rushing to his lips. Her taunt—it seemed like that—made him desperate.

"Madeleine, I tried to tell you—I know it seemed a strange place, but I couldn't wait—I want to tell you now—"

She eluded him, and stopped him with a word. He was not impetuous enough to persist.

"Oh, you master of the art of love-making!" she cried. Pique mingled with mirth in her tone. "First, you propose to me in the midst of the mob; then you propose to me, bursting in like a messenger-boy, and yonder the Governor of this State, with anxious head out of his carriage window, scowling because you don't come along! Admirable occasions for pledging passion and life-long devotion! Dear Harlan, your ingenuity must be puzzled by this time. I'll make a suggestion: fly over our house in a balloon and shout your declaration down the chimney. I'll sit in the fireplace from two to four, afternoons."

"I'll not be put off!" he cried.

"You shall be put out, and I'll do it!" Laughing, she took him by his arm and led him out into the hall. Protesting, he went. "I have some respect for the feelings of our Governor on a chilly afternoon, even if you haven't. You are excused from our little dinner. Go, now, Harlan. I'm serious."

"There's one thing you have given me," he said, red, half-angry, and thoroughly subdued, "and that's the promise that I may take you to the legislative ball. That's to-morrow night—and we'll see!" He bolted out upon the steps.

"Delightful!" she cried after him. "What an opportunity the stage of City Hall will afford for another!" She shut the door before he could reply.

The Governor rallied him a bit on his disturbed looks as they rode on, but Harlan was in no mood to relish jokes on that subject.

Governor Waymouth had no other guests at dinner. He did not broach his business until they were seated in the little parlor of the modest mansion. The room had been converted into a study.

“To date the session has hardly been what you hoped—perhaps that’s too strong a word—what you expected it would be, has it?” inquired the Governor, his earnestness showing that he was ready to begin. He did not wait for a reply.

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"Matters have run in the old rut. Every one seems to be satisfied, eh—even the radicals in the prohibition movement? Isn't that so? Their men have introduced some new legislation, adding on more penalties that no officer will ever enforce—but the mere legislation satisfies 'em. Everybody satisfied, apparently." The Governor uttered that last sentence in meditative manner. Then he straightened, and slapped his hand upon his chair-arm so suddenly that Harlan started. "But I am not satisfied!" he shouted. "I have let them run along. I have let them introduce their bills. I have waited for the lawmakers of this State and for the people to take some initiative. I gave them their call last fall in my letter. I hoped that some part of this State was awake. But those few who have shown some signs of civic interest have only pecked around the edges of reform. Nothing has been done, Harlan Thornton. Not one sweeping bill has been introduced. I have waited, hoping. I hoped the people would arise and help me with this burden. But I've waited in vain. There are only two more days in this session allowed for the introduction of new business.

"My boy, I talked first with you about my becoming Governor of this State. That's why I'm talking first with you about this matter. I shall call every man of this legislature to me and talk with him privately, and in that work I want your assistance. I want you to bring them to me. I called you here to-night because to-morrow night folly and fashion will rule all in this city, and I must be there with the rest. Let me tell you, my boy, that when the men of this legislature awake, after that night of frivolity, it will be to open their eyes on some serious business. Not one word about what I intend to do until then. The session has been a very sweet cake till now—let the ball sugar-coat it! There'll be bitter eating provided day after to-morrow!"

He waited a moment, recovering from sudden passion.

"Ah," he said, gentle once more, "that sounds like senile raving. Pardon me. But while I've waited for the politicians of this State to show some signs of decency, waiting in vain, I've been swallowing back a lot of bitterness. No more of it! To our business now. I want you to know what is coming. I depend on you, as I have depended before, to be my master of ceremonies—and rather grim ceremonies they will be. For I have prepared several bills. You will introduce the House measures. I can depend on Senator Borden, from my county, for what I choose to have originate in the Senate. They are bills that will put our party and this State to the test of honesty. It's strange, isn't it, that what sounds so innocent should be so bitter?"

He opened a drawer in his desk. He took out papers and spread them before him. He selected one.

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“Abolishment of fees (a blow at every grafting officeholder); no more railroad passes for public officials; a bipartisan tax commission that shall haul the rich dodger out into the open—all these matters are covered here. But into your hands, young man, I put the one measure that is to be the most savage test of our honesty. I have put the most thought on it. Every lawyer in this State will try to find a flaw in it. But if I know anything about constitutional law it is framed to beat them all. I’ll not bother to read it to you. Carry it away, and guard it and study it.”

He held it up, waving it. His heart was plainly full. He talked as one addressing the careless multitude—and talking, at the same time, to himself.

“You may divine what it is. It handles the great topic in our State. The source of dishonor, corruption, perjury, and hypocrisy! The prohibitory law! Let me tell what it will do when it has been enacted into law. It will make the Governor of this State the grand high sheriff to enforce personally and actively this one law; it’s in our constitution, and the State should enforce its own. He will have all the resources of the State treasury behind him. He shall have for the first time PROHIBITION. Prohibition enforced, prohibition as the statutes have ordered it, prohibition in actuality instead of its pretence. The pretence has satisfied the rumsellers who sold, the rum-drinkers who drank, and the radicals who have boasted of the law, for all have got out of it what results were desired: appetite was catered to, vanity was satisfied, and graft engendered for the benefit of the office-holding class.

“I’m not going to predict what I think will be the result of this enforcement—not now. What I propose to do as an honest man is to put the prohibitory profession of this State to the test. When this is law, Luke Presson cannot pose as an honest man and continue to sell liquor to all-comers, he cannot bribe sheriff and police; I’ll send my own men to smash every bottle in his place, and I’ll put him into just as dark a cell as any Cheap John who peddles poison from his boot-leg. The rich man must stand on the level of the poor man. It’s the test of our State’s honesty—that bill is—and it shall be called ‘The Thornton Law.’”

He arose, and placed the document in Harlan’s hand.

The young man received it rather gingerly. He held it with somewhat the appearance of one who has the custody of a loaded weapon. His face expressed consternation rather than appreciation.

“Study the measure. I think you’ll find it interesting. Introduce it in the House day after to-morrow. Our gallant lawmakers will be sleepy after the ball. That will wake ’em up.” The old man’s nostrils dilated. He had the air of one who saw battle ahead and yearned for it.



"Move that it be referred to the Committee on Temperance," the Governor went on. "The fight will be on then and there, just as soon as they get their breath. They'll want to get it before a *safer* gang! Let 'em refer it to the Judiciary Committee if they've got the votes to do so. I'm not afraid they'll find any constitutional flaws. And that first vote will give me a line on the general situation. I'll find out just what men need to have the gospel put to 'em straight!"

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“Governor,” stammered the young man, still holding the document at arm’s-length, “wouldn’t it be—don’t you think a—a—some representative who has had more experience than I should be the one to see this bill through?”

“I want that bill sponsored by a man that I can trust absolutely. I’m sure of you, Harlan! When once it is introduced I’ll see that you have plenty of help before the committee and on the floor.”

It had come like a thunderclap on a moonlit night. It was sudden tempest prefaced by the lull of perfect calm. It was the signal to combat sounded when peace seemed assured. The young man perceived now how much of his early zeal had deserted him. He shrank from the task the Governor had assigned to him. It was a blow that was aimed at the tenderest point of his own party; it was obliging the party, as the dominant power, to thrust upon the mass of the people the radical execution of a law which public opinion secretly opposed—that opinion even slyly welcoming the breach of it. And Governor Waymouth had emphasized what that new measure meant by citing the name of Luke Presson. It set the situation before Harlan in a flash. He was summoned to carry out his pledge of loyalty to Governor Waymouth by attacking the pet policy of nullification that kept his own party off the shoals to which extreme radicalism would surely drive it. The first man who would be hit—both as chairman of the party State Committee and in his personal interests—would be the man whose daughter he was seeking. Harlan wondered how that marriage proposal would sound, either on the heels or on the eve of the introduction of “the Thornton bill.”

His uncertainty showed so plainly in his face that the Governor walked around his table and scrutinized him closely.

