The Air Trust eBook

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CHAPTER I.

The birth of an idea.

Sunk far back in the huge leather cushions of his morris chair, old Isaac Flint was thinking, thinking hard. Between narrowed lids, his hard, gray eyes were blinking at the morning sunlight that poured into his private office, high up in the great building he had reared on Wall Street. From his thin lips now and then issued a coil of smoke from the costly cigar he was consuming. His bony legs were crossed, and one foot twitched impatiently. Now and again he tugged at his white mustache. A frown creased his hard brow; and, as he pondered, something of the glitter of a snake seemed reflected in his pupils.

“Not enough,” he muttered, harshly. “It’s not enough—there must be more, more, more! Some way must be found. Must be, and shall be!”

The sunlight of early spring, glad and warm over Manhattan, brought no message of cheer to the Billionaire. It bore no news of peace and joy to him. Its very brightness, as it flooded the metropolis and mellowed his luxurious inner office, seemed to offend the master of the world. And presently he arose, walked to the window and made as though to lower the shade. But for a moment he delayed this action. Standing there at the window, he peered out. Far below him, the restless, swarming life of the huge city crept and grovelled. Insects that were men and women crowded the clefts that were streets. Long lines of cars, toy-like, crept along the “L” structures. As far as the eye could reach, tufted plumes of smoke and steam wafted away on the April breeze. The East River glistened in the sunlight, its bosom vexed by myriad craft, by ocean liners, by tugs and barges, by grim warships, by sailing-vessels, whose canvas gleamed, by snow-white fruitboats from the tropics, by hulls from every port. Over the bridges, long slow lines of traffic crawled. And, far beyond to the dim horizon, stretched out the hives of men, till the blue depths of distance swallowed all in haze.

And as Flint gazed on this marvel, all created and maintained by human toil, by sweat and skill and tireless patience of the workers, a hard smile curved his lips.

“All mine, more or less,” said he to himself, puffing deep on his cigar. “All yielding tribute to me, even as the mines and mills and factories I cannot see yield tribute! Even as the oil-wells, the pipe-lines, the railroads and the subways yield—even as the whole world yields it. All this labor, all this busy strife, I have a hand in. The millions eat and drink and buy and sell; and I take toll of it—yet it is not enough. I hold them in my hand, yet the hand cannot close, completely. And until it does, it is not enough! No, not enough for me!”

He pondered a moment, standing there musing at the window, surveying “all the wonders of the earth” that in its fulness, in that year of grace, 1921, bore tribute to him who toiled not, neither spun; and though he smiled, the smile was bitter.

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“Not enough, yet,” he reflected. “And how—how shall I close my grip? How shall I master all this, absolutely and completely, till it be mine in truth? Through light? The mob can do with less, if I squeeze too hard! Through food? They can economize! Transportation? No, the traffic will bear only a certain load! How, then? What is it they all must have, or die, that I can control? What universal need, vital to rich and poor alike? To great and small? What absolute necessity which shall make my rivals in the Game as much my vassals as the meanest slave in my steel mills? What can it be? For power I must have! Like Caesar, who preferred to be first in the smallest village, rather than be second at Rome, I can and will have no competitor. I must rule *all*, or the game is worthless! But how?”

Almost as in answer to his mental question, a sudden gust of air swayed the curtain and brushed it against his face. And, on the moment, inspiration struck him.

“What?” he exclaimed suddenly, his brows wrinkling, a strange and eager light burning in his hard eyes. “Eh, what? Can it—could it be possible? My God! If so—if it might be—the world would be my toy, to play with as I like!

“If *that* could happen, kings and emperors would have to cringe and crawl to me, like my hordes of serfs all over this broad land. Statesmen and diplomats, president and judges, lawmakers and captains of industry, all would fall into bondage; and for the first time in history one man would rule the earth, completely and absolutely—*and that man would be Isaac Flint*!”

Staggered by the very immensity of the bold thought, so vast that for a moment he could not realize it in its entirety, the Billionaire fell to pacing the floor of his office.

His cigar now hung dead and unnoticed between his thinly cruel lips. His hands were gripped behind his bent back, as he paced the priceless Shiraz rug, itself having cost the wage of a hundred workmen for a year’s hard, grinding toil. And as he trod, up and down, up and down the rich apartments, a slow, grim smile curved his mouth.

“What editor could withstand me, then?” he was thinking. “What clergyman could raise his voice against my rule? Ah! Their ‘high principles’ they prate of so eloquently, their crack-brained economics, their rebellions and their strikes—the dogs!—would soon bow down before *that* power! Men have starved for stiff-necked opposition’s sake, and still may do so—but with my hand at the throat of the world, with the world’s very life-breath in my grip, what then? Submission, or—ha! well, we shall see, we shall see!”

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A subtle change came over his face, which had been growing paler for some minutes. Impatiently he flung away his cigar, and, turning to his desk, opened a drawer, took out a little vial and uncorked it. He shook out two small white tablets, on the big sheet of plate-glass that covered the desk, swallowed them eagerly, and replaced the vial in the desk again. For be it known that, master of the world though Flint was, he too had a master—morphine. Long years he had bowed beneath its whip, the veriest slave of the insidious drug. No three hours could pass, without that dosage. His immense native will power still managed to control the dose and not increase it; but years ago he had abandoned hope of ever diminishing or ceasing it. And now he thought no more of it than of—well, of breathing.

Breathing! As he stood up again and drew a deep breath, under the reviving influence of the drug, his inspiration once more recurred to him.

“Breath!” said he. “Breath is life. Without food and drink and shelter, men can live a while. Even without water, for some days. But without *air*—they die inevitably and at once. And if I make the air my own, then I am master of all life!”

And suddenly he burst into a harsh, jangling laugh.

“Air!” he cried exultantly, “An Air Trust! By God in Heaven, it can be! It shall be!—it must!”

His mind, somewhat sluggish before he had taken the morphine, now was working clearly and accurately again, with that fateful and undeviating precision which had made him master of billions of dollars and uncounted millions of human lives; which had woven his network of possession all over the United States, Europe and Asia and even Africa; which had drawn, as into a spider’s web, the world’s railroads and steamship lines, its coal and copper and steel, its oil and grain and beef, its every need—save air!

And now, keen on the track of this last great inspiration, the Billionaire strode to his revolving book-case, whirled it round and from its shelves jerked a thick volume, a smaller book and some pamphlets.

“Let’s have some facts!” said he, flinging them upon his desk, and seating himself before it in a costly chair of teak. “Once I get an outline of the facts and what I want to do, then my subordinates can carry out my plans. Before all, I must have facts!”

For half an hour he thumbed his references, noting all the salient points mentally, without taking a single note; for, so long as the drug still acted, his brain was an instrument of unsurpassed keenness and accuracy.

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A sinister figure he made, as he sat there poring intently over the technical books before him, contrasting strangely with the beauty and the luxury of the office. On the mantel, over the fireplace of Carrara marble, ticked a Louis XIV clock, the price of which might have saved the lives of a thousand workingmen's children during the last summer's torment. Gold-woven tapestries from Rouen covered the walls, whereon hung etchings and rare prints. Old Flint's office, indeed, had more the air of an art gallery than a place where grim plots and deals innumerable had been put through, lawmakers corrupted past counting, and the destinies of nations bent beneath his corded, lean and nervous hand. And now, as the Billionaire sat there thinking, smiling a smile that boded no good to the world, the soft spring air that had inspired his great plan still swayed the silken curtains.

Of a sudden, he slammed the big book shut, that he was studying, and rose to his feet with a hard laugh—the laugh that had presaged more than one calamity to mankind. Beneath the sweep of his mustache one caught the glint of a gold tooth, sharp and unpleasant.

A moment he stood there, keen, eager, dominant, his hands gripping the edge of the desk till the big knuckles whitened. He seemed the embodiment of harsh and unrelenting Power—power over men and things, over their laws and institutions; power which, like Alexander's, sought only new worlds to conquer; power which found all metes and bounds too narrow.

"Power!" he whispered, as though to voice the inner inclining of the picture. "Life, air, breath—the very breath of the world in my hands—power absolutely, at last!"

CHAPTER II.

The partners.

Then, as was his habit, translating ideas into immediate action, he strode to a door at the far end of the office, flung it open and said:

"See here a minute, Wally!"

"Busy!" came an answering voice, from behind a huge roll-top desk.

"Of course! But drop it, drop it. I've got news for you."

"Urgent?" asked the voice, coldly.

"Very. Come in here, a minute. I've got to unload!"

From behind the big desk rose the figure of a man about five and forty, sandy-haired, long-faced and sallow, with a pair of the coldest, fishiest eyes—eyes set too close together—that ever looked out of a flat and ugly face. A man precisely dressed, something of a fop, with just a note of the “sport” in his get-up; a man to fear, a man cool, wary and dangerous—Maxim Waldron, in fact, the Billionaire’s right-hand man and confidant. Waldron, for some time affianced to his eldest daughter. Waldron the arch-corruptionist; Waldron, who never yet had been “caught with the goods,” but who had financed scores of industrial and political campaigns, with Flint’s money and his own; Waldron, the smooth, the suave, the perilous.

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“What now?” asked he, fixing his pale blue eyes on the Billionaire’s face.

“Come in here, and I’ll tell you.”

“Right!” And Waldron, brushing an invisible speck of dust from the sleeve of his checked coat, strolled rather casually into the Billionaire’s office.

Flint closed the door.

“Well?” asked Waldron, with something of a drawl. “What’s the excitement?”

“See here,” began the great financier, stimulated by the drug. “We’ve been wasting our time, all these years, with our petty monopolies of beef and coal and transportation and all such trifles!”

“So?” And Waldron drew from his pocket a gold cigar-case, monogrammed with diamonds. “Trifles, eh?” He carefully chose a perfecto. “Perhaps; but we’ve managed to rub along, eh? Well, if these are trifles, what’s on?”

“Air!”

“Air?” Waldron’s match poised a moment, as with a slight widening of the pale blue eyes he surveyed his partner. “Why—er—what do you mean, Flint?”

“The Air Trust!”

“Eh?” And Waldron lighted his cigar.

“A monopoly of breathing privileges!”

“Ha! Ha!” Waldron’s laugh was as mirthful as a grave-yard raven’s croak. “Nothing to it, old man. Forget it, and stick to—”

“Of course! I might have expected as much from you!” retorted the Billionaire tartly. “You’ve got neither imagination nor—”

“Nor any fancy for wild-goose chases,” said Waldron, easily, as he sat down in the big leather chair. “Air? Hot air, Flint! No, no, it won’t do! Nothing to it nothing at all.”

For a moment the Billionaire regarded him with a look of intense irritation. His thin lips moved, as though to emit some caustic answer; but he managed to keep silence. The two men looked at each other, a long minute; then Flint began again:

“Listen, now, and keep still! The idea came to me not an hour ago, this morning, looking over the city, here. We’ve got a finger on everything but the atmosphere, the most important thing of all. If we could control *that*—”

“Of course, I understand,” interrupted the other, blowing a ring of smoke. “Unlimited power and so on. Looks very nice, and all. Only, it can’t be done. Air’s too big, too fluid, too universal. Human powers can’t control it, any more than the ocean. Talk about monopolizing the Atlantic, if you will, Flint. But for heaven’s sake, drop—”

“Can’t be done, eh?” exclaimed Flint, warmly, sitting down on the desk-top and levelling a big-jointed forefinger at his partner. “That’s what every new idea has had to meet. It’s no argument! People scoffed at the idea of gas lighting when it was new. Called it ‘burning smoke,’ and made merry over it. That was as recently as 1832. But ten years later, gas-illumination was in full sway.

“Electric lighting met the same objection. And remember the objection to the telephone? When Congress, in 1843, granted Morse an appropriation of $30,000 to run the first telegraph line from Baltimore to Washington, one would-be humorist in that supremely intelligent body tried to introduce an amendment that part of the sum should be spent in surveying a railroad to the moon! And—”

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[Illustration: “Can’t be done, Eh?” said Flint.]

“Granted,” put in Waldron, “that my objection is futile, just what’s your idea?”

“This!” And Flint stabbed at him with his forefinger, while the other financier regarded him with a fishily amused eye. “Every human being in this world—and there are 1,900,000,000 of them now!—is breathing, on the average, 16 cubic feet of air every hour, or about 400 a day. The total amount of oxygen actually absorbed in the 24 hours by each person, is about 17 cubic feet, or *over 30 billions of cubic feet of oxygen*, each day, in the entire world. Get that?”

“Well?” drawled the other.

“Don’t you see?” snapped Flint, irritably. “Imagine that we extract oxygen from the air. Then—”

“You might as well try to dip up the ocean with a spoon,” said Waldron, “as try to vitiate the atmosphere of the whole world, by any means whatsoever! But even if you could, what then?”

“Look here!” exclaimed the Billionaire. “It only needs a reduction of 10 per cent. in the atmospheric oxygen to make the air so bad that nobody can breathe it without discomfort and pain. Take out any more and people will die! We don’t have to monopolize *all* the oxygen, but only a very small fraction, and the world will come gasping to us, like so many fish out of water, falling over each other to buy!”

“Possibly. But the details?”

“I haven’t worked them out yet, naturally. I needn’t. Herzog will take care of those. He and his staff. That’s what they’re for. Shall we put it up to him? What? My God, man! Think of the millions in it—the billions! The power! The—”

“Of course, of course!” interposed Waldron, calmly, eyeing his smoke. “Don’t get excited, Flint. Rome wasn’t built in a day. There may be something in this; possibly there may be the germ of an idea. I don’t say it’s impossible. It looks visionary to me; but then, as you well say, so has every new idea always looked. Let me think, now; let me think.”

“Go ahead and think!” growled the Billionaire. “Think and be hanged to you! *I’m* going to act!”

Waldron vouchsafed no reply, but merely eyed his partner with cold interest, as though he were some biological specimen under a lens, and smoked the while.

Flint, however, turned to his telephone and pulled it toward him, over the big sheet of plate glass. Impatiently he took off the receiver and held it up to his ear.

“Hello, hello! 2438 John!” he exclaimed, in answer to the query of “Number, please?”

Silence, a moment, while Waldron slowly drew at his cigar and while the Billionaire tugged with impatience at his gray mustache.

“Hello! That you, Herzog?”

* * * * *

“All right. I want to see you at once. Immediately, understand?”

* * * * *

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“Very well. And say, Herzog!”

“Bring whatever literature you have on liquid air, nitrogen extraction from the atmosphere, and so on. Understand? And come at once!”

* * * * *

“That’s all! Good-bye!”

Smiling dourly, with satisfaction, he hung up and shoved the telephone away again, then turned to his still reflecting partner, who had now hoisted his patent leather boots to the window sill and seemed absorbed in regarding their gloss through a blue veil of nicotine.

“Herzog,” announced the Billionaire, “will be here in ten minutes, and we’ll get down to business.”

“So?” languidly commented the immaculate Waldron. “Well, much as I’d like to flatter your astuteness, Flint, I’m bound to say you’re barking up a false trail, this time! Beef, yes. Steel, yes. Railroads, steamships, coal, iron, wheat, yes. All tangible, all concrete, all susceptible of being weighed, measured, put in figures, fenced and bounded, legislated about and so on and so forth. But *air*—!”

He snapped his manicured fingers, to show his well-considered contempt for the Billionaire’s scheme, and, throwing away his smoked-out cigar, chose a fresh one.

Flint made no reply, but with an angry grunt flung a look of scorn at the calm and placid one. Then, furtively opening his desk drawer, he once more sought the little vial and took two more pellets—an action which Waldron, without moving his head, complacently observed in a heavily-bevelled mirror that hung between the windows.

“Air,” murmured Waldron, suavely. “Hot air, Flint?”

No answer, save another grunt and the slamming of the desk-drawer.

And thus, in silence, the two men, masters of the world, awaited the coming of the practical scientist, the proletarian, on whom they both, at last analysis, had to rely for most of their results.

CHAPTER III.

The baiting of Herzog.

Herzog was not long in arriving. To be summoned in haste by Isaac Flint, and to delay, was unthinkable. For eighteen years the chemist had lickspittled to the Billionaire. Keen though his mind was, his character and stamina were those of a jellyfish; and when the Master took snuff, as the saying is, Herzog never failed to sneeze.

He therefore appeared, now, in some ten minutes—a fat, rubicund, spectacled man, with a cast in his left eye and two fingers missing, to remind him of early days in experimental work on explosives. Under his arm he carried several tomes and pamphlets; and so, bowing first to one financier, then to the other, he stood there on the threshold, awaiting his masters' pleasure.

"Come in, Herzog," directed Flint. "Got some material there on liquid air, and nitrogen, and so on?"

"Yes, sir. Just what is it you want, sir?"

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“Sit down, and I’ll tell you,”—for the chemist, hat in hand, ventured not to seat himself unbidden in presence of these plutocrats.

Herzog, murmuring thanks for Flint’s gracious permission, deposited his derby on top of the revolving book-case, sat down tentatively on the edge of a chair and clutched his books as though they had been so many shields against the redoubted power of his masters.

“See here, Herzog,” Flint fired at him, without any preliminaries or beating around the bush, “what do you know about the practical side of extracting nitrogen from atmospheric air? Or extracting oxygen, in liquid form? Can it be done—that is, on a commercial basis?”

“Why, no, sir—yes, that is—perhaps. I mean—”

“What the devil *do* you mean?” snapped Flint, while Waldron smiled maliciously as he smoked. “Yes, or no? I don’t pay you to muddle things. I pay you to *know*, and to tell me! Get that? Now, how about it?”

“Well, sir—hm!—the fact is,” and the unfortunate chemist blinked through his glasses with extreme uneasiness, “the fact of the matter is that the processes involved haven’t been really perfected, as yet. Beginnings have been made, but no large-scale work has been done, so far. Still, the principle—”

“Is sound?”

“Yes, sir. I imagine—”

“Cut that! You aren’t paid for imagining!” interrupted the Billionaire, stabbing at him with that characteristic gesture. “Just what do you know about it? No technicalities, mind! Essentials, that’s all, and in a few words!”