“My boy,” he asked, “has the enemy captured you while you’ve been resting on your arms? Remember, there are slick and specious ways of making the wrong seem right in politics! I hope you haven’t been tampered with!”

For a guilty moment Harlan remembered the admonitions of Madeleine Presson. He was promptly ashamed that they had come to his mind when the Governor spoke his fears.

“I’m going to tell you just why I’m a bit slow in this matter,” he said, manfully. “It may seem a trivial reason to you, Governor Waymouth. I stopped to wonder how it would affect my friendship with the Presson family if I should introduce that bill.”

“Oh, I see how the land lies! You can understand now how old I am—old and cold with all the romance burned out of me! I’d forgotten that there’s anything except politics left in the world. So—” He paused, beaming kindly on the young man, and pursing his lips ready for the jocose supposition that Harlan foresaw and anticipated.

“No,” he declared, flushing, “it isn’t that way. It hasn’t gone that far, Governor. I ask your pardon for mentioning my personal affairs, especially an affair of this sort. But I should be very sorry to break off my friendship with the Pressons.”

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The Governor went back to his chair, and sat down in it. He wrinkled his brows and took a long survey of his embarrassed caller.

"I'm afraid I spoke of the case of our mutual friend Presson in rather harsh terms. It would not work like that. Of course, he would bow to the inevitable if such a law were passed. But if it becomes a personal matter in any respect, Mr. Thornton, do you believe that any member of Presson's family would be offended if Presson were made to obey the law?"

"Well, if he persisted against the new law, it would be a pretty hard position for any fair person to defend," admitted the young man.

"I think we may depend on it that this young person, admittedly 'fair'—at my age I can be allowed to bestow that compliment—will respect your integrity. I do not command you to do the service—I cannot do that. But I shall be disappointed if you allow personal reasons to interfere with your public duties. I have depended on you to do it. I have only a few that I can trust."

At that instant, in the presence of this man who had sacrificed so much, Harlan felt that his own interests were too petty for consideration.

He put the document into his pocket.

"Forgive me for hesitating, Governor Waymouth. I'm afraid I'll never make a very good public servant. But I'll try to hold my eyes straight ahead after this."

"Keep the paper in your pocket. Think it all over. You're at the place every man reaches. What you want to do and what you ought to do split very sharply sometimes. I'll let you decide. I have no more to say."

Harlan walked back to the hotel, trying to adjust himself to this new phase of the question. Once more he had been called upon to lead the charge of the forlorn hope. He had not the same thrill of zealous loyalty as before. He was a little hurt because the Governor had made the affairs of his heart of so small importance. An old man's austerity could not understand, perhaps, but nevertheless Harlan felt that he was entitled to some consideration. He had not acquired an old man's calm poise—he was not entirely willing to put politics ahead of everything else, now that he found there were so many other things in life. Was it not true that the mass preferred to pay court to high ideals in the abstract, and bitterly resented any attempt by sincere individuals to enforce the actual? He understood rather vaguely that he would be applauded by the radicals—he had met their leaders and did not like them—he would get the applause the mob gives to "a well-meaning fellow," but more than all he would be sneered at behind his back as "a crank trying to reorganize human nature," and therefore to be shunned. He had been mingling intimately with the chief men of the State; he knew what kind of

comment they had for others. Most of all, he knew that the mild applause of the mob would not be loud enough to drown out those familiar voices nearest him—he had heard those voices many times before: there was his grandfather, there was Luke Presson, there were the political associates with whom he had already begun to train on the basis of compromise.

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There was Luke Presson's daughter!

He strode into the lobby of the hotel, his face gloomy and his thoughts dark. Linton stepped forward to meet him, hat and overcoat on. It was evident that he had been waiting. The sight of him did not improve Harlan's temper. From the first day of the session they had eyed each other malevolently. They had bristled at every possible point of contact. Linton's last exploit had been a speech favoring the railroad tax rebate, a speech in which he scored those who opposed it as enemies to the development of the State. The fervor of his eloquence had made even Harlan Thornton doubt, sourly, whether a constitution that was framed before the exigencies of progress were dreamed of should be too rigidly construed. That was still another point where he and his grandfather disagreed, and the cogent speech of Linton had been the cause of further dispute between them. The Duke was disgusted because his grandson could be so scrupulous that he could not be progressive. For Harlan the straight path of rectitude was fringed with signs set there by friends, every sign inscribed "Fool." From the first, Linton had seemed to aggravate his difficulties, politically and personally.

"Can you give me a few minutes of your time?" he asked, stiffly.

"If it's business, and important, yes," returned Harlan, scowling.

"I should not bother you with anything except business. And as this is of a private nature, I must ask you to invite me to your room."

Harlan led the way to the elevator.

Linton did not remove his overcoat when they were closeted together. He stood with hat in his hand.

"It may surprise you to learn that my business concerns Miss Presson and the legislative ball to-morrow evening," began Linton, but Harlan indignantly broke in.

"You can have no possible business with me, sir, in which Miss Presson's name may be mentioned. Don't you use her name—not in any way. Do you understand?"

"I understand this: I know what I'm talking about and exactly why I've come here, and you're going to listen. Miss Presson has accepted your escort to the ball to-morrow evening. Don't you know, Thornton, why you can't take Madeleine Presson into public, this whole State looking on? I hate to say any more than that. I don't think it's necessary for me to say any more than that!" His face was hard, his tone accusing.

"I tell you, you have no right to mention Miss Presson to me!" cried the other.



“I’m taking it on myself, and I’m giving you a chance by doing it,” retorted Linton. “The story is bad enough now. But you’ll be drummed out of this State if you insult an innocent girl in the way you plan to do.”

In his indignation Thornton had been slow to grasp the fact that his rival was making hints that both affronted and threatened. His conscience accused him of nothing. He felt the crackle of paper in his breast-pocket. He promptly suspected that Linton had gleaned a hint of the proposed legislation which would involve Madeleine’s father.

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He tried to control his anger.

“Will you kindly explain to me by just what right you say this,” he sneered—“except, possibly, that you’re jealous because Miss Presson chose me as her escort.”

“I have a right as a friend of her mother, if nothing else! I am keeping this thing as still as I can for your sake, for in this case protecting you means protecting her. I don’t want to say any more! But sudden illness must prevent you from accompanying Miss Presson into public at that ball.”

Harlan beat a palm upon his own breast.

“I’ve had enough of this, Linton. You tell me what you’re driving at.”

It was plain that Linton hated to be more explicit. This culprit did not seem to quail before vague accusation, as he had expected him to do. He was faced by a young man whose face was lighted by wrath, curiosity, and kindred emotions that were obviously not those of guilt.

“Let me say this in my own defence,” pleaded Linton. “Spinney was going right to Mr. and Mrs. Presson with the story. I got it from him almost by accident. We were talking over our railroad bill this evening, and he mentioned your stand. Then he out with the story that he picked up when he was in Fort Canibas. I do not listen to gossip, Mr. Thornton, but it is plain that Spinney has facts. I have inquired in a prudent way of other men from your section. He has the story, but what they say confirms it.”

Harlan listened, his blank amazement depriving him of speech.

“I’ve said enough now, haven’t I?” asked Linton, significantly.

“No, by God, you haven’t!” shouted the other, coming out of his lethargy of astonishment. The recollection of Spinney’s sinister hints came to him. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that a man who will fool and throw over a girl in a way that drives her away from home and friends is no fit escort—”

He got no further. He knew a thoroughly maddened and dangerous man when he saw one. He stepped back when Harlan dashed at him, and Thornton halted of his own accord. After a time he calmed himself enough to speak.

“I’ll not begin with you, Linton. I’ll begin with the man who started that damnable lie. Oh, that—that—!” He flailed his arms about his head, unable to express himself. “You’ve been lied to. You don’t know any better than to say that. If you hadn’t been jealous you’d never have brought the story to me. I’ll make allowances,” he raved on;

“but the man who started that story will swallow it with teeth and blood mixed.” He stamped about the room. It was so horrible that he could not grasp the enormity of the lie all at once.

Linton was impressed but not routed. He waited till Harlan was quieter.

“I hope you’ll get it straightened out,” he said, coldly. “But with a story like that extant, of course you’ll see the wisdom of the course I’ve suggested. You cannot afford to drag Miss Presson’s name into your affair.”

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"Into my affair! You dirty pup, do you dare to intimate—are you lunatic enough to take stock in any such story about me?"

The epithets sent the color into Linton's face. But he restrained himself.

"Your own grandfather had to take you in hand about the matter before you left Fort Canibas, Thornton. I heard him say that much myself. He gave no details. I don't care for any. I merely came to you to bring a hint as to what you ought to do. You don't seem to take the hint. If you haven't got manliness enough yourself to keep away from Miss Presson until this story—well, put it mildly, and say until this story is run down—then I propose to insist that you do so."

"Look here, Linton, I've usually got pretty good control of myself. I'm trying to hold myself in now—trying as hard as I can. What you have told me is a lie—a damnable lie. See? I say it calmly." He was quivering. "You don't know what you're talking about. I haven't the patience to explain to you. It's none of your business. You keep away from me. Now don't put any more strain on my self-control—in God's name, don't do it, Linton!"

"I am making no secret of my hopes in regard to Miss Presson," stated Linton, firmly. "I have been waiting until I could offer her what she has been accustomed to. You have the advantage of me in money, Thornton. But you're welcome to that! My hopes give me the right to guard her from scandal. I insist that you relieve her of your presence to-morrow evening!"

Harlan, shaken, gray with passion, his teeth set over his lower lip, rushed to the door and threw it open.

"D—n you, you get on the outside!" he panted. "I'm in the mood to kill you!"

Linton went. By his visit and his warning he had thrown a sop to his conscience. He had approached Harlan Thornton with something like desperation. Under his calmness he had long-hidden, consuming passion for Madeleine Presson—a love that had grown through the years, and now waited a fitting time of expression and the endorsement of assured position. If he had any doubts of the truth of the shameful story he had brought he concealed those doubts—he would not admit them to himself. He proposed to win the girl. He chose any weapons that would rout the interloper.

"I warn you that I shall protect her," he said, from the corridor.

"Take a warning from me, too: you get into my affairs, and you'll find hell fires cooler!"

"Your affairs do seem to have that flavor," declared Linton, walking away.

Thornton hurried to the headquarters that the corporations maintained in the hotel for Spinney. Spinney was not there. He ran back to his room and telephoned to the clerk of the hotel. He was informed that Mr. Spinney had gone away for a few days.

It was late, but he threw on his coat and hastened up street to the Presson home. The windows were dark. He did not have the assurance to arouse the family at that time of night.

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By that time, walking in the crisp air of the winter night, he had soothed, somewhat, his fever of anger, sorrow, and shame.

Calmer, he had thoughts only for the bitter wrong that had been done Clare Kavanagh. Somehow it seemed that all were leagued against her—and him! Memory of her unselfishness, her simple faith in him, her abnegation, her true, little-woman trust in his career—it all rushed upon him. For a time he was almost ashamed to face what memory brought to him. Then manfully he set himself to read his heart—at least, he tried to. In the end, hidden in his room, he wept—honest tears of a strong man conscious that he was unable by his strength to hold disaster from an innocent. Even his attempt to find the rogue, Spinney, was futile. He wept, thinking of Clare Kavanagh—exiled from her home, bravely solving her problem of life alone. He went to sleep thinking of Clare Kavanagh.

It was fortunate for his self-respect that she filled his mind so completely at that moment. Otherwise the reflection that he had led himself by degrees to covet the brains and beauty of Madeleine Presson would have convinced him that in his relations with women he was either fool or knave.

Youth, untried in the ways of women and the wiles of loving and the everlasting problem of what the heart most truly desires, has wondered and wept the long ages through!

CHAPTER XXV

WOMEN, AND ONE WOMAN

The next day brought the reign of woman. That festal day in mid-session which preceded the legislative ball had been made woman's field-day by long custom. The politicians arranged the programme in order to bunch events: for the women demanded that they be heard each session on the suffrage question; and the women pleaded for one opportunity to show their best gowns in parade for fashion's sake. So the politicians made one bite at the cherry; "took a double dose and had it over with," as Thelismor Thornton ungraciously expressed it. Frivolity was combined with feminine fervor on the suffrage question. One element was invited to neutralize the other. The politicians could endure the combination better than they could face each faction separately. The advocates of suffrage made their plea while their sisters promenaded the State House corridors to the music of the band. The festival spirit dominated.

The members of the Judiciary Committee wore fresh waistcoats, pinks in their buttonholes, and a genial air—and had not the least idea of granting the suffragists anything except a benignant hearing. The report of "ought not to pass" was a foregone conclusion.

But there were potted palms in the lobbies, decorations in the rotunda, and masses of flowers in the House chamber which was given over to the hearing. And sweet music softened legislative asperities. The women asked, smiling. The men refused, smiling.

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The federated women's clubs of the State had the suffrage matter in their keeping. The delegates were not hard-faced women clutching umbrellas. They were the strictly modern suffragists—radiant matrons, fresh-complexioned girls, women who led in culture and fashion in their respective communities.

At the previous session the Legislative Committee had asked that the delegation of women be restricted to the usual number of persons that appeared at legislative hearings. When a dozen came with their petitions and arguments the Committee blandly stated that there seemed to be no general demand in the State for woman's suffrage—witness the attendance of women interested!

This year the women proposed to disprove that assumption. Every woman's literary, social, art, and economic club in the State sent two delegates. The State was raked for women, even the schools were ransacked. At ten o'clock in the forenoon the State House was packed and women were still crowding in. The galleries, aisles, and standing-room of House and Senate were choked with silks, furs, and feathers which decorated the beauty and brains of the State.

The routine was hurried through. Callous man, gasping for breath, wanted to escape.

The few in the lobby who dared to smoke soon hid their cigars under their coat-tails and departed to the hotels. The cuspidors were hidden. Gay frocks swept cigar stubs out of sight.

When the members of the Judiciary Committee attempted to enter the House chamber to conduct the hearing on suffrage, it required full ten minutes of persuasive eloquence and courteous pushing on the part of the messengers to break the jam of women that filled the door and packed the lobby floor adjacent. The fair lobbyists did not want to give up even that vantage-point in order to admit the men who were to listen. And after the committee had managed to wriggle its way in single file to the platform they had not the heart to expel the women who were occupying their chairs. They gallantly stood in a row against the rear wall of the Speaker's alcove and listened to the petitioners—each woman allowed two minutes! Not one member of the legislature, outside the committee, heard. It would have been an ungallant man, indeed, who did not surrender his place in the chamber to a woman who had come to present her cause. So the women amiably listened to themselves, and the committee listened to them in all politeness, and both sides understood that it was only a genial social diversion out of which nothing would come. In that gathering a suffragette would have been squelched by her own sex.

Harlan Thornton came to the State House early.

Morning had brought him wiser counsel. He felt no impulse to rush to the Presson house. He wondered now what he would have said if he had gained access to

Madeleine Presson the night before. The astounding insult by Herbert Linton troubled him less. It had been a jealous outburst—Linton's confession of his love for the girl had revealed his animus. Probably Linton regretted it—in Harlan's calmer mood he trusted that such was the case. Conscious of his innocence, it did not seem to Harlan that any man would dare to deal further in such outrageous slander after what had been said in their interview.

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Harlan was one of the first to escape from the House through the press of women. There were too many of them. Officious gentlemen had begun to introduce him to wives and daughters and friends. He was not shy, but the presence of so many women—chattering, vivacious, exchanging repartee, challenging retort from him, was disquieting. He made his way to his committee-room. It was in a far corner of the building and was quiet. He had not been able to inspect the bill that Governor Waymouth had placed in his hands. He determined to put behind himself for a time the presence of women and the thoughts of women—even those thoughts which had so occupied him the night before.

There was no one in the committee-room. The State House holiday had attracted his associates. He examined the measure that he was expected to sponsor.