“Well, sir,” answered Herzog, plucking up a little courage under this pointed goading, “so far as the fixation of atmospheric nitrogen goes, more progress has been made in England and Scandinavia, than here. They’re working on it, over there, to obtain cheap and plentiful fertilizer from the air. Nitrogen *can* be obtained from the air, even now, and made into fertilizers even cheaper than the Chili saltpeter. Oxygen is liberated as a by-product, and—”

“Oh, it is, eh? And could it be saved? In liquid form for instance?”

“I think so, sir. The Siemens & Halske interests, in Germany, are doing it already, on a limited scale. In Norway and Austria, nitrogen has been manufactured from air, for some years.”

“On a paying, commercial basis?” demanded Flint, while Waldron, now a trifle less scornful, seemed to listen with more interest as his eyes rested on the rotund form of the scientist.

“Yes, sir, quite so,” answered Herzog. “It’s commercially feasible, though not a very profitable business at best. The gas is utilized in chemical combination with a substantial base, and—”

“No matter about that, just yet,” interrupted Flint. “We can have details later. Do you know of any such business as yet, in the United States?”

“Well, sir, there’s a plant building at Great Falls, South Carolina, for the purpose. It is to run by waterpower and will develop 5000 H.P.”

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“Hear that, Waldron?” demanded the Billionaire. “It’s already beginning even here! But not one of these plants is working for what I see as the prime possibility. No imagination, no grasp on the subject! No wonder most inventors and scientists die poor! They incubate ideas and then lack the warmth to hatch them into general application. It takes men like us, Wally—practical men—to turn the trick!” He spoke a bit rapidly, almost feverishly, under the influence of the subtle drug. “Now if *we* take hold of this game, why, we can shake the world as it has never yet been shaken! Eh, Waldron? What do you think now?”

Waldron only grunted, non-committally. Flint with a hard glance at his unresponsive partner, once more turned to Herzog.

“See here, now,” directed he. “What’s the best process now in use?”

“For what, sir?” ventured the timid chemist.

“For the simultaneous production of nitrogen and oxygen, from the atmosphere!”

“Well, sir,” he answered, deprecatingly, as though taking a great liberty even in informing his master on a point the master had expressly asked about, “there are three processes. But all operate only on a small scale.”

“Who ever told you I wanted to work on a large scale?” demanded Flint, savagely.

“I—er—inferred—beg pardon, sir—I—” And Herzog quite lost himself and floundered hopelessly, while his mismated eyes wandered about the room as though seeking the assurance he so sadly lacked.

“Confine yourself to answering what I ask you,” directed Flint, crisply. “You’re not paid to infer. You’re paid to answer questions on chemistry, and to get results. Remember *that*!”

“Yes, sir,” meekly answered the chemist, while Waldron smiled with cynical amusement. He enjoyed nothing so delightedly as any grilling of an employee, whether miner, railroad man, clerk, ship’s captain or what-not. This baiting, by Flint, was a rare treat to him.

“Go on,” commanded the Billionaire, in a badgering tone. “What are the processes?” He eyed Herzog as though the man had been an ox, a dog or even some inanimate object, coldly and with narrow-lidded condescension. To him, in truth, men were no more than Shelley’s “plow or sword or spade” for his own purpose—things to serve him and to be ruled—or broken—as best served his ends. “Go on! Tell me what you know; and no more!”

“Yes, sir,” ventured Herzog. “There are three processes to extract nitrogen and oxygen from air. One is by means of what the German scientists call *Kalkstickstoff*, between calcium carbide and nitrogen, and the reaction-symbols are—”

“No matter,” Flint waived him, promptly. “I don’t care for formulas or details. What I want is results and general principles. Any other way to extract these substances, in commercial quantities, from the air we breathe?”

“Two others. But one of these operates at a prohibitive cost. The other—”

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“Yes, yes. What is it?” Flint slid off the edge of the table and walked over to Herzog; stood there in front of him, and bored down at him with eager eyes, the pupils contracted by morphine, but very bright. “What’s the best way?”

“With the electric arc, sir,” answered the chemist, mopping his brow. This grilling method reminded him of what he had heard of “Third Degree” torments. “That’s the best method, sir.”

“Now in use, anywhere?”

“In Notodden, Norway. They have firebrick furnaces, you understand, sir, with an alternating current of 5000 volts between water-cooled copper electrodes. The resulting arc is spread by powerful electro-magnets, so.” And he illustrated with his eight acid-stained fingers. “Spread out like a disk or sphere of flame, of electric fire, you see.”

“Yes, and what then?” demanded Flint, while his partner, forgetting now to smile, sat there by the window scrutinizing him. One saw, now, the terribly keen and prehensile intellect at work under the mask of assumed foppishness and jesting indifference—the quality, for the most part masked, which had earned Waldron the nickname of “Tiger” in Wall Street.

“What then?” repeated Flint, once more levelling that potent forefinger at the sweating Herzog.

“Well, sir, that gives a large reactive surface, through which the air is driven by powerful rotary fans. At the high temperature of the electric arc in air, the molecules of nitrogen and oxygen dissociate into their atoms. The air comes out of the arc, charged with about one per cent. of nitric oxide, and after that—”

“Jump the details, idiot! Can’t you move faster than a paralytic snail? What’s the final result?”

“The result is, sir,” answered Herzog, meek and cowed under this harrying, “that calcium nitrate is produced, a very excellent fertilizer. It’s a form of nitrogen, you see, directly obtained from air.”

“At what cost?”

“One ton of fixed nitrogen in that form costs about $150 or $160.”

“Indeed?” commented Flint. “The same amount, combined in Chile saltpeter, comes to —?”

“A little over $300, sir.”

“Hear that, Wally?” exclaimed the Billionaire, turning to his now interested associate. “Even if this idea never goes a step farther, there’s a gold mine in just the production of fertilizer from air! But, after all, that will only be a by-product. It’s the oxygen we’re after, and must have!”

He faced Herzog again.

“Is any oxygen liberated, during the process?” he demanded.

“At one stage, yes, sir. But in the present process, it is absorbed, also.”

Flint’s eyebrows contracted nervously. For a moment he stood thinking, while Herzog eyed him with trepidation, and Waldron, almost forgetting to smoke, waited developments with interest. The Billionaire, however, wasted but scant time in consideration. It was not money now, he lusted for, but power. Money was, to him, no longer any great desideratum. At most, it could now mean no more to him than a figure on a check-book or a page of statistics in his private memoranda. But power, unlimited, indisputable power over the whole earth and the fulness thereof, power which none might dispute, power before which all humanity must bow—God! the lust of it now gripped and shook his soul.

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Paling a little, but with eyes ablaze, he faced the anxious scientist.

“Herzog! See here!”

“Yes, sir?”

“I’ve got a job for you, understand?”

“Yes, sir. What is it?”

“A big job, and one on which your entire future depends. Put it through, and I’ll do well by you. Fail, and by the Eternal, I’ll break you! I can, and will, mark that! Do you get me?”

“I—yes, sir—that is, I’ll do my best, and—”

“Listen! You go to work at once, immediately, understand? Work out for me some process, some practicable method by which the nitrogen and oxygen can both be collected in large quantities from the air. Everything in my laboratories at Oakwood Heights is at your disposal. Money’s no object. Nothing counts, now, but *results*!

“I want the process all mapped out and ready for me, in its essential outlines, two weeks from today. If it isn’t—” His gesture was a menace. “If it is—well, you’ll be suitably rewarded. And no leaks, now. Not a word of this to any one, understand? If it gets out, you know what I can do to you, and will! Remember Roswell; remember Parker Hayes. *They* let news get to the Dillingham-Saunders people, about the new Tezzoni radio-electric system—and one’s dead, now, a suicide; the other’s in Sing-Sing for eighteen years. Remember that—and keep your mouth shut!”

“Yes, sir. I understand.”

“All right, then. A fortnight from today, report to me here. And mind you, have something to report, or—!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well! Now, go!”

Thus dismissed, Herzog gathered together his books and papers, blinked a moment with those peculiar wall-eyes of his, arose and, bowing first to Flint and then to the keenly-watching Waldron, backed out of the office.

When the door had closed behind him, Flint turned to his partner with a nervous laugh.

“That’s the way to get results, eh?” he exclaimed. “No dilly-dallying and no soft soap; but just lay the lash right on, hard—they jump then, the vermin! Results! That fellow will work his head off, the next two weeks; and there’ll be something doing when he comes again. You’ll see!”

Waldron laughed nonchalantly. Once more the mask of indifference had fallen over him, veiling the keen, incisive interest he had shown during the interview.

“Something doing, yes,” he drawled, puffing his cigar to a glow. “Only I advise you to choose your men. Some day you’ll try that on a real man—one of the rough-necks you know, and—”

Flint snapped his fingers contemptuously, gazed at Waldron a moment with unwinking eyes and tugged at his mustache.

“When I need advice on handling men, I’ll ask for it,” he rapped out. Then, glancing at the Louis XIV clock: “Past the time for that C.P.S. board-meeting, Wally. No more of this, now. We’ll talk it over at the Country Club, tonight; but for the present, let’s dismiss it from our minds.”

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“Right!” answered the other, and arose, yawning, as though the whole subject were of but indifferent interest to him. “It’s all moonshine, Flint. All a pipe-dream. Defoe’s philosophers, who spent their lives trying to extract sunshine from cucumbers, never entertained any more fantastic notion than this of yours. However, it’s your funeral, not mine. You’re paying for it. I decline to put in any funds for any such purpose. Amuse yourself; you’ve got to settle the bill.”

Flint smiled sourly, his gold tooth glinting, but made no answer.

“Come along,” said his partner, moving toward the door. “They’re waiting for us, already, at the board meeting. And there’s big business coming up, today—that strike situation, you remember. Slade’s going to be on deck. We’ve got to decide, at once, whether or not we’re going to turn him loose on the miners, to smash that gang of union thugs and Socialist fanatics, and do it right. *That’s* a game worth playing, Flint; but this Air Trust vagary of yours—stuff and nonsense!”

Flint, for all reply, merely cast a strange look at his partner, with those strongly-contracted pupils of his; and so the two vultures of prey betook themselves to the board room where already, round the long rosewood table, Walter Slade of the Cosmos Detective Company was laying out his strike-breaking plans to the attentive captains of industry.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTERLOPER.

On the eleventh day after this interview between the two men who, between them, practically held the whole world in their grasp, Herzog telephoned up from Oakwood Heights and took the liberty of informing Flint that his experiments had reached a point of such success that he prayed Flint would condescend to visit the laboratories in person.

Flint, after some reflection, decided he would so condescend; and forthwith ordered his limousine from his private garage on William Street. Thereafter he called Waldron on the ’phone, at his Fifth Avenue address.

“Mr. Waldron is not up, yet, sir,” a carefully-modulated voice answered over the wire. “Any message I can give him, sir?”

“Oh, hello! That you, Edwards?” Flint demanded, recognizing the suave tones of his partner’s valet.

“Yes, sir.”

“All right. Tell Waldron I’ll call for him in half an hour with the limousine. And mind, now, I want him to be up and dressed! We’re going down to Staten Island. Got that?”

“Yes, sir. Any other message, sir?”

“No. But be sure you get him up, for me! Good-bye!”

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Thirty minutes later, Flint's chauffeur opened the door of the big limousine, in front of the huge Renaissance pile that Waldron's millions had raised on land which had cost him more than as though he had covered it with double eagles; and Flint himself ascended the steps of Pentelican marble. The limousine, its varnish and silver-plate flashing in the bright spring sun, stood by the curb, purring softly to itself with all six cylinders, a thing of matchless beauty and rare cost. The chauffeur, on the driver's seat, did not even bother to shut off the gas, but let the engine run, regardless. To have stopped it would have meant some trifling exertion, in starting again; and since Flint never considered such details as a few gallons of gasoline, why should *he* care? Lighting a Turkish cigarette, this aristocrat of labor lolled on the padded leather and indifferently—-with more of contempt than of interest—regarded a swarm of iron-workers, masons and laborers at work on a new building across the avenue.

Flint, meanwhile, had entered the great mansion, its bronze doors—ravished from the Palazzo Guelfo at Venice—having swung inward to admit him, with noiseless majesty. Ignoring the doorman, he addressed himself to Edwards, who stood in the spacious, mahogany-panelled hall, washing both hands with imaginary soap.

"Waldron up, yet, Edwards?"

"No, sir. He—er—I have been unable—"

"The devil! Where is he?"

"In his apartments, sir."

"Take me up!"

"He said, sir," ventured Edwards, in his smoothest voice. "He said—"

"I don't give a damn what he said! Take me up, at once!"

"Yes, sir. Immediately, sir!" And he gestured suavely toward the elevator.

Flint strode down the hall, indifferent to the Kirmanshah rugs, the rare mosaic floor and stained-glass windows, the Parian fountain and the Azeglio tapestries that hung suspended up along the stairway—all old stories to him and as commonplace as rickety odds and ends of furniture might be to any toiler "cribbed, cabin'd and confined" in fetid East Side tenement or squalid room on Hester Street.

The elevator boy bowed before his presence. Edwards hesitated to enter the private elevator, with this world-master; but Flint beckoned him to come along. And so, borne aloft by the smooth force of the electric motor, they presently reached the upper floor where "Tiger" Waldron laired in stately splendor, like the nabob that he was.

Without ceremony, Flint pushed forward into the bed-chamber of the mighty one—a chamber richly finished in panels of the rare sea-grape tree, brought from Pacific isles at great cost of money and some expenditure of human lives; but this latter item was, of course, beneath consideration.

By the softened light which entered through rich curtains, one saw the famous frieze of De Lussac, that banded the apartment, over the panelling—the frieze of Bacchantes, naked and unashamed, revelling with Satyrs in an abandon that bespoke the age when the world was young. Their voluptuous forms entwined with clustering grapes and leaves, they poured tipsy libations of red wine from golden chalices; while old Silenus, god of drink, astride a donkey, applauded with maudlin joy.

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Flint, however, had no eyes for this scene which would have gladdened a voluptuary's heart—and which, for that reason was dear to Waldron—but walked toward the huge, four-posted bed where Wally himself, now rather paler than usual, with bloodshot eyes, was lying. This bed, despite the fact that it had been transported all the way from Tours, France, and that it once had belonged to an archbishop, had only too often witnessed its owner's insomnia.

"Hm! You're a devil of a man to keep an appointment, aren't you?" Flint sneered at the master of the house. "Eleven o'clock, and not up, yet!"

"Pardon me for remarking, my dear Flint," replied Waldron, stretching himself between the silken sheets and reaching for a cigarette, "that the appointment was not of my making. Also that I was up, last night—this morning, rather—till three-thirty. And in the next place, that scoundrel Hazeltine, trimmed me out of eighty-six thousand in four hours—"

"Roulette again, you idiot?" demanded Flint.

"And in conclusion," said Wally, "that the bigness of my head and the brown taste in my mouth are such as no 'soda and sermons, the morning after' can possibly alleviate. So you understand my dalliance.

"Damn those workmen!" he exclaimed, with sudden irritation, as a louder chattering of pneumatic riveters from the new building all at once clattered in at the window. "A free country, eh? And men are permitted to make *that* kind of a racket when a fellow wants to sleep! By God, if I—"

"Drop that, Wally, and get up!" commanded Flint. "There's no time for this kind of thing today. Herzog has just informed me his experiments have brought results. We're going down to Oakwood Heights to sea a few things for ourselves. And the quicker you get dressed and in your right mind, the better. Come along, I tell you!"

"Still chasing sunbeams from cucumbers, eh?" drawled the magnate, inhaling cigarette smoke and blowing a thin cloud toward the wanton Bacchantes. He affected indifference, but his dull eyes brightened a trifle in his wan face, deep-lined by the savage dissipations of the previous night. "And you insist on dragging me out on the same fatuous errand?"

"Don't be an ass!" snapped the Billionaire. "Get up and come along. The sooner we have this thing under way, the better."

"All right, anything to oblige," conceded Waldron, inwardly stirred by an interest he took good care not to divulge in word or look. "Give me just time for a cold plunge, a few minutes with my masseur and my barber, a bite to eat and—"

Flint laid hold on his partner and shook him roughly.

“Move, you sluggard!” he commanded. And Tiger Waldron obeyed.

Forty-five minutes later, the two financiers were speeding down the asphalt of the avenue at a good round clip. Flint’s gleaming car formed one unit of the never-ending procession of motors which, day and night, year in and year out, spin unceasingly along the great, hard, splendid, cruel thoroughfare.

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“I tell you,” Flint was asserting as they swung into Broadway, at Twenty-third Street, and headed for South Ferry, “I tell you, Wally, the thing is growing vaster and more potent every moment. The longer I look at it, the huger its possibilities loom up! With air under our control, as a source of manufacturing alone, we can pull down perfectly inconceivable fortunes. We shan’t have to send anywhere for our raw material. It will come to us; it’s everywhere. No cost for transportation, to begin with.

“With oxygen, nitrogen and liquid air as products, think of the possibilities, will you? Not an ice-plant in the country could compete with us, in the refrigerating line. With liquid air, we could sweep that market clean. By installing it on our fruit cars and boats, and our beef cars, the saving effected in many ways would run to millions. The sale of nitrogen, for fertilizer, would net us billions. And, above all, the control of the world’s air supply, for breathing, would make us the absolute, undisputed masters of mankind!

“We’d have the world by the windpipe. Its very life-breath would be at our disposal. Ha! What about revolution, then? What about popular discontent, and stiff-necked legislators, and cranky editors? What about commercial and financial rivals? What about these damned Socialists, with their brass-lunged bazoo, howling about monopoly and capitalism and all the rest of it? Eh, what? Just one squeeze,” here Flint closed his corded, veinous fingers, “just one tightening of the fist, and—all over! We win, hands down!”

“Like shutting the wind off from a runaway horse, eh?” suggested Waldron, squinting at his cigar as though to hide the involuntary gleam of light that sparkled in his narrow-set eyes.

“Precisely!” assented Flint, smiling his gold-toothed smile. “The wildest bolter has got to stop, or fall dead, once you close his nostrils. That’s what we’ll do to the world, Wally. We’ll get it by the throat—and there you are!”