It provided for a commission of three men to be appointed by the Governor and to remain under his direct control—a bipartisan board. These men were to appoint special deputies to any number desired. To any county, city, or town these deputies were to be dispatched when it became apparent that police or sheriffs were lax or dishonest in enforcing the prohibitory law. No limits were placed on the number of these men empowered to kill saloons and put liquor-peddlers out of business. No special amount of money was to be asked of the legislature—the bill provided that the State treasury should stand behind the movement.

The young man was quick to understand the tremendous power granted to the Governor by that bill. Under it no party management, no group of politicians, could club or coax the liquor interests into line at the polls by manipulation of the traffic. No sheriff could enrich himself by selling privileges. No city could govern itself in that respect—declaring that public opinion favored the saloons and making local law superior to the constitutional law of the State. The bill provided that a judge must impose both fines and imprisonment when convictions were secured, and, therefore, no judge could carry on any longer a practical system of low license by imposing fines alone.

It was the principle of *enforced* prohibition put on trial.

In the past the Luke Pressons of the State had laughed at interference by a Governor. Local politics, easily handled, had controlled the actions of cities, and police had kept their hands off the traffic for years.

Authority in liquor matters had been vested in the county high sheriffs, and these men were controlled from State headquarters wholly in the interests of politics.

Harlan was sufficiently familiar with the old plan to know how this new system would upset the entire political machine of his State. That folio of document was a bombshell.

He was holding it outspread in his hands when the door opened so suddenly that it startled him. Thelimer Thornton came in, shaking his shoulders disgustedly.

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"Feathers and cackle!" he muttered. "This State House turned into a poultry yard! And half of 'em braced back trying to crow! When a hen crows and a woman votes—well, it's all the same thing!"

He relighted the cigar that he had brought through the press hidden in his big palm. He eyed his grandson keenly and with some disfavor as he puffed the cigar alight.

"Look here, bub," he burst out, "there are enough women around here to-day to remind me that I want to have a word with you on the woman question. You intend to marry Madeleine Presson, don't you?"

"*Intend* to marry her!" blazed his grandson. "You talk as though it was the fashion to grab a girl and carry her off as they did in the Stone Age."

"You know what I mean very well, sir. I take it you are still decent, and if you're decent you'll marry the girl you've beaured around for six months—providing she'll have you. That was the style in my day—and decency doesn't change much—at least, it ought not to."

Had it been the day before, Harlan Thornton would have declared to his grandfather what his intentions were toward Madeleine Presson. The thoughts of the past night's vigil came upon him now—he hesitated. He was angry with himself—angry with this blunt and persistent old man. He did not know whether resentment held him back from acknowledging that he had been a suitor for the hand of Luke Presson's daughter or whether it was the strange, new feeling toward Clare Kavanagh since he had learned that her good name was in such piteous need of his protection and defence.

"Have you asked her to marry you?" demanded the Duke.

"Yes, I have—that is—" he paused. His air irritated still more the testy humor of the old man, plainly provoked by earlier matters.

"That is'!" he sneered. "'I have.' 'Perhaps I have!' 'Maybe I have—let's see what my notes say!' What in the devil is the matter with the young men nowadays, anyway? Blood in your veins about as thick as Porty Reek molasses! You say you have asked her to marry you? Well, if you've asked her and mean it, have you got anything to do with that Kavanagh girl being around this State House to-day?"

Harlan sprang to his feet. He threw the document upon the table. His heart leaped within him. Even while his emotions bewildered him he found himself asking his conscience why he had not searched for her in spite of Dennis Kavanagh and her own plain desire to avoid him. The bare knowledge that she was near sent the blood into his face. Her coming to him seemed reproach for his acceptance of her flight.

"Do you mean that?"

“You are certainly giving me a fine imitation of a man who is surprised,” stated his grandfather. “Maybe you are! I hope so. But she’s here. She’s with a bunch of girls from some school or other, paraded around by a hatchet-faced woman—another crowing hen that’s trying to teach parliamentary law, I suppose. Harlan, I hope you’ve been square with me about that girl! Now, if you’re honest, and don’t know she’s here, keep out of sight. I’ve given you the tip. She’ll be speaking to you—and it will mix matters for you. She’d like nothing better than to do it!”

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"I'm sick of that kind of talk from you," protested the grandson, angrily. "Can't you mention the name of that innocent girl without a slur or an insult? And there's no reason why I cannot meet Clare Kavanagh any time and at any place."

"Your political rule of out-and-open, as you've been tutored by Vard Waymouth, may work with men, but I'm telling you that it won't operate with girls," replied the Duke. "You may mean all right, but I'm suspicious of you. You sneaked back to Fort Canibas last summer to see her—now didn't you?"

"I saw her."

"You don't pay much attention to my wishes, do you, Harlan?"

"I claim the right, in a few matters, to be my own master."

"Even to making a devilish fool of yourself! You want Madeleine Presson. I can see that you want her. I've been watching. And I'm coming out now and say that I want you to have her. She's my idea of a wife. Now you needn't go to talking about that Kavanagh girl and *friendship*! There's no such thing as that kind of friendship."

Harlan had no time then to vent the anger that was seething in him. It seemed that every one who willed took the liberty to intrude upon the affairs which he tried to keep sacred. While that thought was uppermost in his troubled emotions, Linton, the other chief offender, came in, Presson with him.

The chairman began briskly. He was serious, but he spoke kindly.

"I don't usually interfere in these matters, but we'd better have this thing straightened out for the good of all of us. I'm glad you're here, Thelimer. I want you to stand by and listen. Here are two mighty good boys, these two—and now we'll leave out all political differences. We can afford to. We're all better friends than we were when the session opened." In spite of his absorption in his own affairs Harlan thought of the legislative morrow and its possibilities. "Now, this isn't politics! As I say, I don't usually meddle in my wife's or my daughter's—"

"Just one moment, Mr. Presson!" Harlan strode forward. "Has this lying scoundrel dared to bring his dirty scandal to you?"

He looked over the head of the chairman into the defiant face of his rival. The little man threw up his hands, standing between them.

"Hold on! Hold on! You haven't come to me in the usual way, but as near as I can find out both of you are after my daughter. I know of my own knowledge, Harlan, that you have been interested up-country. I simply want to have a general understanding. I

brought Linton here with me. No use in running between! Let's have our say face to face."

Harlan controlled himself.

"I think I understand just what prompts you, Mr. Presson," he said. "I respect your motives. You've been imposed upon. But you're not to blame. I know what you're going to ask me. I'll save you the trouble. I admire your daughter greatly. I have intended to ask her hand in marriage." He was suddenly conscious that the determination to persist in that suit was not acute.

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"That wasn't what I was going to ask you," said Presson with decision. "It's about the girl whom I saw—"

"The name of no other person belongs in this discussion," broke in Harlan, firmly. "I refuse to permit that name to be dragged in, for it's insult and scandal."

There was silence in the room. The chairman looked at Harlan, impressed by his demeanor. He knew the young man well enough to think twice before he persisted. Thelismier Thornton smoked hard, scowling. He was a little cautious about thrusting himself further into a matter that he knew would test the Thornton spirit in his grandson.

But Linton was determined to win his point. He thought he saw his opportunity. He hoped he could force a break between Presson and the other suitor.

"I'm interested in this matter as much as any one," he declared. "I have not told you the full story, Mr. Presson. But I'm here to see this matter straightened out for good and all, and unless you get an answer from this man, as a father ought to, I'll see that you have the facts to put you right."

"Linton, didn't I tell you last night that you were circulating a lie?" Harlan's face was gray.

"If it's a lie why are you afraid of telling Mr. Presson the whole truth and explaining the matter?" insisted Linton with a lawyer's pertinacity in extracting evidence. He realized that if young Thornton talked, even to admit the facts that information from the north country seemed to prove, a bit of impromptu cross-examination might yield results that would help the Linton cause.

"I refuse because every word that is said on the subject is a gross insult to an innocent girl," declared Harlan, passionately. "And I warn you that if you open your mouth again you'll get the only thing a man can give you and remain a man!"

"You'd better take the hint, Linton," advised the Duke. "I don't know exactly what you're driving at, but you're heading toward trouble. They don't do things up our way as they do in a city court-room."

Linton was angry, desperate, and he was as stalwart as the other. He was not inclined to let that opportunity pass.

Defiantly he plunged into the story that Spinney had reported. To his astonishment Harlan rushed for the door. He went out and slammed it behind him.

A project had come to him, prompted by his furious rage which mocked common-sense. A man more accustomed to the conventions would not have attempted it. But all his north-country passion rioted in him at that moment.

The night before he had wept because the peace and good name of Clare Kavanagh were threatened and he could only beat the ugly phantom of scandal helplessly.

Now suddenly he found work for his hands—and his hands had always been his means of expressing his soul in toil, achievement, and in passion.

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He hurried down the stairs into the State House rotunda where the throngs were. The hearing before the committee was adjourned. The band was playing. He thrust himself through the press of the women. Maids and matrons stared after him. His face was pale, his lips made a straight-edge and his eyes swept every group with eagerness that was almost wild. It was search that was distracting. There were women, women. There were so many faces to scan! Chance led him to her—good fortune and the sudden thought that she would probably be found near some object of interest, were she escorted by a teacher. He saw the group near the great case that held the State's battle-flags. He caught her arm and her startled face was turned up to his.

"Come," he whispered, hoarsely. "Come! Do not ask me why. Only come. Hurry!"

With the trustfulness she had always shown in him she did not hesitate. She did not even offer excuses to the tall woman who stepped forward to inquire the intentions of this abrupt young man. She went, as she went in the north country when he called to her. Clinging to his arm she hurried up the broad marble stairway.

She did not ask why. Her faith was complete. But his demeanor frightened her.

"I was sorry after I got here," she gasped, as they hurried on. "But the others came from the school, and I thought it would be such a great place here that no one would notice me. I thought you would not see me, Harlan. But I wanted to learn about—about what you did—what the lawmakers did, so that—so that—"

"Hurry," he urged her. He feared that they would be gone.

This brusqueness, his haste, his sternness troubled her more and more. They were alone in the corridor that led to the committee-room. She stopped, holding him back with her strong young arms. He had hardly looked at her till then. She had changed in the months since he had seen her. Womanly dignity was mingled with the high spirit that had inspired the child. Her garb, her new mien made her beauty brilliant.

"I never lied to you yet, Big Boy," she cried. "I came here because I was hungry for a sight of you. Then I would go back to my work comforted. Now my conscience is clear. Take me where you will."

In that moment his heart was revealed to him. In the stress of new emotions he understood himself at last. He understood that the love which mates, which sweeps away all calculation, which welds, trusts, and never pauses to analyze or compute, is love that disdains mere admiration of intellect or lure of beauty.

His quiet nature had depths. They had never been stirred till then. The child-love had been budding there ready for blossom. It had been fed by faith and ripened by association. Passion now brought it to fruition. Madeleine Presson had appealed only



to one side of him. This girl rounded out the whole philosophy of love. She was not a divinity. His nature did not crave divinity. In his strength, sincerity, ingenuousness, his man's soul, primitive as the free woods, required the mate—one to be cherished and protected. And so, now, when all his soul was stirred, this girl, so bitterly in need of protection—the girl whom the years had endeared to him—came into his heart to reign there.

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Words, emotion choked him. But he could not wait, then. She saw something in his eyes she had never seen there till that moment. But before she could understand he carried her along with him.

“Come! I can’t wait!” he cried.

When he flung open the door of the committee-room the men in it were standing in silence. Presson had picked up the “Thornton Bill” and was reading it, scowling. Whatever Linton had said, it was plain that the father of Madeleine Presson had just found something which diverted his attention from family matters.

Harlan shut the door behind. He locked it. He stepped away from the girl, leaving her standing there. She was a picture to confute slander.

The chairman gazed at her in astonishment. He had not expected such prompt incarnation of the topic.

“I know what foul lies have just been uttered in this room by that fellow!” Harlan leaned forward and drove an accusatory finger at Linton. “Now here stands the woman you have insulted. Look at her, you lying hound! There’s only one thing you can do! Acknowledge yourself a liar and apologize!”

Linton did not speak. He raised his eyebrows; it was unspoken comment on the peculiar actions of this young savage from the woods.

“Presson, get out of here and bring help,” muttered the Duke. “Hell is going to break loose!”

The chairman slipped the document into his pocket and tiptoed around the side of the room. Harlan paid no attention to him. His eyes were for Linton.

“Are you going to apologize?”

“I’ll wait until—” began the lawyer, but he got no further.

The Thornton temper had been strained beyond the breaking-point. Harlan was upon him.

“Bring a dozen!” yelled the Duke after the chairman who had been tugging at the door, and now escaped.

Linton was tall and muscular, but law-practice is not lumbering. He struck viciously at Harlan, ducking to and fro with the briskness of the trained boxer. But the woodsman merely leaped upon him, heedless of his blows. He bore him down. He drove resistless knees into his shoulders. He thrust Linton’s face against the floor and ground

it against the boards. Then he dragged the limp figure past the cursing Duke toward the girl. She had fled to a corner, covering her eyes and sobbing in terror.

“D—n you, you’ll apologize to the girl who’s going to be my wife,” raved Harlan.

When Presson returned at the head of volunteers the victor was grinding the bleeding face on the floor once more and Linton was screaming appeals.

There were enough of them to separate the men. They dragged Harlan away out of the room in spite of his struggles. The mere sight of the lawyer seemed to infuriate him more.

The Duke hurried the girl out and away while the peacemakers were struggling with the young combatants.

“Stop that blubbing,” he commanded, roughly. “If you’ve got any grit left in you, brace up. Don’t let people here notice!”

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He was trying to hide as much of the true reason for the affray as he could. He wanted to get the girl out of sight.

"I didn't know—I did nothing—if it was about me I didn't—" He stopped her brutally.

"About you, you little fool? Of course it wasn't about you! My grandson is going to marry Luke Presson's daughter."

She stiffened in the hook of his arm. They were in the corridor and had not come into the view of the people.

"Every one knows it," he hurried on. He saw an opportunity to get in a cruel blow at the romance he suspected and hated. "They have been going together for months. She'll be the right kind of a wife for him. They were fighting about her—those two young hyenas."

She pulled away from him. The tears were on her cheeks, but she held herself straight and looked him in the eye.

"That's a lie, Mr. Thornton!"

"It's the truth. He'll marry her if you haven't spoiled it all for him—spoiled his good name and stirred up all this scandal for him just as he was getting ready to amount to something in the world, with a wife that could help him! You get away from here as quickly as you can. You hear me? If his career is spoiled you've done it. Don't stay around here and disgrace him any more. It's bad enough, as it is, for him and Miss Presson!"

She stared at him, stricken and puzzled. Then she left him.

"I don't need any further escort," she informed him, turning after she had gone a few steps. It was Dennis Kavanagh's girl speaking now. "I have been escorted by the Thorntons quite enough during the past ten minutes. I tell you again, I believe you lie. But I propose to understand something more about this—and I'll not disgrace you nor your grandson!"

"Go ask some questions!" he called after her. He felt sure that gossip would confirm him. But to make sure that Harlan did not follow her and find her and discredit gossip he turned back down the corridor purposing to keep that belligerent young man under watch and ward for a time.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WAY OF A MAID WITH A MAID

The Duke found his grandson in an anteroom where the half dozen excited, wondering men had conveyed him.

The old man and the young man stood for a few moments and gazed at each other. Harlan was breathless, disheveled, his knuckles were bleeding.

“Where is she?”

The Duke came close to him. “She went away. Now keep your mouth closed. You talk about disgracing a girl,” he muttered in his grandson’s ear; “if you haven’t disgraced her and yourself and all of us here to-day it isn’t because you haven’t done your best! God only knows why I didn’t leave you in the woods where you belong!”