“Yes, there we are,” repeated Waldron, “but—”

“But what, now?”

Waldron did not answer, for a moment, but squinted up at the tall buildings, temples of Mammon and of Greed, filled from pave to cornice with toiling, sweated hordes of men and women, all laboring for Capitalism; many of them, directly or indirectly, for him. Then, as the limousine slowed at Spring Street, to let a cross-town car pass—a car whose earnings he and Flint both shared, just as they shared those of every surface and subway and “L” car in the vast metropolis—he said:

“Have you weighed the consequences carefully, Flint? Quite carefully? This thing of cornering all the oxygen is a pretty big proposition. Do you think you really ought to undertake it?”

“Why not?”

“Have you considered the frightful suffering and loss of life it might entail? Almost certainly would entail? Are you quite sure you *want* to take the world by the throat and —and choke it? For money?”

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“No, not for money, Waldron. We’re both staggering under money, as it is. But power! Ah, that’s different!”

“I know,” admitted Waldron. “But ought we—you—to attempt this, even for the sake of universal power? Your plan contemplates a monopoly such that everybody who refused or was unable to buy your product would, at best, have to get along with vitiated air, and at worst would have to stifle. Do you really think we ought to undertake this?”

Keenly he eyed Flint, as he thus sounded the elder man’s inhuman determination. Flint, fathoming nothing of his purpose, retorted with some heat:

“Ha! Getting punctilious, all at once, are you? Talk ethics, eh? Where were your scruples, a year ago, when people were paying 25 cents a loaf for bread, because of that big wheat pool you put through? How about the oil you’ve just lately helped me boost by a 20 per cent. increase? And when the papers—though mostly those infernal Socialist or Anarchist papers, or whatever they were—shouted that old men and women were freezing in attics, last winter, what then? Did you vote to arbitrate the D.K. coal strike? Not by a jugful! You stood shoulder to shoulder with me, then, Wally, while *now* —!”

“It’s a bit different, now,” interposed “Tiger,” with an evil smile, still leading his partner along. “Since then I’ve had the—ah—the extreme happiness to become engaged to your daughter, Catherine. New thoughts have entered my mind. I’ve experienced a—a —”

“You quitter!” burst out Flint. “No, by God! you aren’t going to put this thing over on me. I’ll have no quitter for *my* son-in-law! Wally, I’m astonished at you. Astonished and disappointed. You’re not yourself, this morning. That eighty-six thousand you dropped last night, has shaken your heart. Come, come, pull together! Where’s your nerve, man? Where’s your nerve?”

Waldron answered nothing. In silence the partners watched the press of traffic, each busy with his own thoughts, Waldron waiting for Flint to reopen fire on him, and the Billionaire decided to say no more till his associate should make some move. Thus the limousine reached the Staten Island ferry, that glorious monument of municipal ownership wrecked by Tammany grafting. In silence they smoked while the car rolled down the incline and out onto the huge ferry boat. Then, as the crowded craft got under way, a minute later, both men left the car and strolled to the rail to watch the glittering sparkle of the sunlight on the harbor; the teeming commerce of the port; the creeping liners and busy tugs; the towering figure of Liberty, her flameless torch held far aloft in mockery.

Suddenly Waldron spoke.

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“You can’t do it, I tell you!” said he, waving an eloquent hand toward the sky. “It’s too big, the air is, as I said before. Too damned big! Own coal and copper, if you will, and steel and ships, here; own those buildings back there,” with a gesture at the frowning line of skyscrapers buttressing Manhattan, “but don’t buck the impossible! And incidentally, Flint, don’t misunderstand me, either. When I asked you if we *ought* to try it, I merely meant, would it be *safe*? The world, Flint, is a dangerous toy to play with, too hard. The people are perilous baubles, if you step on their corns a bit too often or too heavily. Every Caesar has a Brutus waiting for him somewhere, with a club.

“Once let the unwashed get an idea into their low brows, and you can’t tell where it may lead them. Even a rat fights, in its last corner. These human rats of ours have been getting a bit nasty of late. True, they swallowed the Limited Franchise Bill, three years ago, with only a little futile protest, so that now we’ve got them politically hamstrung. True, there’s the Dick Military Bill, recently enlarged and perfected, so they can’t move a hand without falling into treason and court-martial. True again, they’ve stood for the Censorship and the National Mounted Police—the Grays—all in the last year. But how much more will they stand, eh? You close your hand on their windpipes, and by God! something may happen even yet, after all!”

Flint snapped his fingers with contempt.

“Machine guns!” was all he said.

“Yes, of course,” answered Waldron. “But there may be life in the old beast yet. They may yet kick the apple cart over—and us with it. You never can tell. And those infernal Socialists, always at it, night and day, never letting up, flinging firebrands into the powder magazine! *Sometime* there’s going to be one hell of a bang, Flint! And when it comes, *suave qui peut*! So go slow, old man—go damned slow, that’s all I’ve got to say!”

“On the contrary,” said Flint, blinking in the golden spring sunshine as he peered out over the swashing brine at a raucous knot of gulls, “on the contrary, Wally, I’m going to push it as fast as the Lord will let me. You can come in, or not, as you see fit—but remember this, no quitter ever gets a daughter of mine! And another thing; we’re in the year 1921, now, not 1910 or 1915. Developments, political and otherwise, have moved swiftly, these few years past. Then, there might have been trouble. To-day, there can’t be. We’ve got things cinched too tight for that!

“Ten years ago, they might have had our blood, the people might, or given us a hemp-tea party in Wall Street. today, all’s safe. Come, be a man and grip your courage! We can put the initial stages through in absolute secrecy—and then, once we get our clutch on the world’s breath, what have we to fear?”

“Go slow, Flint!”

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“Nonsense! Oxygen is life itself. There’s no substitute. Vitiate the air by removing even 10 per cent. of it, and the world will lick our boots for a chance to breathe! Everybody’s got to have oxygen, all the way from kings and emperors down to the toiling cattle, the Henry Dubbs, as I believe they’re commonly called in vulgar speech. Shut off the air, and ‘the captains and the kings’ will run to heel like the rabble itself. Run to heel, and pay for the privilege of doing it! We’ve got the universities, press, churches, laws, judges, army and navy and everything already in our hands. We’ll be secure enough, no fear!”

“Shhhhh!” And Waldron nudged the Billionaire with his elbow.

In his excitement, Flint had permitted his voice to rise, a little. Not far from him, leaning on the rail, a stockily built young fellow in overalls, a cap pulled down firmly over his well-shaped head, was apparently watching the gulls and the passing boats, with eyes no less blue than the bay itself; eyes no less glinting than the sunlight on the waves. He seemed to be paying no heed to anything but what lay before him. But “Tiger” Waldron, possessed of something of the instinct of the beast whose name he bore, subconsciously sensed a peril in his nearness. The man’s ear—if unusually quick—-might, just *might* possibly have caught a word or two meant for no interloper. And at that thought, Waldron once more nudged his partner.

“Shhh!” he repeated, “Enough. We can finish this, in the limousine.”

Flint looked at him a moment, in silence, then nodded.

“Right you are,” said he. And both men climbed back into the closed car.

“You never can tell what ears are primed for news,” said Waldron. “Better take no chances.”

“Before long, we can throw away all subterfuge,” the Billionaire replied as he shut the door. “But for now, well, you’re correct. Once our grasp tightens on the windpipe of the world, we’re safe. From our office in Wall Street you and I can play the keys of the world-machine as an organist would finger his instrument. But there must be no leak; no publicity; no suspicion aroused. We’ll play our music *pianissimo*, Wally, with rare accompaniments to the tune of ’great public utility, benefit to the public health,’ and all that—the same old game, only on a vastly larger scale.

“Every modern composer in the field of Big Business knows that score and has played it many times. *We* will play it on a monstrous pipe organ, with the world’s lungs for bellows and the world’s breath to vibrate our reeds—and all paying tribute, night and day, year after year, all over the world, Wally, all over the world!

“God! What power shall be ours! What infinite power, such as, since time began, never yet lay in mortal hands! We shall be as gods, Waldron, you and I—and between us, we shall bring the human race wallowing to our feet in helpless bondage, in supreme abandon!”

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The ferry boat, nearing the Staten Island landing, slowed its ponderous screws. The chauffeur flung away his cigarette, drew on his gauntlets and accelerated his engine. Forward the human drove began to press, under the long slave-driven habit of haste, of eagerness to do the masters' bidding.

The young mechanic by the rail—he of the overalls and keen blue eyes—turned toward the bows, picked up a canvas bag of tools and stood there waiting with the rest.

For a moment his glance rested on the limousine and the two half-seen figures within. As it did so, a wanton breeze from off the Island flapped back the lapel of his jumper. In that brief instant one might have seen a button pinned upon his blue flannel shirt—-clasped hands, surrounded by the legend: "Workers of the World, Unite!"

But neither of the plutocrats observed this; nor, had they seen, would they have understood.

And whether the sturdy toiler had overheard aught of their infernal conspiring—or, having heard it, grasped its dire and criminal significance—who, who in all this weary and toil-burdened world, could say?

CHAPTER V.

IN THE LABORATORY.

Half an hour's run down Staten Island, along smooth roads lined with sleepy little towns and through sparse woods beyond which sparkled the shining waters of the harbor, brought the two plutocrats to the quiet settlement of Oakwood Heights.

Now the blase chauffeur swung the car sharply to the left, past the aviation field, and so came to the wide-scattered settlement—almost a colony—which, hidden behind high, barb-wire-topped fences, carried on the many and complex activities of the partners' experiment station. Here were the several laboratories where new products were evolved and old ones refined, for Flint's and Waldron's greater profit. Here stood a complete electric power plant, for lighting and heating the works, as well as for current to use in the retorts and many powerful machines of the testing works.

Here, again, were broad proving grounds, for fuel and explosives; and, at one side, stood a low, skylighted group of brick buildings, known as the electro-chemical station. Dormitories and boarding-houses for the small army of employees occupied the eastern end of the enclosure, nearest the sea. Over all, high chimney stacks and the aerials of a mighty wireless plant dominated the entire works. A private railroad spur pierced the western side of the enclosure, for food and coal supplies, as well as for the handling of the numerous imports and exports of this wonderfully complete feudal domain. As the colony lay there basking in the sunshine of early spring, under its drifting streamers of

smoke, it seemed an ideal picture of peaceful activities. Here a locomotive puffed, shunting cars; there, a steam-jet flung its plumes of snowy vapor into air; yonder, a steam hammer thundered on a massive anvil. And forges rang, and through open windows hummed sounds of industry.

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And yet, not one of all those sounds but echoed more bitter slavery for men. Not one of all those many activities but boded ill to humanity. For the whole plan and purpose of the place was the devising of still wider forms of human exploitation and enslavement. Its every motive was to serve the greed of Flint and Waldron. Outwardly honest and industrious, it inwardly loomed sinister and terrible, a type and symbol of its masters' swiftly growing power. Such, in its essence, was the great experiment station of these two men who lusted for dominion over the whole world.

As the long, glittering car drew up at the main gate of the enclosure, a sharp-eyed watchman peered through a sliding wicket therein. Satisfied by his inspection, he withdrew; and at once the big gate rolled back, smoothly actuated by electricity. The car purred onward, into the enclosure. When the gate had closed noiselessly behind it, the chauffeur ran it down a splendidly paved roadway, swung to the right, past the machine shops, and drew it to a stand in front of the administration building.

Flint and his partner alighted, and stood for a moment surveying the scene with satisfaction. Then Flint turned to the chauffeur.

"Put the car in the garage," he directed. "We may not want it till afternoon."

The blase one touched his cap and nodded, in obedience. Then, as the car withdrew, the partners ascended the broad steps.

"Good chap, that Herrick," commented Waldron, casting a glance at the retreating chauffeur. "Quick-witted, and mum. Give me a man who knows how to mind *and* keep still about it, every time!"

"Right," assented Flint. "Obedience is the first of all virtues, and the second is silence. Well, it looks to me as though we had the whole world coming our way, now, along that very same path of virtue. Once we get this air proposition really to working, the world will obey. It will have to! And as for silence, we can manage that, too. The mere turn of a valve, and—!"

Waldron smiled grimly, as though in derision of what he seemed to think his partner's chimerical hopes, but made no answer. Together they entered the administration building. Five minutes later, Herzog, their servile experimenter, stood bowing and cringing before them.

"Got it, Herzog?" demanded Flint, while Waldron lighted still another of those costly cigars—each one worth a good mechanic's daily wage.

"Yes, sir, I believe so, sir," the scientist replied, depreciatingly. "That is, at least, on a small scale. Two weeks was the time you allowed me, sir, but—"

“I know. You’ve done it in eleven days,” interrupted, the Billionaire. “Very well. I knew you could. You’ll lose nothing by it. So no more of that. Show us what you’ve done. Everything all ready?”

“Quite ready, sir,” the other answered. “If you’ll be so good as to step into the electro-chemical building?”

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Flint very graciously signified his willingness thus to condescend; and without delay, accompanied by the still incredulous Waldron, and followed by Herzog, he passed out of the administration building, through a covered passage and into the electro-chemical works.

A variety of strange odors and stranger sounds filled this large brick structure, windowless on every side and lighted only by broad skylights of milky wire-glass—this arrangement being due to the extreme secrecy of many processes here going forward. The partners had no intention that any spying eyes should ever so much as glimpse the work in this department; work involving foods, fuels, power, lighting, almost the entire range of the vast network of exploiting media they had already flung over a tired world.

“This way, gentlemen,” ventured Herzog, pointing toward a metal door at the left of the main room. He unlocked this, which was guarded by a combination lock, like that of a bank vault, and waited for them to enter; then closed it after them, and made quite sure the metal door was fast.

A peculiar, pungent smell greeted the partners’ nostrils as they glanced about the inner laboratory. At one side an electric furnace was glowing with graphite crucibles subjected to terrific heat. On the other a dynamo was humming. Before them a broad, tiled bench held a strange assortment of test tubes, retorts and complex apparatus of glass and gleaming metal. The whole was lighted by a strong white light from above, through the milk-hued glass—one of Herzog’s own inventions, by the way; a wonderful, light-intensifying glass, which would bend but not break; an invention which, had he himself profited by it, would have brought him millions, but which the partners had exploited without ever having given him a single penny above his very moderate salary.

“Is that it?” demanded Flint, a glitter lighting up his morphia-contracted pupils. He jerked his thumb at a complicated nexus of tubes, brass cylinders, coiled wires and glistening retorts which stood at one end of the broad work-bench.

“That is it, sir,” answered Herzog, apologetically, while “Tiger” Waldron’s hard face hardened even more. “Only an experimental model, you understand, sir, but—”

“It gets results?” queried Flint sharply. “It produces oxygen and nitrogen on a scale that indicates success, with adequate apparatus?”

“Yes, sir. I believe so, sir. No doubt about it; none whatever.”

“Good!” exclaimed the Billionaire. “Now show us!”

“With pleasure, sir. But first, let me explain, a little.”

“Well, what?” demanded Flint. His partner, meanwhile, had drawn near the apparatus, and was studying it with a most intense concentration. Plain to see, beneath this man’s foppish exterior and affected cynicism, dwelt powerful purposes and keen intelligence.

“Explain what?” repeated the Billionaire. “As far as details go, I’m not interested. All I want is results. Go ahead, Herzog; start your machine and let me see what it can do.”

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“I will, sir,” acceded the scientist. “But first, with your permission, I’ll point out a few of its main features, and—”

“Damn the main features!” cried Flint. “Get busy with the demonstration!”

“Hold on, hold on,” now interrupted Waldron. “Let him discourse, if he wants to. Ever know a scientist who wasn’t primed to the muzzle with expositions? Here, Herzog,” he added, turning to the inventor, “I’ll listen, if nobody else will.”

Undecided, Herzog smiled nervously. Even Flint had to laugh at his indecision.

“All right, go on,” said the Billionaire. “Only for God’s sake, make it brief!”

Herzog, thus adjured, cleared his throat and blinked uneasily.

“Oxygen,” he said. “Yes, I can produce it quickly, easily and in large quantities. As a gas, or as a liquid, which can be shipped to any desired point and there transformed into gaseous form. Liquid air can also be produced by this same machine, for refrigerating purposes. You understand, of course, that when liquid air evaporates, it is only the nitrogen that goes back into the atmosphere at 313 degrees below zero. The residue is pure liquid oxygen. In other words, this apparatus will make money as a liquid air plant, and furnish you oxygen as a by-product.

“It will also turn out nitrogen, for fertilizing purposes. The income from a full-sized machine, on this pattern, from all three sources, should be very large indeed.”

“Good,” put in Waldron. “And liquid air, for example, would cost how much to produce?”

“With power-cost at half a cent per H.P. hour, about $2.50 a ton. The oxygen by-product alone will more than pay for that, in purifying and cooling buildings, or used to promote combustion in locomotives and other steam engines. The liquid air itself can be used as a motive power for a certain type of expansion engine, or—”

“There, there, that’s enough!” interposed Flint, brusquely. “We don’t need any of your advice or suggestions, Herzog. As far as the disposal of the product is concerned, we can take care of that. All we want from you is the assurance that that product can be obtained, easily and cheaply, and in unlimited quantities. Is that the case?”

“It is, sir.”

“All right. And can liquid oxygen be easily transported any considerable distance?”

“Yes, sir. In what is known as Place’s Vacuum-jacketed Insulated Container, it can be kept for weeks at a time without any appreciable loss.”

Flint pondered a moment, then asked, again:

“Could large tanks, holding say, a million gallons, be built on that principle, for wholesale storage? And could vacuum-jacketed pipes be laid, for conveying liquid oxygen or its gas?”

“No reason why not, sir. Yes, I may say all that is quite feasible.”

“Very well, then,” snapped Flint. “That’s enough for the present. Now, show us your machine at work! Start it Herzog. Let’s see what you can do!”

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The Billionaire's eyes glittered as Herzog laid a hand on a gleaming switch. Even Waldron forgot to smoke.

"Gentlemen, observe," said Herzog, as he threw the lever.

CHAPTER VI.

OXYGEN, KING OF INTOXICATORS.

A soft humming note began to vibrate through the inner laboratory—a note which rose in pitch, steadily, as Herzog shoved the lever from one copper post to another, round the half-circle.

"I am now heating the little firebrick furnace," said the scientist. "In Norway, they use an alternating current of only 5,000 volts, between water-cooled copper electrodes, as I have already told you. I am using 30,000 volts, and my electrodes, my own invention, are—"

"Never mind," growled Flint. "Just let's see some of the product—some liquid oxygen, that's all. The why and wherefore is your job, not ours!"

Herzog, with a pained smile, bent and peered through a red glass bull's-eye that now had begun to glow in the side of his apparatus.

"The arc is good," he muttered, as to himself. "Now I will throw in the electro-magnets and spread it; then switch in my intensifying condenser, and finally set the turbine fans to work, to throw air through the field. Then we shall see, we shall see!"

Suiting the action to the words, he deftly touched here a button, there a lever; and all at once a shrill buzzing rose above the lower drone of the induction coils.

"Gentlemen," said Herzog, straightening up and facing his employers, "the process is now already at work. In five minutes—yes, in three—I shall have results to show you!"

"Good!" grunted Waldron. "That's all we're after, results. That's the only way you hold your job, Herzog, just getting results!"

He relighted his cigar, which had gone out during Herzog's explanation—for "Tiger" Waldron, though he could drop thousands at roulette without turning a hair, never yet had been known to throw away a cigar less than half smoked. Flint, meanwhile, took out a little morocco-covered note book and made a few notes. In this book he had kept an outline of his plan from the very first; and now with pleasure he added some memoranda, based on what Herzog had just told him, as well as observations on the machine itself.

Thus two minutes passed, then three.

“Time’s up, Herzog!” exclaimed Waldron, glancing at the electric clock on the wall. “Where’s the juice?”

“One second, sir,” answered the scientist. Again he peeked through the glowing bull’s-eye. Then, his face slightly pale, his bulging eyes blinking nervously, he took two small flint glass bottles, set them under a couple of pipettes, and deftly made connections.

“Oxygen cocktail for mine,” laughed Waldron, to cover a certain emotion he could not help feeling at sight of the actual operation of a process which might, after all, open out ways and means for the utter subjugation of the world.

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Neither Flint nor the inventor vouchsafed even a smile. The Billionaire drew near, adjusted a pair of pince-nez on his hawk-like nose, and peered curiously at the apparatus. Herzog, with a quick gesture, turned a small silver faucet.

“Oxygen! Unlimited oxygen!” he exclaimed. “I have found the process, gentlemen, commercially practicable. Oxygen!”

Even as he spoke, a lambent, sparkling liquid began to flow through the pipette, into the flask. At sight of it, the Billionaire’s eyes lighted up with triumph. Waldron, despite his assumed nonchalance, felt the hunting thrill of Wall street, the quick stab of exultation when victory seemed well in hand.

“These bottles,” said Herzog, “are double, constructed on the principle of the Thermos bottle. They will keep the liquid gases I shall show you, for days. Huge tanks could be built on the same principle. In a short time, gentlemen, you can handle tons of these gases, if you like—thousands of tons, unlimited tons.

“The Siemens and Halske people, and the Great Falls, S.C., plant, will be mere puttering experimenters beside you. For neither they nor any other manufacturers have any knowledge of the vital process—my secret, polarizing transformer, which does the work in one-tenth the time and at one-hundredth the cost of any other known process. For example, see here?”

He turned the faucet, disconnected the flask and handed it to Flint.

“There, sir,” he remarked, “is a half-pint of pure liquid oxygen, drawn from the air in less than eight minutes, at a cost of perhaps two-tenths of a cent. On a large scale the cost can be vastly reduced. Are you satisfied, sir?”

Flint nodded, curtly.

“You’ll do, Herzog,” he replied—his very strongest form of commendation. “You’re not half bad, after all. So this is liquid oxygen, eh? Very cheap, and very cold?”

His eyes gleamed with joy at sight of the translucent potent stuff—the very stuff of life, its essence and prime principle, without which neither plant nor animal nor man can live—oxygen, mother of all life, sustainer of the world.

“Very cheap, yes, sir,” answered the scientist. “And cold, enormously cold. The specimen you hold in your hand, in that vacuum-protected flask, is more than three hundred degrees below zero. One drop of it on your palm would burn it to the bone. Incidentally, let me tell you another fact—”

“And that is?”

“This specimen is the allotropic or condensed form of oxygen, much more powerful than the usual liquified gas.”

“Ozone, you mean?”

“Precisely. Would you like to sense its effect as a ventilating agent?”

“No danger?”

“None, sir. Here, allow me.”

Herzog took the flask, pressed a little spring and liberated the top. At once a whitish vapor began to coil from the neck of the bottle.

“Hm!” grunted Waldron, smiling. “Mountain winds and sea breezes have nothing on that!” He sniffed with appreciation. “Some gas, all right!”

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“You’re right, Wally,” answered the Billionaire. “If this works out on a large scale, in all its details—well—I needn’t impress its importance on you!”

Yielding to the influence of the wonderful, life-giving gas, the rather close air of the laboratory, contaminated by a variety of chemical odors, and vitiated by its recent loss of oxygen, had begun to freshen and purify itself in an astonishing manner. One would have thought that through an open window, close at hand, the purest ocean breeze was blowing. A faint tinge of color began to liven the somewhat pasty cheek of the Billionaire. Waldron’s big chest expanded and his eye brightened. Even the meek Herzog stood straighter and looked more the man, under the stimulus of the life-giving ozone.

“Fine!” exclaimed Flint, with unwonted enthusiasm, and nearly yielded to a laugh. Waldron went so far as to slap Herzog on the shoulder.

“You’re some wizard, old man!” he exclaimed, with a warmth hitherto never known by him—for already the subtle gas was beginning to intoxicate his senses. “And you can handle nitrogen with the same ease and precision?”

“Exactly,” answered Herzog. “This other vial contains pure nitrogen. With enlarged apparatus, I can supply it by the trainload. The world’s fertilizer problem is solved!”

“Great work!” ejaculated Waldron, even more excited than before, but Flint, his natural sourness asserting itself, merely growled some ungracious remark.

“Nitrogen can go hang,” said he. “It’s oxygen we’re after, primarily. Once we get our grip on that, the world will be—”

Waldron checked him just in time.

“Enough of this,” he interrupted sharply. “I admit, I’m not myself, in this rich atmosphere. I know *you’re* feeling it, already, Flint. Come along out of this, where we can regain our aplomb. We’ve seen enough, for once.”

He turned to Herzog.

“For God’s sake, man,” cried he, “cork that magic bottle of yours, before all the oxygen-genii escape, or you’ll have us both under the table! And, see here,” he added, pulling out his check-book, while Flint stared in amazed disgust. “Here, take a blank check.” He took his fountain pen and scrawled his name on one. “The amount? That’s up to you. Now, let us out,” he bade, as Herzog stood there regarding the check with entire uncomprehension. “Out, I say, before I get extravagant!”

Herzog, perfectly comprehending the magnates' unusual conduct as due to oxygen-intoxication in its initial stage, made no comment, but walked to the door, spun the combination and flung it open.

"Glad to have had the pleasure of demonstrating the process to you, gentlemen," said he. "If you're convinced it's practicable, I'm at your orders for any larger extension of the work. Have you any other question or suggestion?"

Neither magnate answered. Flint was trying hard to hold his self-control. Waldron, red-faced now and highly stimulated, looked as though he had been drinking even more than usual.

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Both passed out of the laboratory with rather unsteady steps. Together they retraced their way to the administration building; and there, safe at last in the private inner office, with the door locked, they sat down and stared at each other with expressions of amazement.

CHAPTER VII.

A FREAK OF FATE.

Waldron was the first to speak. With a sudden laugh, boisterous and wild, he cried:

“Flint, you old scoundrel, you’re drunk!”

“Drunk yourself!” retorted the Billionaire, half starting from his chair, his fist clenched in sudden passion. “How dare you—?”

“Dare? I dare anything!” exclaimed Waldron. “Yes, I admit it—I *am* half seas over. That ozone—God! what a stimulant! Must be some wonderfully powerful form. If we—could market it—”

Flint sank back in his chair, waving an extravagant hand.

“Market it?” he answered. “Of course we can market it, and will! Drunk or sober, Wally, I know what I’m talking about. The power now in our grasp has never yet been equalled on earth. On the one side, we can half-stifle every non-subscriber to our service, or wholly stifle every rebel against us. On the other, we can simply saturate every subscriber with health and energy, or even—if they want it—waft them to paradise on the wings of ozone. The old Roman idea of ‘bread and circus’ to rule the mob, was child’s play compared to this! Science has delivered the whole world into our hands. Power, man, power! Absolute, infinite power over every living, breathing thing!”

He fell silent, pondering the vast future; and Waldron, gazing at him with sparkling eyes, nodded with keen satisfaction. Thus for a few moments they sat, looking at each other and letting imagination ran riot; and as they sat, the sudden, stimulating effect of the condensed oxygen died in their blood, and calmer feelings ensued.

Presently Waldron spoke again.

“Let’s get down to brass tacks,” said he, drawing his chair up to the table. “I’m almost myself again. The subtle stuff has got out of my brain, at last. Generalities and day-dreams are all very well, Flint, but we’ve got to lay out some definite line of campaign. And the sooner we get to it the better.”

“Hm!” sneered Flint. “If it’s not more practical than your action in giving Herzog that blank check, it won’t be worth much. As an extravagant action, Wally, I’ve never seen it equalled. I’m astonished, indeed I am!”

Waldron laughed easily.

“Don’t worry,” he answered his partner. “That temporary aberration of judgment, due to oxygen-stimulus, will have no results. Herzog won’t dare fill out the check, anyhow, because he knows he’d get into trouble if he did; and even though he should, he can collect nothing. I’ll have payment stopped, at once, on that number. No danger, Flint!”

“I don’t know,” mused the Billionaire. “It may be that this man has us just a little under his thumb. He, and he alone, understands the process. We’ve got to treat him with due consideration, or he may leave us and carry his secret to others—to Masterson, for instance, or the Amalgamated people, or—”

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“Nothing doing on that, old man!” interrupted “Tiger.” “Have no fear. The first move he makes, off to Sing Sing he goes, the way we jobbed Parker Hayes. Slade and the Cosmos Agency can take care of *him*, all right, if he asserts himself!”

“Very likely,” answered Flint, who had now at last entirely recovered his sang-froid. “But in that event, our work would be at a standstill. No, Waldron, we mustn’t oppose this fellow. Better let the check go through, if he has nerve enough to fill it out and cash it. He won’t dare gouge very deep; and no matter what he takes, it won’t be a drop in the ocean, compared to the golden flood now almost within our grasp!”

Waldron pondered a moment, then nodded assent.

“All right. Correct,” he finally answered. “So then, we can dismiss that trifle from our minds. Now, to work! We’ve got the process we were after. What next?”

“First of all,” answered the Billionaire, “we’ll let this Herzog understand that he’s to have a share in the results; that in this, as in everything so far, he’s merely a tool—and that when tools lose their cutting edge we break ’em. He’s a meek devil. We can hold *him* easily enough.”

“Right. And then?” asked Waldron.

“Then? First of all, a good, big, wide-sweeping publicity campaign. That must begin today, to prepare opinion for the forthcoming development of the new idea.”

“Henderson can handle that, all right,” said Wally, leaning forward in his chair. “Give him the idea, and turn him loose, and he’ll get results. A clever dog, that. He and his press bureau, working through all the big dailies and many of the magazines, can turn this country upside down in six months. Let him get on this job, and before you know it the public will be demanding, be fighting for a chance to subscribe to the new ventilating-service. That part of it is easy!”

“Yes, you’re right,” replied Flint. “We’ll see Henderson no later than this afternoon. He and his writers can lay out a series of popular articles and advertisements, to be run as pure reading matter, with no distinguishing mark that they *are* ads, which will get the country—the whole world, in fact—coming our way.”

“Good,” the other assented. “Meantime, we can begin installing oxygen machines on a big scale, a huge scale, to supply the demand that’s bound to arise. Where do you think we’d best manufacture? Herzog says water power is the correct thing. We might use Niagara—use some of the surplus power we already own there.”

“Niagara would do, very well,” answered Flint. He had once more taken out his little morocco-covered note book, and was now jotting down some further memoranda. “It’s a good location. Pipe-lines could easily be extended, from it, to cover practically a

quarter to a third of the United States. Eventually we'll put in another plant in Chicago, one in Denver and one on the Pacific Coast. Then, in time, there must be distributing centers in Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia. But for the present, we'll begin with the Niagara plant. After we get that under full operation, the others will develop in due course of time."

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“Our charter covers this new line of work. There will be no need of any legal technicalities,” said Waldron, with a smile. “Some charter, if I do say it, who shouldn’t. I drew it, you remember. Nothing much in the way of possible business-extension got past *me*!”

Flint nodded.

“You’re right,” he answered. “Nothing stands in our way, now. Positively nothing. We have land, power and capital without limit. We have the process. We control press, law, courts, judges, military and every other form of government. All we need look out for is to secure public confidence and keep the bandage on the eyes of the world till our system is actually in operation—then there will be no redress, no come back, no possible rebellion. As I’ve already said, Wally, we’ll have the whole world by the windpipe; and let the mob howl *then*, if they dare!”

“Yes, let ’em howl!” chimed in “Tiger,” with a snarl that proved his nickname no misnomer. “Inside of a year we’ll have them all where we want them. You were right, Flint, when you called oil, coal, iron and all the rest of it mere petty activities. Air—ah! that’s the talk! Once we get the *air* under our control, we’re emperors of all life!”

His words rang frank and bold, but something in his look, as he blinked at his partner, might have given Flint cause for uneasiness, had the Billionaire noticed that oblique and dangerous glance. One might have read therein some shifty and devious plan of Waldron’s to dominate even Flint himself, to rule the master or to wreck him, and to seize in his own hands the reins of universal power. But Flint, bending over his note-book and making careful memoranda, saw nothing of all this.

Waldron, an inveterate smoker, lighted a fresh cigar, leaned back, surveyed his partner and indulged in a short inner laugh, which hardly curved his cruel lips, but which hardened still more those pale-blue, steely eyes of his.

“All right,” said he, at last. “Enough of this, Flint. Let’s get back to town, now, and have a conference with Henderson. That’s the first step. By tonight, the whole campaign of publicity must be mapped out. Come, come; you can finish your memoranda later. I’m impatient to be back in Wall Street. Come along!”

Five minutes later, having left orders that Herzog was to attend upon them in their private offices, next morning, they had ordered the limousine and were making way along the hard road toward the gate of the enclosure.

The gate opened to let them pass, then swung and locked again, behind them. At a good clip, the powerful car picked up speed on the homeward way. The two magnates, exultant and flushed with the consciousness of coming victory, lolled in the deeply-cushioned seat and spoke of power.

As they swung past the aviation field and neared the Oakwood Heights station, a train pulled out. Down the road came tramping a workingman in overalls and jumper, with a canvas bag of tools swinging from his brawny right hand. As he walked, striding along with splendid energy, he whistled to himself—no cheap ragtime air, but Handel's Largo, with an appreciation which bespoke musical feeling of no common sort.

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The Billionaire caught sight of him, just as the car slowed to take the sharp turn by the station. Instant recognition followed. Flint's eyes narrowed sharply.

"Hm! The same fellow," he grunted to himself. "The same rascal who stood beside us on the ferry boat, as we were talking over our plans. Now, what the devil?"

Shadowed by a kind of instinctive uneasiness, not yet definite or clear but more in the nature of a premonition of trouble, Flint gazed fixedly at the mechanic as the car swung round the bend in the road. The glance was returned.

Yielding to some kind of imperative curiosity, the Billionaire leaned over the side of the car—leaned out, with his coat flapping in the stiff wind—and for a moment peered back at the disquieting workman.

Then the car swept him out of sight, and Flint resumed his seat again.

He did not know—for he had not seen it happen—that in that moment the slippery, leather-covered note-book had slid from his lolling coat pocket and had fallen with a sharp slap on the white macadam, skidded along and come to rest in the ditch.

The workingman, however, who had paused and turned to look after the speeding car, *he* had seen all this.

A moment he stood there, peering. Then, retracing his steps with resolution he picked up the little book and slid it into the pocket of his jeans.

Deserted was the road. Not a soul was to be seen, save the crossing flagman, musing in his chair beside his little hut, quite oblivious to everything but a rank cob pipe. The workman's act had not been noticed.

Nobody had observed him. Nobody knew. Not a living creature had witnessed the slight deed on which, by a strange freak of fate, the history of the world was yet to turn.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE UNBIDDEN, SHARES GREAT SECRETS.

Immediately on discovering his loss—which was soon after having reached his office—-Flint, in something like a fright, telephoned down to the Oakwood Heights laboratory and instructed Herzog, in person, to make a careful search for it and to report results inside an hour. Even though some of the essentials of his plan were written in a code of his own devising, Flint paled before the possible results should the book fall into the hands of anybody intelligent enough to fathom its meaning.

“Damn the luck!” he ejaculated, pacing the office floor, his fists knotted. “If it had been a pocket book with a few thousand inside, that would have been a trifle. But to lose my plan of campaign—God grant no harm may come of it!”

Waldron, slyly observing him, could not suppress a smile.

“Calling on God, eh?” sneered he. “You *must* be agitated. I haven’t heard that kind of entreaty on your lips, Flint, since the year of the big coal strike, when you prayed God the gun-men might ‘get’ the strikers before they could organize. Come, come, man, brace up! Your book will turn up all right; and even if it doesn’t there’s no cause for alarm. It would take a man of extraordinary acumen to read *your* hieroglyphics! Cheer up, Flint. There’s really nothing to excite you.”

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The Billionaire thus adjured, sat down and tried to calm his agitation.

“Rotten luck, eh?” he queried. “But after all, Herzog is likely to find the book. And even if he doesn’t, I guess we’re safe enough. The very boldness of the plan—supposing even that the finder could grasp it—would put it outside the seeming range of the possible. It’s hardly a hundred to one shot any harm may come of it.”