“I’m going out to find her,” insisted his grandson. “This is my own business from now on.”

“You try to leave this room in the shape you’re in and I’ll have you committed to the insane asylum across the river. The girl has more sense than you’ve got.”

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While he was speaking Presson came in. He pulled the House bill from his pocket.

"Thornton," he said, walking up to Harlan, "I didn't think there could be anything more important just now than the damnable performance you've just been through and the part my family plays in it. But here's something I propose to take while it's hot!" He shook the document at the young man. Harlan swept it out of his grasp before he could prevent, and buttoned it in his breast-pocket.

"That is mine," he stated, not flinching under the indignant protest.

"If it's yours will you inform me what you intend to do with it?"

"I intend to introduce it in the House at to-morrow's session and work for its passage."

"He's got a bill there," roared the chairman, turning to the Duke, "that's written by the Devil himself! It makes old Waymouth archfiend of all the ramrodders in this State! Our sheriffs are made his deputies and the Russian Tsar becomes a hog-reeve beside him." He blurted out the purport of the measure, garnishing the recital with good, round oaths.

"So you're loaded with that, are you?" inquired the elder Thornton. He was as careless of the presence of the listeners as the chairman had been. He began invective, but the young man broke in.

"Grandfather," he said, firmly, "I've listened long enough to that kind of talk from you and Mr. Presson—I've listened to all kinds of reasons why a man should come here and sell his soul for the sake of getting ahead in politics." He was thinking of the temptation that had come to him in the form of Madeleine Presson. "I don't want any more of it. I don't know of any reason why this State shouldn't obey its laws so long as they remain laws. As to my private business, I suggest that the two of you keep still."

They had no appetite for further discourse with this young madman just then.

The Duke turned on his heel and walked out. Presson followed.

"Gentlemen," said the young man to those who remained, "I have no quarrel with you. I do not want any. Do you understand?" He wiped his hands with his handkerchief, smoothed his hair, and walked past them.

As calmly as he could he hurried through the lobbies and the rotunda of the State House. The crowds were thinning. The band had gone. The women had scattered to prepare for the ball of the evening. Among the few that were left he could not find her.

He went back to his committee-room and pondered until dusk fell.

One matter presented itself to his mood as a duty. He called a carriage and was driven to the Presson home.

Madeleine came down in answer to his card. But as she entered the reception-room her father followed at her heels, beginning threats as he came in.

"Father," she said, quietly, "I have just listened to you. You need not fear that I do not understand myself and my duty. I ask you to retire."

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He stood there a moment, still muttering his wrathful protest, but in the end her dignity mastered him. He went away.

What she did next amazed the young man who stood there waiting. She came to him and patted his cheek.

"My poor boy," she said, softly, and drew him down beside her on a couch.

For a moment the words he had come prepared to say deserted him. He could not speak. He found sincere compassion in her eyes—sympathy and something else which he did not fathom.

"I can do at least one decent thing to-day," he burst out. "I can come to you man-fashion and ask you to release me from our engagement of this evening. I know, of course, you wouldn't go to the ball with me after what has happened. But there's a deeper reason. I am going to tell it to you. Don't misunderstand me. I don't know the right words to use. Any way I put it may sound as though I were a cad. But understand me, Madeleine—as my friend, understand me—for God's sake, do! You have been wise. You have counselled me. I need a friend now!" His voice broke, and she waited. "I've come to my senses. Oh, it's no discredit to you that I thought I loved you. I thought so."

"Your love would honor any woman, Harlan."

He looked at her piteously. He understood how his confession would sound. Only his resolve to be honest with her availed to drive him to the confession he intended to make.

"I couldn't say it to some girls," he cried. "They would not see how it was. But I can only tell you the truth!"

"Wait a moment," she said, interrupting. "You are not just yourself. Let me talk to you. Only a little while ago a girl came to me."

He started up, but she restrained him.

"Listen! She had heard. There were plenty to tell her when she asked. We have given occasion for gossip. Gossip has eyes and ears and good imagination. It has even been reported that our engagement would be announced after the legislative ball. Wait! She heard all that from the first one she asked. She has told me so. She believes it!"

"Believes it! What did you tell her?"

“Wait, I say! I have shown patience this afternoon. I waited for her to speak. Let me tell you what she said while I waited. She said she wanted you to be a great man. She knew, so she told me, that she only brought trouble and distress to you. She wanted to see me so that she might know if I were the one who could help you in your career. I’ll not tell you what she said to me about myself. She is a sweet and gracious girl, that little Clare, Harlan! She said she knew I could help you in your work in life. And she wanted to tell me the little story of you two—she wanted to forestall gossip that might hurt you in my eyes. And she gave you to me. Harlan, I have heard of that kind of love—but I didn’t believe it existed. Did you?”

Tears were on his cheeks.

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"I know her!" he choked.

She understood his answer. She waited a little while.

"And I love her above all the honors and treasures of this world!"

She stood up.

"I'm going to find her," he went on. "You understand me, don't you, Madeleine?"

"I understand. But you shall not go to find her"—she smiled into his startled eyes—"for she is hidden in my room, waiting to tell me more—waiting until I tell her something that will take the burden from her heart. I had been listening to her when my father came in with his story; I had not made my confession. It would have comforted her—it will comfort her, for I can tell her truthfully I have not yet met the man I can love, Harlan—you were not the one!" She left with him the consolation of a smile and hastened away. She did not even reproach him because of his affair with Linton.

He stood waiting at the door. He heard the steps on the stairs. He was ready to clasp her.

But Madeleine Presson came in alone. "The girl has gone, Harlan. The maid said she ran away after I left her. I was a fool. I dropped your card!"

He stood dumb and motionless.

"Gone, believing that!" he gasped.

She shook him. "But you can find her. Remember that she is young. She believed gossip too quickly. You must find her. Hurry! She will only have to see your eyes to know that they all lied."

He rushed to the door.

"Bring her to me," cried the girl. "I'll know how to help you."

At the railroad station he was told that the special trains had gone with the visitors who were not in town for the ball.

He did not even know the name of the school from which she had come.

At the State House he at last found some one who had seen and known the group—an attache of the State educational department. There was no train that way until midnight. He took it. How he passed the time of waiting he never knew. He was at the

doors of the institution as early as decency permitted. He did not wish to compromise her.

He was assured in a manner that left no room for doubt that Miss Kavanagh had not returned with the others. They were much worried and had notified her father.

Harlan sent an appealing telegram to him, daring even to solicit that ogre of the North. But no word came to him.

He wired orders to his caretaker at "The Barracks" to investigate at that end, and returned to the State capital, distracted, baffled, not knowing what step to take next. The session had not closed for the day when he arrived at the State House.

Men in the lobby stared at him as he passed. It was evident that tongues had been busy with his affairs. His grandfather, striding up and down, tried to intercept him, but he kept on to his seat. All the eyes of the House were on him. Word of the "Thornton Bill" had gone abroad. Now, in spite of his mental distress, he remembered his duty.

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When he rose to ask the privilege of introducing a bill, interrupting the order of business, he anticipated objection.

No objection was made.

The opposition did not propose to waste effort on pettifogging preliminaries.

The bill went in and on its way—and that night the capital buzzed with the discussion of it.

Harlan Thornton spent half the night at the telegraph-office, his mind intent on something far from prospective legislation.

But no word came to comfort him—no clew that he could pursue.

Days grew into weeks. He did not attempt search in person. It would have been vague wandering about the country. He remained to hold up the hands of Governor Waymouth, finding relish for fight in the rancor that settled within him.

He and Linton silently faced the gossip that beat about them in regard to their encounter—and kept away from each other. Theirs was a balanced account.

And Madeleine Presson somewhat ostentatiously permitted the attentions of the young Secretary of State!