“All right, then, let it go at that,” said Waldron. “And now, to business. Suppose, for example, you’ve got a perfectly unlimited supply of oxygen-gas and liquid. How are you going to market it? Just what details have you worked out?”

Flint pondered a moment, before replying. At last he said:

“Of course you understand, Wally, I can’t give you every point. The whole thing will be an evolution, and new ideas and processes, new uses and demands will develop as time passes. But in the main, my idea is this: The big producing stations will steadily extract oxygen from the atmosphere, thus leaving the air increasingly poorer and less adapted to sustaining human life.

“I shall store the oxygen in vast tanks, like the ordinary gas-tanks to be found in every city, only much bigger. These tanks will be fed by pipe-lines from the central stations, thus.”

Flint drew toward him a sheet of his heavily embossed letter-paper, and, picking up a pencil, began to sketch a rough diagram. Waldron, making no comment, followed every stroke with keen interest.

“From these tanks,” the Billionaire continued, “smaller pipes will convey the gaseous oxygen to every house taking our service.”

“Just like ordinary gas?”

“Precisely. Each room will be fitted with an oxygen jet apparatus, something like a gas burner, with a safety device to prevent over supply and avoid the dangers of combustion.”

“Combustion?”

“Yes. In pure oxygen, a glowing bit of wire will burst into flame. Your cigar, there, would catch fire, from the merest spark in its inmost folds. Too much oxygen in a room not only intoxicates the occupants—we’ve already seen *that* effect—but also develops a great fire risk. So we shall have to make some provision for that, Wally. It will be absolutely essential.”

“All right. Allowing it’s been made, what then?” asked “Tiger,” with extraordinary interest.

“Can’t you see? We’ll have every household under our absolute thumb?” And Flint pressed his thumb on the table to illustrate. “My God, man, think of it! Every city honeycombed by our pipes—yes, and every village and hamlet too, and even every farm house that can afford it! At first, the cost will be very low, till people have become accustomed to ozone as they are to water. The whole ventilation problem will be solved, at once and for all time. Where we can’t pipe in the ozone, we can use portable vaporizers, to be supplied once a month, and of sufficient capacity to keep the air of an average-sized house perfectly pure for thirty days.

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“Pure? More than pure! Exhilarating, life-giving, delicious! Under this system, Wally, the middle and upper classes will thrive as never before. They’ll grow in size and weight, in health and intelligence, under the steady influence of ozone, day and night. Every vital process will be stimulated. Our invention will mark a new era in the welfare of the world!”

“Bunk!” sneered Wally. “That’s all very well for your prospectuses and newspaper articles, old man, but the fact is we don’t give a damn whether it helps the world or wrecks it. We’re out for money and power. My motto is, Get ’em and do good, if you can—but *get* ’em anyhow! So you had better can the philanthropic part of it. Just show me the cash, and you can have all the credit!”

Flint shot a grim look at his partner, then continued:

“Don’t be flippant, Wally. This is a serious business and must be treated as such. In addition to the respiratory service, we can put in water-cooling and refrigerating services, at low cost, also cold-pipes for cooling houses in summer. In fine, we can immeasurably add to the health and comfort of the better classes; and can at last have everybody using our gas, which, registering through our own sealed meters, will flood us with wealth so vast as to make that of these Standard Oil pifflers look like the proverbial thirty cents!”

“Fine!” exclaimed Waldron, nodding approval. “Also, any time any rebellion develops we can merely shut off the supply in that quarter, and quickly reduce it. Or, again, we can increase the potency of the gas, and fairly intoxicate the people, till they stand for anything. Just fancy, now, our pipes connected with the sacred Halls of Congress and with the White House! Even if any difficulty could possibly be expected from these sources, just imagine how quickly we could nip it in the bud!”

“Quickly isn’t the word, Wally,” answered the Billionaire. “I tell you, old man, the world lies in our hands, today. And we have only to close our fingers, in order to possess it!”

He glanced at his own fingers, as though he visibly perceived the great world lying there for him to squeeze. Waldron’s eyes, following the Billionaire’s, saw that Flint’s hand was trembling, and understood the reason. More than three hours had passed—nay, almost four—since Flint had had any opportunity to take his necessary dose of morphia. Waldron arose, paced to the window and stood there looking out over the vast panorama of city, river and harbor, apparently absorbed in contemplation, but really keen to hear what Flint might do.

His expectations were not disappointed. Hardly had he turned his back, when he heard the desk-drawer open, furtively, and knew the Billionaire was taking out the little vial of white tablets, dearer to him than ever the caress of woman to a Don Juan. A moment later, the drawer closed again.

"He'll do now, for a while," thought Waldron, with satisfaction. "Let him go the limit, if he likes—the fool! The more he takes, the quicker I win. It'll kill him yet, the dope will. And *that* means, my mastery of the world will be complete. Let him go it! The harder, the better!"

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He turned back toward Flint, again, veiling in that impenetrable face of his the slightest hint or expression which might have told Flint that he understood the Billionaire's vice. If Flint were Vulture, Waldron was Tiger, indeed. And so, for a brief moment, these two soulless men of gold and power stood eyeing each other, in silence.

Suddenly Waldron spoke.

"There's one thing you've forgotten to speak of, Flint," he said.

"And that is?" demanded the other, already calmed by the quick action of the subtle, enslaving drug.

"The effect on the world's poor—on the toiling millions! The results of this innovation, in slum, and slave-quarter, and in the haunts of poverty. Your talk has all been of the middle and upper classes, and of the benefits accruing to them, from increased oxygen-consumption. But how about the others? Every ounce of oxygen you take out of the air, leaves it just so much poorer. Store thousands of tons of the life-giving gas, in monster tanks, and you vitiate the entire atmosphere. How about that? How can even the well-to-do breathe, then, out-doors, to say nothing of the poverty-stricken millions?"

Flint grimaced, showing a glint of his gold tooth—his substitute for a smile.

"That's all reckoned for," he answered. "I thought I made it quite clear, in our previous talk. To begin with, we will withdraw the oxygen from the atmosphere so slowly that at first there won't be any noticeable effect on the out-door air. For a while, the only thing that will be noticed by the world will be that our gas service, to private residences and institutions, will result in greatly increased comfort and health to the better classes. And the cost will be so low—at first, mind you, only at first—that every family of any means at all can take it. In fact, Wally, we can afford practically to give away the service, for the first year, until we get our grip firmly fixed on the throat of the world. Do you get the idea?"

Waldron nodded, as he drew leisurely on his cigar.

"Practical to a degree," he answered. "That is, until the poor begin to gasp for breath. But what then?"

"By the time the outer atmosphere really begins to show the effect of withdrawing a considerable percentage of the oxygen," Flint answered, "we will have our pocket respirators on the market. Well-to-do people will as soon think of going out without their shoes, as they will with their respirators. No, there won't be any visible tubes or attachments, Wally. Nothing of that kind. Only, each person will carry a properly insulated cake of solidified oxygen that will evaporate through the special apparatus and surround him with a normally rich atmosphere. And—"

“Yes, but the poor? The workers? What of them?”

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“Devil take *them*, if it comes to that!” retorted Flint, with some heat. “Who ever gives them any serious attention, as it is? Who bothers about their health? They eat and drink and breathe the leavings, anyhow—eat the cheapest and most adulterated food, drink the vilest slop and breathe the most vitiated slum air. Nobody cares, except perhaps those crazy Socialists that once in a while get up on the street-corner and howl about the rights of man and all that rubbish! Working-class? What do *I* care about the cattle? Let them die, if they want to! D’you suppose, for one minute, I’m going to limit or delay this big innovation, because there’s a working-class that may suffer?”

“They’ll do more than suffer, Flint, if you seriously depreciate the atmosphere. They’ll die!”

“Well, let them, and be damned to them!” retorted Flint, already showing symptoms of drug-stimulation. Waldron, smoking meanwhile, eyed him with a dangerous smile lurking in his cold eyes. “Let them, I say! They die off, now, twice or thrice as fast as the better classes, but what difference does it make? Great breeders, those people are. The more they die, the faster they multiply. Let them go their way and do as they like, so long as they don’t interfere with *us*! The only really important factor to reckon on is this, that with an impoverished air to breathe, their rebellious spirit will die out—the dogs!—and we’ll have no more talk of social revolution. We’ll draw their teeth, all right enough; or rather, twist the bowstring round their damned necks so tight that all their energy, outside of work, will be consumed in just keeping alive. Revolution, then? Forget it, Waldron! We’ll kill *that* viper once and for all!”

“Good idea, Flint,” the other replied, with approbation. “Only a master-mind like yours could have conceived it. I’m with you, all right enough. Only, tell me—do you really believe we can put this whole program through, without a hitch? Without a leak, anywhere? Without barricades in the streets, wild-eyed agitators howling, machine-guns chattering, and Hell to pay?”

Flint smiled grimly.

“Wait and see!” he growled.

“Maybe you’re right,” his partner answered. “But slow and easy is the only way.”

“Slow and easy,” Flint assented. “Of course we can’t go too fast. In 1850, for example, do you suppose the public would have tolerated the sudden imposition of monopolies? Hardly! But now they lie down under them, and even vote and fight to keep them! So, too, with this Air Trust. Time will show you I’m right.”

Waldron glanced at his watch.

“Long past lunch-time, Flint,” said he. “Enough of this, for now. And this afternoon, I’ve got that D. K. & E. directors’ meeting on hand. When shall we go on with our plans, and get down to specific details?”

“This evening, say?”

“Very well. At my house?”

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“No. Too noisy. Run out to Englewood, to mine. We’ll be quiet there. And come early, Waldron. We’ve no end of things to discuss. The quicker we get the actual work under way, now, the better. You can see Catherine, too. Isn’t that an inducement?”

Thus ended the conference. It resumed, that night, in Flint’s luxurious study at “Idle Hour,” his superb estate on the Palisades. Waldron paid only a perfunctory court to Catherine, who manifested her pleasure by studied indifference. Both magnates felt relieved when she withdrew. They had other and larger matters under way than any dealing with the amenities of life.

Until past midnight the session in the study lasted, under the soft glow of the Billionaire’s reading-light. And many choice cigars were smoked, many sheets of paper covered with diagrams and calculations, many vast schemes of conquest expanded, ere the two masters said good-night and separated.

At the very hour of Waldron’s leave-taking, another man was pondering deeply, studying the problem from quite another angle, and—no less earnestly, than the two magnates—laying careful plans.

This man, sturdy, well-built and keen, smoked an old briar as he worked. A flannel shirt, open at the throat, showed a well-sinewed neck and powerful chest. Under the inverted cone of a shaded incandescent in his room, at the electricians’ quarters of the Oakwood Heights enclosure, one could see the deep lines of thought and careful study crease his high and prominent brow.

From time to time he gazed out through the open window, off toward the whispering lines of surf on the eastern shores of Staten Island—the surf forever talking, forever striving to give its mystic message to the unheeding ear of man. And as he gazed, his blue eyes narrowed with the intensity of his thought. Once, as though some sudden understanding had come to him, he smote the pine table with a corded fist, and swore below his breath.

It was past two in the morning when he finally rose, stretched, yawned and made ready for sleep on his hard iron bunk.

“Can it be?” he muttered, as he undressed. “Can it be possible, or am I dreaming? No—this is no dream! This is reality; and thank God, I understand.”

Then, before he extinguished his light, he took from the table the material he had been studying over, and put it beneath his pillow, where he could guard it safe till morning.

The thing he thus protected was none other than a small note-book, filled with diagrams, jottings and calculations, and bound in red morocco covers.

That night, at Englewood—in the Billionaire's home and in the workman's simple room at Oakwood Heights—history was being made.

The outcome, tragic and terrible, who could have foreseen?

CHAPTER IX.

DISCHARGED.

Almost all the following morning, working at his bench in the electro-chemical laboratories of the great Oakwood Heights plant, Gabriel Armstrong pondered deeply on the problems and responsibilities now opening out before him.

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The finding of that little red-leather note-book, he fully understood, had at one stroke put him in possession of facts more vital to the labor-movement and the world at large than any which had ever developed since the very beginning of Capitalism. A Socialist to the backbone, thoroughly class-conscious and dowered with an incisive intellect, Gabriel thrilled at thought that he, by chance, had been chosen as the instrument through which he felt the final revolution now must work. And though he remained outwardly calm, as he bent above his toil, inwardly he was aflame. His heart throbbed with an excitement he could scarce control. His brain seemed on fire; his soul pulsed with savage joy and magnificent inspiration. For he was only four-and-twenty, and the bitter grind of years and toil had not yet worn his spirit down nor quelled the ardor of his splendid strength and optimism.

Working at his routine labor, his mind was not upon it. No, rather it dwelt upon the vast discovery he had made—or seemed to have made—the night before. Clearly limned before his vision, he still saw the notes, the plans, the calculations he had been able to decipher in the Billionaire's lost note-book—the note-book which now, deep in the pocket of his jumper that hung behind him on a hook against the wall, drew his every thought, as steel draws the compass-needle.

"Incredible, yet true!" he pondered, as he filed a brass casting for a new-type dynamo. "These men are plotting to strangle the world to death—to strangle, if they cannot own and rule it! And, what's more, I see nothing to prevent their doing it. The plan is sound. They have the means. At this very moment, the whole human race is standing in the shadow of a peril so great, a slavery so imminent, that the most savage war of conquest ever waged would be a mere skirmish, by comparison!"

Mechanically he labored on and on, turning the tremendous problem in his brain, striving in vain for some solution, some grasp at effective opposition. And, as he thought, a kind of dumb hopelessness settled down about him, tangible almost as a curtain black and heavy.

"What shall I do?" he muttered to himself. "What can I do, to strike these devils from their villainous plan of mastery?"

As yet, he saw nothing clearly. No way seemed open to him. Alone, he knew he could do nothing; yet whither should he turn for help? To rival capitalist groups? They would not even listen to him; or, if they listened and believed, they would only combine with the plotters, or else, on their own hook, try to emulate them. To the labor movement? It would mock him as a chimerical dreamer, despite all his proofs. At best, he might start a few ineffectual strikes, petty and futile, indeed, against this vast, on-moving power. To the Socialists? They, through their press and speakers—in case they should believe him and co-operate with him—could, indeed, give the matter vast publicity and excite popular opposition; but, after all, could they abort the plan? He feared they could not.

The time, he knew, was not yet ripe when Labor, on the political field, could meet and overthrow forces such as these.

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And so, for all his fevered thinking, he got no radical, no practical solution of the terrible problem. More and more definitely, as he weighed the pros and cons, the belief was borne in upon him that in this case he must appeal to nobody but himself, count on nobody, trust in nobody save Gabriel Armstrong.

“I must play a lone hand game, for a while at least,” he concluded, as he finished his casting and took another. “Later, perhaps, I can enlist my comrades. But for now, I must watch, wait, work, all alone. Perhaps, armed with this knowledge—invaluable knowledge shared by no one—I can meet their moves, checkmate their plans and defeat their ends. Perhaps! It will be a battle between one man, obscure and without means, and two men who hold billions of dollars and unlimited resources in their grasp. A battle unequal in every sense; a battle to the death. But I may win, after all. Every probability is that I shall lose, lose everything, even my life. Yet still, there is a chance. By God, I’ll take it!”

The last words, uttered aloud, seemed to spring from his lips as though uttered by the very power of invincible determination. A sneer, behind him, brought him round with a start. His gaze widened, at sight of Herzog standing there, cold and dangerous looking, with a venomous expression in those ill-mated eyes of his.

“Take it, will you?” jibed the scientist. “You thief!”

Gabriel sprang up so suddenly that his stool clattered over backward on the red-tiled floor. His big fist clenched and lifted. But Herzog never flinched.

“Thief!” he repeated, with an ugly thrust of the jaw. Servile and crawling to his masters, the man was ever arrogant and harsh with those beneath his authority. “I repeat the word. Drop that fist, Armstrong, if you know what’s good for you. I warn you. Any disturbance, here, and—well, you know what we can do!”

The electrician paled, slightly. But it was not through cowardice. Rage, passion unspeakable, a sudden and animal hate of this lick-spittle and supine toady shook him to the heart’s core. Yet he managed to control himself, not through any personal apprehension, but because of the great work he knew still lay before him. At all hazards, come what might, he must stay on, there, at the Oakwood Heights plant. Nothing, now, must come between him and that one supreme labor.

Thus he controlled himself, with an effort so tremendous that it wrenched his very soul. This trouble, whatever it might be, must not be noised about. Already, up and down the shop, workers were peering curiously at him. He must be calm; must pass the insult, smooth the situation and remain employed there.

"I—I beg pardon," he managed to articulate, with pale lips that trembled. He wiped the beaded sweat from his broad forehead. "Excuse me, Mr. Herzog. I—you startled me. What's the trouble? Any complaint to make? If so, I'm here to listen."

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Herzog's teeth showed in a rat-like grin of malice.

"Yes, you'll listen, all right enough," he sneered. "I've named you, and that goes! You're a thief, Armstrong, and this proves it! Look!"

From behind his back, where he had been holding it, he produced the little morocco-covered book. Right in Armstrong's face he shook it, with an oath.

"Steal, will you?" he jibed. "For it's the same thing—no difference whether you picked it out of Mr. Flint's pocket or found it on the floor here, and tried to keep it! Steal, eh? Hold it for some possible reward? You skunk! Lucky you haven't brains enough to make out what's in it! Thought you'd keep it, did you? But you weren't smart enough, Armstrong—no, not quite smart enough for me! After looking the whole place over, I thought I'd have a go at a few pockets—and, you see? Oh, you'll have to get up early to beat *me* at the game you—you thief!"

With the last word, he raised the book and struck the young man a blistering welt across the face with it.

Armstrong fell back, against the bench, perfectly livid, with the wale of the blow standing out red and distinct across his cheek. Then he went pale as death, and staggered as though about to faint.

"God—God in heaven!" he gasped. "Give me—strength—not to kill this animal!"

A startled look came into Herzog's face. He recognized, at last, the nature of the rage he had awakened. In those twitching fists and that white, writhen face he recognized the signs of passion that might, on a second's notice, leap to murder. And, shot through with panic, he now retreated, like the coward he was, though with the sneer still on his thin and cruel lips.

"Get your time!" he commanded, with crude brutality. "Go, get it at once. You're lucky to get off so easily. If Flint knew this, you'd land behind bars. But we want no scenes here. Get your money from Sanderson, and clear out. Your job ended the minute my hand touched that book in your pocket!"

Still Armstrong made no reply. Still he remained there, dazed and stricken, pallid as milk, a wild and terrible light in his blue eyes.

An ugly murmur rose. Two or three of his fellow-workmen had come drifting down the shop, toward the scene of altercation. Another joined them, and another. Not one of them but hated Herzog with a bitter animosity. And now perhaps, the time was come to pay a score or two.

But Armstrong, suddenly lifting his head, faced them all, his comrades. His mind, quick-acting, had realized that, now his possession of the book had been discovered, his chances of discovering anything more, at the works, had utterly vanished. Even though he should remain, he could do nothing there. If he were to act, it must be from the outside, now, following the trend of events, dogging each development, striving in hidden, devious ways—violent ways, perhaps—to pull down this horrible edifice of enslavement ere it should whelm and crush the world.

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So, acting as quickly as he had thought, and now ignoring the man Herzog as though he had never existed, Armstrong faced his fellows.

“It’s all right, boys,” said he, quite slowly, his voice seeming to come from a distance, his tones forced and unnatural. “It’s all right, every way. I’m caught with the goods. Don’t any of you butt in. Don’t mix with my trouble. For once I’m glad this is a scab shop, otherwise there might be a strike, here, and worse Hell to pay than there will be otherwise. I’m done. I’ll get my time, and quit. But—remember one thing, you’ll understand some day what this is all about.

“I’m glad to have worked with you fellows, the past few months. You’re all right, every one of you. Good-bye, and remember—”

“Here, you men, get back to work!” cried Herzog, suddenly. “No hand-shaking here, and no speech-making. This man’s a sneak-thief and he’s fired, that’s all there is to it. Now, get onto your job! The first man that puts up a complaint about it, can get through, too!”

For a moment they glowered at him, there in the white-lighted glare of the big shop. A fight, even then, was perilously near, but Armstrong averted it by turning away.

“I’m done.” he repeated. He gathered up a few tools that belonged to him, personally, gave one look at his comrades, waved a hand at them, and then, followed by Herzog, strode off down the long aisle, toward the door.

“Herzog,” said he, calmly and with cold emphasis, “listen to this.”

“Get out! Get your time, I tell you, and go!” repeated the bully. “To Hell with you! Clear out of here!”

“I’m going,” the young man answered. “But before I do, remember this; you grazed death, just now. Well for you, Herzog, almighty well for you, my temper didn’t best me. For remember, you struck me and called me ’thief’—and that sort of thing can’t be forgotten, ever, even though we live a thousand years.

“Remember, Herzog—not now, but sometime. Remember that one word—sometime! That’s all!”

With no further speech, and while Herzog still stood there by the shop door, sneering at him, Armstrong turned and passed out. A few minutes later he had been paid off, had packed his knapsack with his few belongings, and was outside the big palisade, striding along the hard and glaring road toward the station.

“I did it,” his one overmastering thought was. “Thank heaven, I did it! I held my temper and my tongue, didn’t kill that spawn of Hell, and saved the whole situation. I’m out of a

job, true enough, and out of the plant; but after all, I'm free—and I know what's in the wind!

"There's yet hope. There'll be a way, a way to do this work! What a man *must* do, he *can* do!"

Up came Armstrong's chin, as he walked. His shoulders squared, with strength and purpose, and his stride swung into the easy machine gait that had already carried him so many thousand miles along the hard and bitter highways of the world.

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As he strode away, on the long road toward he knew not what, words seemed to form and shape in his strengthened and refortified mind—words for long years forgotten—-words that he once had heard at his mother's knee:

"*He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city!*"

CHAPTER X.

A GLIMPSE AT THE PARASITES.

The Longmeadow Country Club, on the Saturday afternoon following Armstrong's abrupt dismissal, was a scene of gaiety and beauty without compare. Set in broad acres of wood and lawn, the club-house proudly dominated far-flung golf-links and nearer tennis-courts. Shining motors stood parked on the plaza before the club garage, each valued at several years' wages of a workingman. Men and women—exploiters all, or parasites—elegantly and coolly clad in white, smote the swift sphere upon the tennis-court, with jest and laughter. Others, attended by caddies—mere proletarian scum, bent beneath the weight of cleeks and brassies—moved across the smooth-cropped links, kept in condition by grazing sheep and by steam-rollers. On putting-green and around bunkers these idlers struggled with artificial difficulties, while in shops and mines and factories, on railways and in the blazing Hells of stoke-holes, men of another class, a slave-class, labored and agonized, toiled and died that *these* might wear fine linen and spend the long June afternoon in play.

From the huge, cobble-stone chimney of the Country Club, upwafting smoke told of the viands now preparing for the idlers' dinner, after sport—rich meats and dainties of the rarest. In the rathskeller some of the elder and more indolent men were absorbing alcohol while music played and painted nymphs of abundant charms looked down from the wall-frescoes. Out on the broad piazzas, well sheltered by awnings from the rather ardent sun, men and women sat at spotless tables, dallying with drinks of rare hues and exalted prices. Cigarette-smoke wafted away on the pure breeze from over the Catskills, far to northwest, defiling the sweet breath of Nature, herself, with fumes of nicotine and dope. A Hungarian orchestra was playing the latest Manhattan ragtime, at the far end of the piazza. It was, all in all, a scene of rare refinement, characteristic to a degree of the efflorescence of American capitalism.

At one of the tables, obviously bored, sat Catherine Flint, only daughter of the Billionaire. A rare girl, she, to look upon—deep-bosomed and erect, dressed simply in a middy-blouse with a blue tie, a khaki skirt and low, rubber-soled shoes revealing a silk-stockinged ankle that would have attracted the enthusiastic attention of gentlemen in any city of the world. No hat disfigured the coiled and braided masses of coppery hair that circled her shapely head. A healthy tan on face and arms and open throat bespoke her keen devotion to all outdoor life. Her fingers, lithe and strong, were graced by but

two rings—a monogram, of gold, and the betrothal ring that Maxim Waldron had put there, only three weeks before.

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Impatience dominated her. One could see that, in the nervous tapping of her fingers on the cloth; the slight swing of her right foot as she sat there, one knee crossed over the other; the glance of her keen, gray eyes down the broad drive-way that led from the huge stone gates up to the club-house.

Beside her sat a nonentity in impeccable dress, dangling a monocle and trying to make small-talk, the while he dallied with a Bronx cocktail, costing more than a day's wage for a childish flower-making slave of the tenements, and inhaled a Rotten Row cigarette, the "last word" from London in the tobacco line. To the sallies of this elegant, the girl replied by only monosyllables. Her glass was empty, nor would she have it filled, despite the exquisite's entreaties. From time to time she glanced impatiently at the long bag of golf-sticks leaning against the porch rail; and, now and then, her eyes sought the little Cervine watch set in a leather wristlet on her arm.

"Inconsiderate of him, I'm sure—ah—to keep so magnificent a Diana waiting," drawled her companion, blowing a lungful of thin blue smoke athwart the breeze. "Especially when you're so deuced keen on doing the course before dinner. Now if *I* were the favored swain, wild horses wouldn't keep me away."

She made no answer, but turned a look of indifference on the shrimp beside her. Had he possessed the soul of a real man, he would have shriveled; but, being oblivious to all things save the pride of wealth and monstrous self-conceit, he merely snickered and reached for his cocktail—which, by the way, he was absorbing through a straw.

"I say, Miss Flint?" he presently began again, stirring the ice in the cocktail.

"Well?" she answered, curtly.

"If you—er—are really very, *very* impatient to have a go at the links, why wait for Wally? I—I should be only too glad to volunteer my services as your knight-errant, and all that sort of thing."

"Thanks, awfully," she answered, "but Mr. Waldron promised to go round the course with me, this afternoon, and I'll wait."

The impeccable one grinned fatuously, invited her again to have a drink—which she declined—and ordered another for himself, with profuse apologies for drinking alone; apologies which she hardly seemed to notice.

"Deuced bad form of Wally, I must say," the gilded youth resumed, trying to make capital for himself, "to leave you in the lurch, this way!"

Silence from Catherine. The would-be interloper, feeling that he was on the wrong track, took counsel with himself and remained for a moment immersed in what he

imagined to be thought. At last, however, with an oblique glance at his indifferent companion, he remarked.

“Devilish hard time women have in this world, you know! Don’t you sometimes wish you were a man?”

Her answer flashed back like a rapier:

“No! Do you wish *you* were?”

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Stunned by this “facer,” Reginald Van Slyke gasped and stared. That he, a scion of the Philadelphia Van Slykes, in his own right worth two hundred million dollars—dollars ground out of the Kensington carpet-mill slaves by his grandfather—should be thus flouted and put upon by the daughter of Flint, that parvenu, absolutely floored him. For a moment he sat there speechless, unable even to reach for his drink; but presently some coherence returned. He was about to utter what he conceived to be a strong rejoinder, when the girl suddenly standing up, turned her back upon him and ignored him as completely as she might have ignored any of the menials of the club.

His irritated glance followed hers. There, far down the drive, just rounding the long turn by the artificial lake, a big blue motor car was speeding up the grade at a good clip. Van Slyke recognized it, and swore below his breath.

“Wally, at last, damn him!” he muttered. “Just when I was beginning to make headway with Kate!”

Vexed beyond endurance, he drummed on the cloth with angry fingers; but Catherine was oblivious. Unmindful of the merry-makers at the other tables, the girl waved her handkerchief at the swiftly-approaching motor. Waldron, from the back seat, raised an answering hand—though without enthusiasm. Above all things he hated demonstration, and the girl’s frank manner, free, unconventional and not yet broken to the harness of Mrs. Grundy, never failed to irritate him.

“Very incorrect for people in our set,” he often thought. “But for the present I can do nothing. Once she is my wife, ah, then I shall find means to curb her. For the present, however, I must let her have her head.”

Such was now his frame of mind as the long car slid under the porte-cochere and came to a stand. He would have infinitely preferred that the girl should wait his coming to her, on the piazza; but already she had slung her bag of sticks over her strong shoulder, and was down the steps to meet him. Her leave-taking of the incensed Van Slyke had been the merest nod.

“You’re late, Wally,” said she, smiling with her usual good humor, which had already quite dissipated her impatience. “Late, but I’ll forgive you, this time. I’m afraid we won’t have time to do all eighteen holes round. What kept you?”

“Business, business!” he answered, frowning. “Always the same old grind, Kate. You women don’t understand. I tell you, this slaving in Wall Street isn’t what it’s cracked up to be. I couldn’t get away till 11:30. Then, just had a quick bite of lunch, and broke every speed law in New York getting here. Do you forgive me?”

He had descended from the car, in speaking. They shook hands, while the chauffeur stood at attention and all the gossips on the piazza, scenting the possibility of a disagreement, craned discreetly eager necks and listened intently.

“Forgive you? Of course—this time, but never again,” the girl laughed. “Now, run along and get into your flannels. I’ll meet you on the driving green, in ten minutes. Not another second, mind, or—”

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“I’ll be on the dot,” he answered. “Here, boy,” beckoning a caddy, “take Miss Flint’s sticks. And have mine carried to the green. Look sharp, now!”

Then, with a nod at the girl, he ran up the steps and vanished in the club-house, bound for the locker-room.

Fifteen minutes the girl waited on the green, watching others drive off from the little tees and inwardly chafing to be in action. Fifteen, and then twenty, before Waldron finally appeared, immaculate in white, bare-armed and with a loose, checked cap shading his close-set eyes. The fact was, in addition to having changed his clothes, he had felt obliged to linger in the bar for a little Scotch; and one drink had meant another; and thus precious moments had sped.

But his smile was confident as he approached the green. Women, after all, he reflected, were meant to be kept waiting. They never appreciated a man who kept appointments exactly. Not less fatuous at heart, in truth, was he, than the unfortunate Van Slyke. But his manner was perfection as he saluted her and bade the caddy build their tees.

The girl, however, was now plainly vexed. Her mouth had drawn a trifle tight and the tilt of her chin was determined. Her eyes were far from soft, as she surveyed this delinquent fiance.

“I don’t like you a bit, today, Wally,” said she, as he deliberated over the club-bag, choosing a driver. “This makes twice you’ve kept me waiting. I warn you don’t let it happen again!”

Under the seeming banter of her tone lurked real resentment. But he, with a smile—-partly due to a finger too much Scotch—only answered, in a low tone:

“You’re adorable, today, Kate! The combination of fresh air and annoyance has painted the most wonderful roses on your cheeks!”

She shrugged her shoulders with a little motion she had inherited from French ancestry, stooped, set her golf ball on the little mound of sand, exactly to suit her, and raised her driver on high.

“Nine holes,” said she, “and I’m going to beat you, today!”

He frowned a little at the spirit of the threat, for any self-assertion in a woman crossed his grain; but soon forgot his pique in admiration of the drive.

Swishing, her club flashed down in a quick circle. *Crack*! It struck the gutta-percha squarely. The little white sphere zipped away like a rocket, rose in a far trajectory, up, up, toward the water-hazard at the foot of the grassy slope, then down in a long curve.

Even while the girl's cry of "Fore!" was echoing across the green, the ball struck earth, ricochetted and sped on, away, across the turf, till it came to rest not twenty yards from the putting green of the first hole.

"Wheeoo!" whistled Waldron. "Some drive. I guess you're going to make good your threat, today, Kate of my heart!"

The smile she flashed at him showed that her resentment had, for the moment, been forgotten.

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“Come on, Wally, now let’s see what *you* can do,” said she, starting off down the slope, while her meek caddy tagged at a respectful distance.

Waldron, thus adjured, teed up and swung at the ball. But the Scotch had by no means steadied his aim. He foozled badly and broke his pet driver, into the bargain. The steel head of it flew farther even than the ball, which moved hardly ten yards.

“Damn!” he muttered, under his breath, choosing another stick and glancing with real irritation at Catherine’s lithe, splendidly poised figure already some distance down the slope.

His second stroke was more successful, nearly equalling hers. But her advantage, thus early won, was not destined to be lost again. And as the game proceeded, Waldron’s temper grew steadily worse and worse.

Thus began, for these two people, an hour destined to be fraught with such pregnant developments—an hour which, in its own way, vitally bore on the great loom now weaving warp and woof of world events.

CHAPTER XI.

THE END OF TWO GAMES.

Trivial events sometimes precipitate catastrophies. It has been said that had James MacDonald not left the farm gate open, at Hugomont, Waterloo might have ended otherwise. So now, the rupture between Catherine Flint and Maxim Waldron was precipitated by a single unguarded oath.

It was at the ninth hole, down back of the Terrace Woods bunker. Waldron, heated by exercise and the whiskey he had drunk, had already dismissed the caddies and had undertaken to carry the clubs, himself, hoping—man-fashion—to steal a kiss or two from Catherine, along the edge of the close-growing oaks and maples. But all his plans went agley, for Catherine really made good and beat him, there, by half a dozen strokes; and as her little sphere, deftly driven by the putting-iron gripped in her brown, firm hands, rolled precisely over the cropped turf and fell into the tinned hole, the man ejaculated a perfectly audible “*Hell!*”

She stood erect and faced him, with a singular expression in those level gray eyes—-eyes the look of which could allure or wither, could entice or command.

“Wally,” said she, “did you swear?”

“I—er—why, yes,” he stammered, taken aback and realizing, despite his chagrin, how very poor and unsportsmanlike a figure he was cutting.

“I don’t like it,” she returned. “Not a little bit, Wally. It isn’t game, and it isn’t manly. You must respect me, now and always. I can’t have profanity, and I won’t.”

He essayed lame apologies, but a sudden, hot anger seemed to have possessed him, in presence of this free, independent, exacting woman—this woman who, worst of all, had just beaten him at the game of all games he prided himself on playing well. And despite his every effort, she saw through the veil of sheer, perfunctory courtesy; and seeing, flushed with indignation.

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“Wally,” she said in a low, quiet tone, fixing a singular gaze upon him, “Wally, I don’t know what to make of you lately. The other night at Idle Hour, you hardly looked at me. You and father spent the whole evening discussing some business or other—”

“Most important business, my dear girl, I do assure you,” protested Waldron, trying to steady his voice. “Most vitally—”

“No matter about that,” she interposed. “It could have been abridged, a trifle. I barely got six words out of you, that evening; and let me tell you, Wally, a woman never forgets neglect. She may forgive it; but forget it, never!”

“Oh, well, if you put it that way—” he began, but checked himself in time to suppress the cutting rejoinder he had at his tongue’s end.

“I do, and it’s vital, Wally,” she answered. “It’s all part and parcel of some singular kind of change that’s been coming over you, lately, like a blight. You haven’t been yourself, at all, these few days past. Something or other, I don’t know what, has been coming between us. You’ve got something else on your mind, beside me—something bigger and more important to you than I am—and—and—”

He pulled out his gold cigar-case, chose and lighted a cigar to steady his nerve, and faced her with a smile—the worst tactic he could possibly have chosen in dealing with this woman. Supremely successful in handling men, he lacked finesse and insight with the other sex; and now that lack, in his moment of need, was bringing him moment by moment nearer the edge of catastrophe.

“I don’t like it at all, Waldron,” she resumed, again. “You were late, the other night, in taking me to the Flower Show. You were late, today, for our appointment here; and the ten minutes I gave you to get ready in, stretched out to twenty before you—”

He interrupted her with a gesture of uncontrollable vexation.

“Really, my dear Kate,” he exclaimed, “if you—er—insist on holding me to account for every moment—”

“You’ve been drinking, too, a little,” she kept on. “And you know I detest it! And just now, when I beat you in a square game, you so far forgot yourself as to swear. Now, Waldron—”

“Oh, puritanical, eh?” he sneered, ignoring the danger signals in her eyes. Even yet there might have been some chance of avoiding shipwreck, had he heeded those twin beacons, humbled himself, made amends by due apology and promised reformation. For though Catherine never had truly loved this man, some years older than herself and of radically different character, still she liked and respected him, and found him—by his very force and dominance—far more to her taste than the insipid hangers-on, sons of

fortune or fortune-hunters, who, like the sap-brained Van Slyke, made up so great a part of her “set.”