CHAPTER XXVII

THE EVERLASTING PROBLEM

Day after day, during that session, an old man sat in the executive chamber of the State House. His face grew as white as his hair. There were deeper lines in his countenance than mere old age had tooled across the skin. One after the other the men of the two branches of the legislature came before him at his summons. He did not entreat of them. There was no more of that suave political diplomacy in the executive chamber, after the fashion of the old days of easy rule. This Governor declared himself to be the mouthpiece of the people of his State. He showed to the legislators their path toward absolute honesty. He ordered them to follow it. One or two of the first ones who were called upon the carpet dared to refuse—attempted to evade. He promptly issued statements to the press, holding those men up to the people of their State as traders and tricksters. Voters had always understood that trades and tricks were in progress in the legislature, and had never bothered their heads much about the matter. But this incisive showing up of individuals was new and startling and effective. It afforded no opportunity for the specious reasoning along mere political lines which had excused dishonesty in the past.

Protests poured in on the would-be rebels. Their experience warned the others. The State was in a mood to try reform. The reform was promised on the usual broad lines. Individuals did not stop to reflect what effect the suggested legislation would have on their own interests. Every man was after "the other fellow."

"I'll keep you here until you pass these laws," stated the grim old man in the executive chamber, "even if you stay here till snow flies again."

Legislators are paid by the session, not by the week. The prospect of spending the summer fighting an obstinate old man, with the people behind him, was not alluring when personal expenses were considered. Even lobbyists and corporations and political considerations fail to hold sway under such conditions.

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The Governor's bills went through.

"They've abolished fees," drawled Thelismar Thornton, one day in the lobby, "to get square with Constable Emerson Pike up my way. Em went down to replevin some hens, and after he'd chased each hen a dozen times around the barn he sat down and charged up mileage to the county. The rest of this legislation is on the same basis. Here's a legislature that's like Dave Darrington's hogs. After old Dave lost his voice and couldn't holler to the hogs, he used to rap on the trough with his cane at feeding-time. Then a woodpecker made his home in the pig-pen and the hogs went crazy. Vard Waymouth is all bill! I'd reckoned I'd go home. But I guess I'll stay and see just how far dam foolishness can go!"

So he patrolled the lobby, puffing everlastingly at his cigar, watching the activity of Harlan with a disgust that he did not try to conceal and occasionally flinging a sour remark at that devoted young man.

"A calf leaving the cow to chase a steer," he growled. "He'll know better when it comes supper-time!"

One day a man halted him. "You may be interested in what's going on in the House, just now, Mr. Thornton. Your grandson is making a speech."

"Then he *has* lost his mind!" snapped the Duke. "I'd only suspected it up to now!"

But when he edged in at the door he discovered that his grandson was not making the usual spectacle which the untried orator affords. The zeal which had driven him into the fight was supporting him as he faced the men who were his associates. He stood at his desk, pale—but unfaltering. He was talking to them, man to man.

"It has met me to my face, it has followed at my back through all these weeks," he was saying. "I'm accused of helping to wreck my party. You know better than that, gentlemen. You know who did the wrecking. It has been going on for years. And we have been asked to hide the retreat of the wreckers. I refuse to allow those men who have wrecked our party to call themselves the true prophets and summon us to follow them. Our party is not simply the men who hold office for their personal gain. If making them honest or putting them out is destroying the party, then let's destroy and rebuild.

"We need to rebuild.

"Up in our woods it's dangerous to leave slash on the ground after a winter's cutting. The politicians have left a lot of slash in this State. The fire has got into it. It is burning up the old dead branches and tops, but it is hurting the standing timber, too—I understand that. Why not see to it after this that the men who leave political slash shall not be allowed to operate!

“It’s a bad litter, gentlemen, that has been left around the roots of our prohibitory law. I have introduced the bill that’s now under consideration. It has nothing to do with the principle of prohibition—the theory of that was threshed out in these chambers before I was born. But isn’t it time, gentlemen, to have a test of the *practice* of prohibition?”

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"I know little about politics. I am merely one of the hundreds of young men in this State who stand on the outside of politics and want the opportunity to be honest when we vote. We appeal to the older men of this State to drop the game for a little while and give us a chance to start fair. The biggest corporation in this State is the State itself, and I like to think that all of us, young or old, are partners or stockholders. I've been brought up in business. We know what we'd all do in straight business. Why can't we do it in State affairs? Too many influences surround a legislature to make its work really deliberative. After the heat and arguments of this session have died away we ought to have a meeting on a real business basis.

"Let the churches, the grange, the radicals, the liberals, the hotel men, the liquor men, all send their delegates. Let that assemblage take thought on a plan which will lift out of politics a question that doesn't belong there. Let's end civil war on this question. Give the young men some other picture as their eyes open on the politics of this State."

It was the earnest, ingenuous appeal of one crying out of the wilderness of human uncertainty—of one who saw the evils in those attempts of men to curb greed and appetite—of one earnestly seeking a remedy, but not clearly understanding that so long as the world shall endure, with men and women weak and human, some problems must remain unsettled.

"I'll suggest a place for that convention," muttered Thelismar Thornton to those who stood about him. "Hold it in Purity Park in Paradise! Settle the rum question!" he sneered. "Noah hadn't been stamping around on dry ground long enough to get his quilts aired out before he was drunk on Noah's Three Star! And Japheth probably got mad and passed a prohibitory law and thought he had the trouble fixed forever."

When the legislature finally adjourned the protestations that had been wrung out of it promised much in the way of honest reorganization.

Harlan Thornton remained with Governor Waymouth for a time. His Excellency found him indispensable.

The commissions were at work.

Office-holders whined, taxpayers squirmed. Honesty was greeted everywhere by wry faces.

But the "Thornton law," its deputies superseding county and city authority, was the bitterest political pill of all. The results discouraged the righteous—Governor Waymouth predicted them accurately with the old-age cynicism of one who understood human nature. The flagrantly open places were closed. But innumerable dives thereby secured the business which had gone to the open places in the days of toleration. An army could not have closed the dives—the proprietors of which, in most cases, carried

their villanous concoctions on their persons. Express companies were organized for the sole purpose of dealing in liquors by the parcel system, and the State's liquor agencies, established under the protection of the prohibitory law itself, were besieged by patrons who stood in queues of humanity like buyers at a theatre ticket-window.

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Reformation of human nature by mere statute was a failure!

But mere political disaster did not daunt the stern old man who held his commissioners to their task. The people themselves began to complain of the cost of the new system of enforcement—the money paid to make them obey their own laws. When their complaints were loudest the Governor allowed himself the luxury of a smile.

Reform for the mass. Admirable!

Reform for the individual. Atrocious infringement of personal liberty!

“I cannot make them good,” he said to Harlan. “But I can give them such a picture of their own iniquity that perhaps they’ll realize it and make themselves good. You can’t reform folks in this world on much of any basis except that!”

It was late summer and they were in the garden of the brick house at Burnside.

Harlan had been at his chief’s side day after day, shielding him as much as possible from those who came to solicit, to threaten, to complain. In the opportunity given him to meet every man of importance in the State he had won respect, even regard. His personality removed him from the ranks of the radicals and relieved him from the imputation that attached to them. His sincerity was evident. He was frank to express his disappointment at the results of the legislation he had assisted in procuring. He listened attentively to the suggestions of others. He made it plain that he was not unalterably wedded to a law because he had been instrumental in adding it to the code. He made known to all his willingness to compromise on everything except honesty, and day by day he made men understand better the basis of the system advocated by his chief and himself.

They had burnished the mirror of politics; they held its new and brighter surface up to the people that they might gaze on themselves. And in time the people came to realize what service had been done. And, as they realized it, the name of young Thornton went abroad in the State from mouth to mouth—men speaking of him as one who was entitled to the praise that attaches to honesty unsmirched by bigotry.

His optimism softened the asperities which men found in the character of the Governor. He attracted to the grim old man the loyalty of the youth of the State, and at the same time won that loyalty for himself. He had come forward at a time when men were ready to accept new ideals, even if they were obliged to wade to them through such mire as now soiled the execution of the new laws.

That proposed convention for the unprejudiced consideration of the liquor laws was taking form. The intemperate radicals were the only ones declaiming against



“compromise with the devil.” But the new conditions were revealing the real colors of those impractical zealots, and it was plain that their noisy minority would no longer be allowed to bluster down the truer and more equable spirit of “the best for all the people.” The men and women of the State were taking time to analyze some of those high-sounding phrases with which so-called temperance had disguised vicious theories which left human nature out of the equation.