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So, all might yet have been amended; but this was not to be. Never yet had “Tiger” Waldron bowed the neck to living man or woman. Dominance was his whole scheme of life. Though he might purr, politely enough, so long as his fur was smoothed the right way, a single backward stroke set his fangs gleaming and unsheathed every sabre-like claw. And now this woman, his fiancee though she was, her beauty dear to him and her charm most fascinating, her fortune much desired and most of all, an alliance with her father—now this woman, despite all these considerations, had with a few incisive words ruffled his temper beyond endurance.

So great was his agitation that, despite his strongest instinct of saving, he flung away the scarcely-tasted cigar.

“Kate,” he exclaimed, his very tongue thick with the rage he could not quell, “Kate, I can’t stand this! You’re going too far. What do you know of men’s work and men’s affairs? Who are you, to judge of their times of coming and going, their obligations, their habits and man of life? What do *you* understand—?”

“It’s obvious,” she replied with glacial coldness, “that I don’t understand *you*, and never have. I have been living in a dream, Wally; seeing you through the glass of illusion; not reality. After all, you’re like all men—just the same, no different. Idealism, self-sacrifice, con true nobility of character, where are these, in you? What is there but the same old selfishness, the same innate masculine conceit and—”

“No more of this, Kate!” cried the financier, paling a little. “No more! I can’t have it! I won’t—it’s impossible! You—you don’t understand, I tell you. In your narrow, untrained, woman’s way, you try to set up standards for me; try to judge me, and dictate to me. Some old puritanical streak in you is cropping out, some blue-law atavism, some I know not what, that rebels against my taking a drink—like every other man. That cries out against my letting slip a harmless oath—again, like every other man that lives and breathes. Every man, that is, who *is* a man, a real man, not a dummy! If you’ve been mistaken in me, how much more have I, in you! And so—”

“And so,” she took the very words from his pale lips, “we’ve both been mistaken, that’s all. No, no,” she forbade him with raised hand, as he would have interrupted with protests. “No, you needn’t try to convince me otherwise, now. A thousand volumes of speeches, after this, couldn’t do it. An hour’s insight into the true depths of a man’s character—yes, even a moment’s—perfectly suffices to show the truth. You’ve just drawn the veil aside, Wally, for me, and let me look at the true picture. All that I’ve known and thought of you, so far, has been sham and illusion. Now, I *know* you!”

“You—you don’t, Catherine!” he exclaimed, half in anger, half contrition, terrified at last by the imminent break between them, by the thought of losing this rich flower from the garden of womanhood, this splendid financial and social prize. “I—I’ve done wrong, Kate. I admit it. But, truly—”

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“No more,” said she, and in her voice sounded a command he knew, at last, was quite inexorable. “I’m not like other women of our set, perhaps. I can’t be bought and sold, Wally, with money and position. I can’t marry a man, and have to live with him, if he shows himself petty, or small, or narrow in any way. I must be free, free as air, as long as I live. Even in marriage, I must be free. Freedom can only come with the union of two souls that understand and help and inspire each other. Anything else is slavery—-and worse!”

She shuddered, and for a moment turned half away from him, as, now contrite enough for the minute, he stood there looking at her with dazed eyes. For a second the idea came to him that he must take her in his arms, there in the edge of the woods, burn kisses on her ripe mouth, win her back to him by force, as he had won all life’s battles. He would not, could not, let this prize escape him now. A wave of desire surged through his being. He took a step toward her, his trembling arms open to seize her lithe, seductive body. But she, retreating, held him away with repellant palms.

“No, no, no!” she cried. “Not now—never that, any more! I must be free, Wally—free as air!”

She raised her face toward the vast reaches of the sky, breathed deep and for a moment closed her eyes, as though bathing her very soul in the sweet freedom of the out-of-doors.

“Free as air!” she whispered. “Let me go!”

He started violently. Her simile had struck him like a lash.

“Free—as what?” he exclaimed hoarsely. “As *air*? But—but there’s no such freedom, I tell you! Air isn’t free any more—or won’t be, soon! It will be everything, anything but free, before another year is gone! Free as air? You—you don’t understand! Your father and I—we shall soon own the air. Free as air? Yes, if you like! For that—that means you, too, must belong to me!”

Again he sought to take her, to hold her and overmaster her. But she, now wide-eyed with a kind of sudden terror at this latest outbreak, this seeming madness on his part, which she could nowise fathom or comprehend, retreated ever more and more, away from him.

Then suddenly with a quick effort, she stripped off the splendid, blazing diamond from her finger, and held it out to him.

“Wally,” said she, calm now and quite herself again, “Wally, let’s be friends. Just that and nothing more. Dear, good, companionable friends, as we used to be, long years ago, before this madness seized us—this chimera of—of love!”

As a bull charging, is struck to the heart by the sword of the matador, and stops in his tracks, motionless and dazed before he falls, so “Tiger” Waldron stopped, wholly stunned by this abrupt and crushing denouement.

For a moment, man and woman faced each other. Not a word was spoken. Catherine had no word to say; and Waldron, though his lips worked, could bring none to utterance. Then their eyes met; and his lowered.

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“Good-bye,” said she quietly. “Good-bye forever, as my betrothed. When we meet again, Wally, it will be as friends, and nothing more. And now, let me go. Don’t come with me. I prefer to be alone. I’d rather walk, a bit, and think—and then go back quietly to the club-house, and so home, in my car. Don’t follow me. Here—take this, and—-good-bye.”

Mechanically he accepted the gleaming jewel. Mechanically, like a man without sense or reason, he watched her walk away from him, upright and strong and lithe, voluptuous and desirable in every motion of that splendid body, now lost to him forever. Then all at once, entering a woodland path that led by a short cut back to the club-house, she vanished from his sight.

Vanished, without having even so much as turned to look at him again, or wave that firm brown hand.

Then, seeming to waken from his daze, “Tiger” laughed, a terrible and cruel laugh; and then he flung a frightful blasphemy upon the still June air; and then he dashed the wondrous diamond to earth, and stamped and dug it with a perfect frenzy of rage into the soft mold.

And, last of all, with lowered head and lips that moved in fearful curses, he crashed away into the woods, away from the path where the girl was, away from the club-house, away, away, thirsting for solitude and time to quell his passion, salve his wounded pride and ponder measures of terrible revenge.

The diamond ring, crushed into the earth, and the golf clubs, lying where they had fallen from the disputants’ hands, now remained there as melancholy reminders of the double game—love and golf—which had so suddenly ended in disaster.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE GREAT HIGHWAY.

As violently rent from his job as Maxim Waldron had been torn from his alliance with Catherine, Gabriel Armstrong met the sudden change in his affairs with far more equanimity than the financier could muster. Once the young electrician’s first anger had subsided—and he had pretty well mastered it before he had reached the Oakwood Heights station—he began philosophically to turn the situation in his mind, and to rough out his plans for the future.

“Things might be worse, all round,” he reflected, as he strode along at a smart pace. “During the seven months I’ve been working for these pirates, I’ve managed to pay off the debt I got into at the time of the big E. W. strike, and I’ve got eighteen dollars or a little more in my pocket. My clothes will do a while longer. Even though Flint

blacklists me all over the country, as he probably will, I can duck into some job or other, somewhere. And most important of all, I know what's due to happen in America—I've seen that note-book! Let them do what they will, they can't take *that* knowledge away from me!"

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The outlook, on the whole, was cheering. Gabriel broke into a whistle, as he swung along the highway, and slashed cheerfully with his heavy stick at the dusty bushes by the roadside. A vigorous, pleasing figure of a man he made, striding onward in his blue flannel shirt and corduroys, stout boots making light of distance, somewhat rebellious black hair clustering under his cap, blue eyes clear and steady as the sunlight itself. There must have been a drop of Irish blood somewhere or other in his veins, to have given him that ruddy cheek, those eyes, that hair, that quick enthusiasm and that swiftness to anger—then, by reaction, that quick buoyancy which so soon banished everything but courageous optimism from his hot heart.

Thus the man walked, all his few worldly belongings—most precious among them his union card and his red Socialist card—packed in the knapsack strapped to his broad shoulders. And as he walked, he formulated his plans.

“Niagara for mine,” he decided. “It’s there these hellions mean to start their devilish work of enslaving the whole world. It’s there I want to be, and must be, to follow the infernal job from the beginning and to nail it, when the right time comes. I’ll put in a day or two with my old friend, Sam Underwood, up in the Bronx, and maybe tell him what’s doing and frame out the line of action with him. But after that, I strike for Niagara—yes, and on foot!”

This decision came to him as strongly desirable. Not for some time, he knew, could the actual work of building the Air Trust plant be started at Niagara. Meanwhile, he wanted to keep out of sight, as much as possible. He wanted, also to save every cent. Again, his usual mode of travel had always been either to ride the rods or “hike” it on shanks’ mare. Bitterly opposed to swelling the railways’ revenues by even a penny, Armstrong in the past few years of his life had done some thousands of miles, afoot, all over the country. His best means of Socialist propaganda, he had found, was in just such meanderings along the highways and hedges of existence—a casual job, here or there, for a day, a week, a month—then, quick friendships; a little talk; a few leaflets handed to the intelligent, if he could find any. He had laced the continent with such peregrinations, always sowing the seed of revolution wherever he had passed; getting in touch with the Movement all over the republic; keeping his finger on the pulse of ever-growing, always-strengthening Socialism.

Such had his habits long been. And now, once more adrift and jobless, but with the most tremendous secret of the ages in his possession, he naturally turned to the comfort and the calming influence of the broad highway, in his long journey towards the place where he was to meet, in desperate opposition, the machinations of the Air Trust magnates.

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“It’s the only way for me,” he decided, as he turned into the road leading toward Saint George and the Manhattan Ferry. “Flint and Herzog will be sure to put Slade and the Cosmos people after me. Blacklisting will be the least of what they’ll try to do. They’ll use slugging tactics, sure, if they get a chance, or railroad me to some Pen or other, if possible. My one best bet is to keep out of their way; and I figure I’m ten times safer on the open road, with a few dollars to stave off a vagrancy charge, and with two good fists and this stick to keep ’em at a distance, than I would be on the railroads or in cheap dumps along the way.

“The last place they’ll ever think of looking for me will be the big outdoors. *Their* idea of hunting for a workman is to dragnet the back rooms of saloons—especially if they’re after a Socialist. That’s the limit of their intelligence, to connect Socialism and beer. I’ll beat ’em; I’ll hike—and it’s a hundred to one I land in Niagara with more cash than when I started, with better health, more knowledge, and the freedom that, alone, can save the world now from the most damnable slavery that ever threatened its existence!”

Thus reasoning, with perfect clarity and a long-headedness that proved him a strategist at four-and-twenty, Gabriel Armstrong whistled a louder note as he tramped away to northward, away from the hateful presence of Herzog, away from the wage-slavery of the Oakwood Heights plant, away—with that precious secret in his brain—toward the far scene of destined warfare, where stranger things were to ensue than even he could possibly conceive.

Saturday morning found him, his visit with Underwood at an end, already twenty miles or more from the Bronx River, marching along through Haverstraw, up the magnificent road that fringes the Hudson—now hidden from the mighty river behind a forest-screen, now curving on bold abutments right above the sun-kissed expanses of Haverstraw Bay, here more than two miles from wooded shore to shore.

At eleven, he halted at a farm house, some miles north of the town, got a job on the woodpile, and astonished the farmer by the amount of birch he could saw in an hour. He took his pay in the shape of a bountiful dinner, and—after half an hour’s smoke and talk with the farmer, to whom he gave a few pamphlets from the store in his knapsack—said good-bye to all hands and once more set his face northward for the long hike through much wilder country, to West Point, where he hoped to pass the night.

Thus we must leave him, for a while. For now the thread of our narration, like the silken cord in the Labyrinth of Crete, leads us back to the Country Club at Longmeadow, the scene, that very afternoon, of the sudden and violent rupture between the financier and Catherine Flint.

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Catherine, her first indignation somewhat abated, and now vastly relieved at the realization that she indeed was free from her loveless and long-since irksome alliance with Waldron, calmly enough returned to the club-house. Head well up, and eyes defiant, she walked up the broad steps and into the office. Little cared she whether the piazza gossips—The Hammer and Anvil Club, in local slang—divined the quarrel or not. The girl felt herself immeasurably indifferent to such pettinesses as prying small talk and innuendo. Let people know, or not, as might be, she cared not a whit. Her business was her own. No wagging of tongues could one hair's breadth disturb that splendid calm of hers.

The clerk, behind the desk, smiled and nodded at her approach.

"Please have my car brought round to the porte-cochere, at once?" she asked. "And tell Herrick to be sure there's plenty of gas for a long run. I'm going through to New York."

"So soon?" queried the clerk. "I'm sure your father will be disappointed, Miss Flint. He's just wired that he's coming out tomorrow, to spend Sunday here. He particularly asks to have you remain. See here?"

He handed her a telegram. She glanced it over, then crumpled it and tossed it into the office fire-place.

"I'm sorry," she answered. "But I can't stay. I must get back, to-night. I'll telegraph father not to come. A blank, please?"

The clerk handed her one. She pondered a second, then wrote:

> Dear Father: A change of plans makes me return home at once. Please wait and see me there. I've something important to talk over with you.
>
> Affectionately,
>
> Kate.

Ordinarily people try to squeeze their message to ten words, and count and prune and count again; but not so, Catherine. For her, a telegram had never contained any space limit. It meant less to her than a post-card to you or me. Not that the girl was consciously extravagant. No, had you asked her, she would have claimed rigid economy—she rarely, for instance, paid more than a hundred dollars for a morning gown, or more than a thousand for a ball-dress. It was simply that the idea of counting words had never yet occurred to her. And so now, she complacently handed this verbose message to the clerk, who—thoroughly well-trained—understood it was to be charged on her father's perfectly staggering monthly bill.

“Very well, Miss Flint,” said he. “I’ll send this at once. And your car will be ready for you in ten minutes—or five, if you like?”

“Ten will do, thank you,” she answered. Then she crossed to the elevator and went up to her own suite of rooms on the second floor, for her motor-coat and veils.

“Free, thank heaven!” she breathed, with infinite relief, as she stood before the tall mirror, adjusting these for the long trip. “Free from that man forever. What a narrow escape! If things hadn’t happened just as they did, and if I hadn’t had that precious insight into Wally’s character—good Lord!—catastrophe! Oh, I haven’t been so happy since I—since—why, I’ve *never* been so happy in all my life!

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“Wally, dear boy,” she added, turning toward the window as though apostrophizing him in reality, “now we can be good friends. Now all the sham and pretense are at an end, forever. As a friend, you may be splendid. As a husband—oh, impossible!”

Lighter of heart than she had been for years, was she, with the added zest of the long spin through the beauty of the June country before her—down among the hills and cliffs, among the forests and broad valleys—down to New York again, back to the father and the home she loved better than all else in the world.

In this happy frame of mind she presently entered the low-hung, swift-motored car, settled herself on the luxurious cushions and said “Home, at once!” to Herrick.

He nodded, but did not speak. He felt, in truth, somewhat incapable of quite incoherent speech. Not having expected any service till next day, he had foregathered with others of his ilk in the servants’ bar, below-stairs, and had with wassail and good cheer very effectively put himself out of commission.

But, somewhat sobered by this quick summons, he had managed to pull together. Now, drunk though he was, he sat there at the wheel, steady enough—so long as he held on to it—and only by the redness of his face and a certain glassy look in his eye, betrayed the fact of his intoxication. The girl, busy with her farewells as the car drew up for her, had not observed him. At the last moment Van Slyke waved a foppish hand at her, and smirked adieux. She acknowledged his good-bye with a smile, so happy was she at the outcome of her golf-game; then cast a quick glance up at the club windows, fearing to see the harsh face of Wally peeping down at her in anger.

But he was nowhere to be seen; and now, with a sudden acceleration of the powerful six-cylinder engine, the big gray car moved smoothly forward. Growling in its might, it swung in a wide circle round the sweep of the drive, gathered speed and shot away down the grade toward the stone gates of the entrance, a quarter mile distant.

Presently it swerved through these, to southward. Club-house, waving handkerchiefs and all vanished from Kate’s view.

“Faster, Herrick,” she commanded, leaning forward, “I must be home by half past five.”

Again he nodded, and notched spark and throttle down. The car, leaping like a wild creature, began to hum at a swift clip along the smooth, white road toward Newburgh on the Hudson.

Thirty miles an hour the speedometer showed, then thirty-five and forty. Again the drunken chauffeur, still master of his machine despite the poison pulsing in his dazed brain, snicked the little levers further down. Forty-five, fifty, fifty-five, the figures on the dial showed.

Now the exhaust ripped in a crackling staccato, like a machine gun, as the chauffeur threw out the muffler. Behind, a long trail of dust rose, whirling in the air. Catherine, a sportswoman born, leaned back and smiled with keen pleasure, while her yellow veil, whipping sharply on the wind, let stray locks of that wonderful red-gold hair stream about her flushed face.

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Thus she sped homeward, driven at a mad race by a man whose every sense was numbed and stultified by alcohol—homeward, along a road up which, far, far away, another man, keen, sober and alert, was trudging with a knapsack on his broad back, swinging a stick and whistling cheerily as he went.

Fate, that strange moulder of human destinies, what had it in store for these two, this woman and this man? This daughter of a billionaire, and this young proletarian?

Who could foresee, or, foreseeing, could believe what even now stood written on the Book of Destiny?

CHAPTER XIII.

CATASTROPHE!