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The politicians of the old school remained aloof.

They were pointing to “the wreck of the party.”

“And I’ll be passed down to history as the wrecker,” said the Governor, talking to Harlan under the big elm. “But you’ve got strong arms, my boy. I can see that you’ll have much to do in building anew out of the wreck, you and those who are beginning to appreciate you. I can see a future of much promise for you, Harlan.”

“I’ll be politely, but firmly, invited to go back to the woods,” protested the young man.

“You’ll not be allowed to do it,” replied the Governor, quietly. “You have been tested for your honesty. These newer times have eyes to recognize that quality. And the rogues are being smoked out. But remember that even the end of time will not find all questions solved. That thought will have to serve you for consolation.”

That was hardly the consolation that would satisfy impetuous youth and zeal in accomplishment.

But Harlan had been learning lessons in consolation.

The thought of Clare Kavanagh was with him night and day. In spite of all his searching she remained hidden. He did not confide his grief to any one. It brought pallor to his face and listlessness in the daily duties that bore upon him. Governor Waymouth took note at last. And when the young man asked for permission to go home to the north country for a time he reluctantly sent him away.

On the eve of his departure, which had been announced by a press that now followed his movements with the attention accorded to a man of importance in State affairs, he obeyed a summons from Madeleine Presson. She put a letter into his hands. It was addressed to Clare Kavanagh.

“You will find her, Harlan,” she said, comfortingly. “Love will search her out. And when you find her, give her this letter. There are words from woman to woman that woman understands.”

Harlan found his grandfather sitting on the broad porch of “The Barracks,” smoking and looking out across the river valley.

The spirit in which he had left that hateful legislature seemed to have departed from the Duke. The old quizzical glint was in his eyes as he grasped Harlan’s hand. After their greeting they sat together in silence.

“It’s a beautiful game, hey, my boy?” remarked the Duke, at last. “I see that some of the country papers have already begun to talk of you for Governor of the State. The editors

haven't seen you, but from what they've heard they probably think you're a hundred years old and have grown to enormous size!"

"Don't make game of me, grandfather," said Harlan, coloring.

"Oh, I'm only expressing a wicked hope. There are some men in this State that I'd like to see punished to that extent." He chuckled. "Put me down for fifty thousand dollars, first subscriber to your campaign fund."

"I can appreciate the humor of that joke," said Harlan. "For I've had a liberal education in the past year—I've found out just how little I know." He added wearily, "And I've found out how hard it is to be what you want to be."

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His grandfather tipped his head back into his clasped hands, his characteristic attitude. He squinted out across the hills.

“Bub,” he said, “I had the first real blow of my life the other day. A man pointed me out on the train and told another man, loud enough so that I overheard him, that I was Harlan Thornton’s grandfather—’and I forget his first name,’ he said, ‘it begins with T.’”

They ate supper together in the old mess-hall, back on their former footing. Word by word it came out of the Duke—his admiration for this boy who had made his own way. Every blow he had dealt his grandfather’s personal pride had brought the reactionary glow of appreciation of this scion who could hit so hard and so surely.

He watched him saddle his horse after supper. He did not ask where he was going.

Harlan did not know. His longing drew him down the long street and across the big bridge, his horse walking slowly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ONE PROBLEM SOLVED

The dusk was cool and soft. Below him the current gurgled against the piers with sounds as though the river’s fairies laughed there in the gloom. Doves nestled against the rafters of the bridge above, stirring with tired murmurings.

When he came out under the stars he saw the red eyes of Dennis Kavanagh’s house. The sight of them put the peace of the sky and fields out of his heart. He spurred his horse and galloped up the hill.

Even as Thelismer Thornton found true haven on his porch in the summer evening, so Dennis Kavanagh had his solace in his own domain, smoking his pipe. He sat there when Harlan swung close to the steps.

“Mr. Kavanagh,” said the young man, sternly, “I am Harlan Thornton. Do you know any ill of me?”

“I know that you’re old Land-Grabber Thornton’s grandson! I also know that you have shaken him in politics until his old teeth rattled. And I’m much obliged to you!”

“I’m not here to talk about politics or my grandfather. I’m here on my own account. You know where your own daughter is. I’ve come to ask you honorably and fairly where she is. Will you tell me?”

Mr. Kavanagh was silent a long time. He seemed to be struggling with some kind of surprise.

“No, I’ll not tell you,” he declared at last.

“Then I want to tell *you* something, sir. I love your daughter. I love her so honestly—so devotedly that I propose to search for her through this world. And when I find her—” he hesitated.

“If you find her?”

“I stopped because I do not want to threaten or boast. But I will say, Mr. Kavanagh, that when I find her I’ll beg of her to be my wife, and if she consents I promise you that no two sour old men are going to spoil our happiness! I want a fair understanding with you.”

“Queer notions you have of a fair understanding,” retorted Mr. Kavanagh. “You’d call it a fair understanding, would you, to come here and tell me to get off my own doorstep because you claimed the place?”

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"I mean that no man has the right to refuse happiness to his own or to others simply to curry his own personal spite. That's all, sir."

He whirled his horse and galloped away. He halted at the church, threw the reins over the animal's head and went and sat on the steps. He wanted to think. He wanted to calm himself. He hoped that the place would console him with its memories, afford him some hope, some suggestion.

He wondered now why he had allowed anything to delay that search. Yet he understood vaguely that she had hidden herself from him by her own choice. She had fled with wounded heart. He had not dared to seek her too eagerly.

The red eyes of Kavanagh's house mocked him.

Suddenly he started up. A figure, flitting and wraith-like, was coming toward him from those eyes. It was running. He could hear the swift patter of feet. She came straight to him where he stood; he had not dared to run toward her.

"I heard—I followed!" she gasped, and the next moment was sobbing in his arms.

All his talk to her for a long time was incoherent babbling of love and remorse. Then he held her close.

"Little girl," he said, "I've learned in the world outside. I've learned many things. But this—this I've learned bitterly and forever! There's love of fame and of power and of mere beauty—but there's only one love after all—that's the love that gives all, is all—that's my love for you and the love I think you have for me. It is ours—that love. Oh, my sweetheart, how we will cherish it all the years through!"

After a time he drew her down on the steps and they sat in silence through long minutes, listening to the muted calling of the crickets in the grasses, the rustle of the river current, all the soft noises of the summer night.

Then he bethought himself and drew Madeleine Presson's letter from his pocket. He gave it to her with a word of explanation.

Looking into his eyes, her own eyes brilliant as stars, she slowly tore the letter to bits and scattered the snowy fragments upon the grass.

"A woman does know," she said; "knows without reading what some other woman writes. I do not need her words, Big Boy. I know of my own heart. I knew long ago. I listened too readily to others. I have listened to my own love since. I have been waiting for you to come."

After another silence which needed no words to interpret it, he rose and lifted her to her feet. With his arm about her he walked to his horse. He mounted and drew her up, and she clung to him, as maid to knight.

“So, to your father now,” he told her.

“But not to speak to him harshly,” she said, a ripple of merriment in her voice, “for I’ll tell you a secret. He did not try to stop me when I ran away—he even called after me, ‘He’s turned in at the church, you wild banshee!’ They have told him things that have given him new respect for Harlan Thornton. But your grandfather?”

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“He has learned that my love is my own affair, along with my politics.”

“Let me do my part, Harlan,” she said, proudly. “Love will light the waiting, and it will not seem waiting. When I take my place at your side he shall not be able to say that I am not the wife for you.”

“It’s enough for me to-night that I love you and you love me. The years must take care of themselves. Love will mark off the calendar for us, little sweetheart, not in months or in years, but in one dear summer of waiting that will make work worth while and life worth living.”

He patted the horse’s neck and they went slowly up the road toward the Kavanagh house, their arms about each other, the gracious dusk hiding them. Life’s future hid its problem. Love’s present was enough.

THE END