For a time no danger seemed to threaten. Kate was not only fearless as a passenger, but equally intrepid at the wheel. Many a time and oft she had driven her father's highest-powered car at dizzying speeds along worse roads than the one her machine was now following. Velocity was to her a kind of stimulant, wonderfully pleasurable; and now, realizing nothing of the truth that Herrick was badly the worse for liquor, she leaned back in the tonneau, breathed the keen slashing air with delight, and let her eyes wander over the swiftly-changing panorama of forest, valley, lake and hill that, in ever new and more radiant beauty, sped away, away, as the huge car leaped down the smooth and rushing road.

Dust and pebbles flew in the wake of the machine, as it gathered velocity. Beneath it, the highway sped like an endless white ribbon, whirling back and away with smooth rapidity. No common road, this, but one which the State authorities had very obligingly built especially for the use of millionaires' motor cars, all through the region of country-clubs, parks, bungalows and summer-resorts dotting the west shore region of the Hudson. Let the farmer truck his produce through mud and ruts, if he would. Let the country folk drive their ramshackle buggies over rocks and stumps, if they so chose. Nothing of that sort for millionaires! No, *they* must have macadam and smooth, long curves, easy grades and—where the road swung high above the gleaming river—-retaining walls to guard them from plunging into the palisaded abyss below.

At just such a place it was, where the road made a sharper turn than any the drunken chauffeur had reckoned on, that catastrophe leaped out to shatter the rushing car.

Only a minute before, Kate—a little uneasy now, at the truly reckless speeding of the driver, and at the daredevil way in which he was taking curves without either sounding his siren or reducing speed—had touched him on the shoulder, with a command: "Not *quite* so fast, Herrick! Be careful!"

His only answer had been a drunken laugh.

“Careful nothing!” he slobbered, to himself. “You wanted speed—an’ now—hc!—-b’Jesus, you *get*—hc!—speed! *I* ain’t ’fraid—are—hc!—*you*?”

She had not heard the words, but had divined their meaning.

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“Herrick!” she commanded sharply, leaning forward. “What’s the matter with you? Obey me, do you hear? Not so fast!”

A whiff of alcoholic breath suddenly told her the truth. For a second she sat there, as though petrified, with fear now for the first time clutching at her heart.

“Stop at once!” she cried, gripping the man by the collar of his livery. “You—you’re drunk, Herrick! I—I’ll have you discharged, at once, when we get home. Stop, do you hear me? You’re not fit to drive. I’ll take the wheel myself!”

But Herrick, hopelessly under the influence of the poison, which had now produced its full effect, paid no heed.

“Y’—can’t dri’ *thish* car!” he muttered, in maudlin accents. “Too big—too heavy for—hc! —woman! I—*I* dri’ it all right, drunk or sober! Good chauffeur—good car—I know thish car! You won’t fire me—hc!—for takin’ drink or two, huh? I drive you all ri’—drive you to New York or to—hc!—Hell! Same thing, no difference, ha! ha!—I—”

A sudden blaze of rage crimsoned the girl’s face. In all her life she never had been thus spoken to. For a second she clenched her fist, as though to strike down this sodden brute there in the seat before her—a feat she would have been quite capable of. But second thought convinced her of the peril of such an act. Ahead of them a long down-grade stretched away, away, to a turn half-hidden under the arching greenery. As the car struck this slope, it leaped into ever greater speed; and now, under the erratic guidance of the lolling wretch at the wheel, it began to sway in long, unsteady curves, first toward one ditch, then the other.

Another woman would have screamed; might even have tried to jump out. But Kate was not of the hysteric sort. More practical, she.

“I’ve got to climb over into the front seat,” she realized in a flash, “and shut off the current—cut the power off—stop the car!”

On the instant, she acted. But as she arose in the tonneau, Herrick, sensing her purpose, turned toward her in the sudden rage of complete intoxication.

“Naw—naw y’ don’t!” he shouted, his face perfectly purple with fury and drink. “No woman—he!—runs this old boat while I’m aboard, see? Go on, fire me! *I* don’t give—-damn! But you don’t run—car! Sit down! *I* run car—New York or Hell—no matter which! *I*—”

Hurtling down the slope like a runaway comet, now wholly out of control, the powerful gray car leaped madly at the turn.

Catherine, her heart sick at last with terror, caught a second's glimpse of forest, on one hand; of a stone wall with tree-tops on some steep abyss below, just grazing it, on the other. Through these trees she saw a momentary flash of water, far beneath.

Then the leaping front wheels struck a cluster of loose pebbles, at the bend.

Wrenched from the drunkard's grip, the steering wheel jerked sharply round.

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A skidding—a crash—a cry!

Over the roadway, vacant now, floated a tenuous cloud of dust and gasoline-vapor, commingled.

In the retaining-wall at the left, a jagged gap appeared. Suddenly, far below, toward the river, a crashing detonation shattered harsh echoes from shore to shore.

Came a quick flash of light; then thick, black, greasy smoke arose, and, wafting through the treetops, drifted away on the warm wind of that late June afternoon.

A man, some quarter of a mile to southward, on the great highway, paused suddenly at sound of this explosion.

For a moment he stood there listening acutely, a knotted stick in hand, his flannel shirt, open at the throat, showing a brown and corded neck. The heavy knapsack on his shoulders seemed no burden to that rugged strength, as he stood, poised and eager, every sense centered in keen attention.

“Trouble ahead, there, by the Eternal!” he suddenly exclaimed. His eye had just caught sight of the first trailing wreaths of smoke, from up the cliff. “An auto’s gone to smash, down there, or I’m a plute!”

He needed no second thought to hurl him forward to the rescue. At a smart pace he ran, halloo’ing loudly, to tell the victims—should they still live—that help was at hand. At his right, extended the wall. At his left, a grove of sugar-maples, sparsely set, climbed a long slope, over the ridge of which the descending sun glowed warmly. Somewhat back from the road, a rough shack which served as a sugar-house for the spring sap-boiling, stood with gaping door, open to all the winds that blew. These things he noted subconsciously, as he ran.

Then, all at once, as he rounded a sharp turn, he drew up with a cry.

“Down the cliff!” he exclaimed. “Knocked the wall clean out, and plunged! Holy Mackinaw, what a smash!”

In a moment he had reached the scene of the catastrophe. His quick eye took in, almost at a glance, the skidding mark of the wheels, the ragged rent in the wall, the broken limbs of trees below.

“Some wreck!” he ejaculated, dropping his stick and throwing off his knapsack. “*Hello, Hello, down there!*” he loudly hailed, scrambling through the gap.

From below, no answer.

A silence, as of death, broken only by the echo of his own voice, was all that greeted his wild cry.

[Illustration: He gathered her up as though she had been a child.]

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RESCUE.

Gabriel Armstrong leaped, rather than clambered, through the gap in the wall, and, following the track of devastation through the trees, scrambled down the steep slope that led toward the Hudson.

The forest looked as though a car of Juggernaut had passed that way. Limbs and saplings lay in confusion, larger trees showed long wounds upon their bark, and here and there pieces of metal—a gray mud-guard, a car door, a wind-shield frame, with shattered plate glass still clinging to it—lay scattered on the precipitous declivity. Beside these, hanging to a branch, Gabriel saw a gaily-striped auto robe; and, further down, a heavy, fringed shawl.

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Again he shouted, holding to a tree-trunk at the very edge of a cliff of limestone, and peering far down into the abyss where the car had taken its final plunge. Still no answer. But, from below, the heavy smoke still rose. And now, peering more keenly, Armstrong caught sight of the wreck itself.

“There it is, and burning like the pit of Hell!” he exclaimed. “And—what’s that, under it? A man?”

He could not distinctly make out, so thick the foliage was. But it seemed to him that, from under the jumbled wreckage of the blazing machine, something protruded, something that suggested a human form, horribly mangled.

“Here’s where I go down this cliff, whatever happens!” decided Gabriel. And, acting on the instant, he began swinging himself down from tree to bush, from shrub to tuft of grass, clinging wherever handhold or foothold offered, digging his stout boots into every cleft and cranny of the precipice.

The height could not have been less than a hundred and fifty feet. By dint of wonderful strength and agility, and at the momentary risk of falling, himself, to almost certain death, Gabriel descended in less than ten minutes. The last quarter of the distance he practically fell, sliding at a tremendous rate, with boulders and loose earth cascading all about him in a shower.

He landed close by the flaming ruin.

“Lucky this isn’t in the autumn, in the dry season!” thought he, as he approached. “If it were, this whole cliff-side, and the woods beyond, would be a roaring furnace. Some forest-fire, all right, if the woods weren’t wet and full of sap!”

Parting the brush, he made his way as close to the car as the intense heat would let him. The gasoline-tank, he understood, had burst with the shock, and, taking fire, had wrapped the car in an Inferno of unquenchable flame. Now, the woodwork was entirely gone; and of the wheels, as the long machine lay there on its back, only a few blazing spokes were left. The steel chassis and the engine were red-hot, twisted and broken as though a giant hammer had smitten them on some Vulcanic anvil.

“There’s a few thousand dollars gone to the devil!” thought he. But his mind did not dwell on this phase of the disaster. Still he was hoping, against hope, that human life had not been dashed and roasted out, in the wreck. And again he shouted, as he worked his way to the other side of the machine—to the side which, seen from the cliff above, had seemed to show him that inert and mangled body.

All at once he stopped short, shielding his face with his hands, against the blaze.

“Good God!” he exclaimed; and involuntarily took off his cap, there in the presence of death.

That the man *was* dead, admitted of no question. Pinned under the heavy, glowing mass of metal, his body must already have been roasted to a char. The head could not be seen; but part of one shoulder and one arm protruded, with the coat burned off and the flesh horribly crackled; while, nearer Gabriel, a leg showed, with a regulation chauffeur’s legging, also burned to a crisp.

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“Nothing for me to do, here,” said Gabriel aloud. “He’s past all human help, poor chap. I don’t imagine there can be anybody else in this wreck. I haven’t seen anybody, and nobody has answered my shouts. What’s to be done next?”

He pondered a moment, then, looking at the license plate of the machine—its enamel now half cracked off, but the numbers still legible—drew out his note-book and pencil and made a memo of the figures.

“Four-six-two-two, N.Y.,” he read, again verifying his numbers. “That will identify things. And now—the quicker I get back on the road again, and reach a telephone at West Point, the better.”

Accordingly, after a brief search through the bushes near at hand, for any other victim—a search which brought no results—he set to work once more to climb the cliff above him.

The fire, though still raging, was obviously dying down. In half an hour, he knew, it would be dead. There was no use in trying to extinguish it, for gasoline defies water, and no sand was to be had along that rocky river shore.

“Let her burn herself out,” judged Gabriel. “She can’t do any harm, now. The road for mine!”

He found the upward path infinitely more difficult than the downward, and was forced to make a long detour and do some hard climbing that left him spent and sweating, before he again approached the gap in the wall. Pausing here to breathe, a minute or two, he once more peered down at the still-smoking ruin far below. And, as he stood there all at once he thought he heard a sound not very far away to his right.

A sound—a groan, a half-inchoate murmur—a cry!

Instantly his every sense grew keen. Holding his breath he listened intently. Was it a cry? Or had the breeze but swayed one tree limb against another; or did some boatman’s hail, from far across the river, but drift upward to him on the cliff?

“Hello! *Hello*!” he shouted again. “Anybody there?”

Once more he listened; and now, once more, he heard the sound—this time he knew it was a cry for help!

“Where are you?” shouted he, plunging forward along the steep side of the cliff. “Where?”

No answer, save a groan.

“Coming! Coming!” he hailed loudly. Then, guided as it seemed by instinct, almost as much as by the vague direction of the moaning call, he ploughed his way through brush and briar, on rescue bent.

All at once he stopped short in his tracks, wild-eyed, a stammering exclamation on his lips.

“A woman!” he cried.

True. There, lying as though violently flung, a woman was half-crouched, half-prone behind the roots of a huge maple that leaned out far above a sheer declivity.

He saw torn clothing, through the foliage; a white hand, out-stretched and bleeding; a mass of golden-coppery hair that lay dishevelled on the bed of moss and last autumn’s leaves.

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“A woman! Dying?” he thought, with a sudden stab of pity in his heart.

Then, forcing his way along, he reached her, and fell upon his knees at her side.

“Not dead! Not dying! Thank God!” he exclaimed. One glance showed him she would live. Though an ugly gash upon her forehead had bathed her face in blood, and though he knew not but bones were broken, he recognized the fact that she was now returning, fast, to consciousness.

Already she had opened her eyes—wild eyes, understanding nothing—and was staring up at him in dazed, blank terror. Then one hand came up to her face; and, even as he lifted her in both his powerful arms, she began to sob hysterically.

He knew the value of that weeping, and made no attempt to stop it. The overwrought nerves, he understood, must find some outlet. Asking no question, speaking no word—-for Gabriel was a man of action, not speech—he gathered her up as though she had been a child. A tall woman, she; almost as tall as he himself, and proportioned like a Venus. Yet to him her weight was nothing.

Sure-footed, now, and bursting through the brambles with fine energy, he carried her to the gap in the wall, up through it, and so to the roadway itself.

“Where—where am I?” the woman cried incoherently. “O—what—where—?”

“You’re all right!” he exclaimed. “Just a little accident, that’s all. Don’t worry! I’ll take care of you. Just keep quiet, now, and don’t think of anything. You’ll be all right, in no time!”

But she still wept and cried out to know where she might be and what had happened. Obviously, Gabriel saw, her reason had not yet fully returned. His first aim must be to bathe her wound, find out what damage had been done, and keeping her quiet, try to get help.

Swiftly he thought. Here he and the woman were, miles from any settlement or house, nearly in the middle of a long stretch of road that skirted the river through dense woods. At any time a motor might come along; and then again, one might not arrive for hours. No dependence could be put on this. There was no telephone for a long distance back; and even had one been near he would not have ventured to leave the girl.

Could he carry her back to Fort Clinton, the last settlement he had passed through? Impossible! No man’s strength could stand such a tremendous task. And even had it been within Gabriel’s means, he would have chosen otherwise. For most of all the girl needed rest and quiet and immediate care. To bear her all that distance in his arms might produce serious, even fatal results.

“No!” he decided. “I must do what I can for her, here and now, and trust to luck to send help in an auto, down this road!”

His next thought was that bandages and wraps would be needed for her cut and to make her a bed. Instantly he remembered the shawl and the big auto-robe that he had seen caught among the trees.

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“I must have those at once!” he realized. “When the machine went over the edge, they were thrown out, just as the girl was. A miracle she wasn’t carried down, with the car, and crushed or burned to death down there by the river, with that poor devil of a chauffeur!”

Laying her down in the soft grass along the wall, he ran back to where the wraps were, and, detaching them from the branches, quickly regained the road once more.

“Now for the old sugar-house in the maple-grove,” said he. “Poor shelter, but the best to be had. Thank heaven it’s fair weather, and warm!”

The task was awkward, to carry both the girl and the bulky robes, but Gabriel was equal to it She had by now regained some measure of rationality; and though very pale and shaken, manifested her nerve and courage by no longer weeping or asking questions.

Instead, she lay in his arms, eyes closed, with the blood stiffening on her face; and let him bear her whither he would. She seemed to sense his strength and mastery, his tender care and complete command of the situation. And, like a hurt and tired child, outworn and suffering, she yielded herself, unquestioningly, to his ministrations.

Thus Gabriel, the discharged, blacklisted, outcast rebel and proletarian, bore in his arms of mercy and compassion the only daughter of old Isaac Flint, his enemy, Flint the would-be master of the world.

Thus he bore the woman who had been betrothed to “Tiger” Waldron, unscrupulous and cruel partner in that scheme of dominance and enslavement.

Such was the meeting of this woman and this man. Thus, in his arms, he carried her to the old sugar-house.

And far below, the mighty river gleamed, unheeding the tragedy that had been enacted on its shores, unmindful of the threads of destiny even now being spun by the swift shuttles of Fate.

In the branches, above Gabriel and Catherine, birdsong and golden sunlight seemed to prophesy. But what this message might be, neither the woman nor the man had any thought or dream.

CHAPTER XV.

AN HOUR AND A PARTING.

Arriving at the sugar-house, tired yet strong, Gabriel put the wounded girl down, quickly raked together a few armfuls of dead leaves, in the most sheltered corner of the

ramshackle structure, and laid the heavy auto-robe upon this improvised bed. Then he helped his patient to lie down, there, and bade her wait till he got water to wash and dress her cut.

“Don’t worry about anything,” he reassured her. “You’re alive, and that’s the main thing, now. I’ll see you through with this, whatever happens. Just keep calm, and don’t let anything distress you!”

She looked at him with big, anxious eyes—eyes where still the full light of understanding had not yet returned.

“It—it all happened so suddenly!” she managed to articulate. “He was drunk—the chauffeur. The car ran away. Where is it? Where is Herrick—the man?”

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“I don’t know,” Gabriel lied promptly and with force. Not for worlds would he have excited her with the truth. “Never you mind about that. Just lie still, now, till I come back!”

Already, among the rusty utensils that had served for the “sugaring-off,” the previous spring, he had routed out a tin pail. He kicked a quantity of leaves in under the sheet-iron open stove, flung some sticks atop of them, and started a little blaze. Warm water, he reflected, would serve better than cold in removing that clotting blood and dressing the hurt.

Then, saying no further word, but filled with admiration for the girl’s pluck, he seized the pail and started for water.

“Nerve?” he said to himself, as he ran down the road toward a little brook he remembered having crossed, a few hundred yards to southward. “Nerve, indeed! Not one complaint about her own injuries! Not a word of lamentation! If this isn’t a thoroughbred, whoever or whatever she is, I never saw one!”

He returned, presently, with the pail nearly full of cold and sparkling water. Ignoring rust, he made her drink as deeply as she would, and then set a dipperful of water on the now hot sheet-iron.

Then, tearing a strip off the shawl, he made ready for his work as an amateur physician.

“Tell me,” said he, kneeling there beside her in the hut which was already beginning to grow dusk, “except for this cut on your forehead, do you feel any injury? Think you’ve got any broken bones? See if you can move your legs and arms, all right.”

She obeyed.

“Nothing broken, I guess,” she answered. “What a miracle! Please leave me, now. I can wash my own hurt. Go—go find Herrick! He needs you worse than I do!”

“No he doesn’t!” blurted Gabriel with such conviction that she understood.

“You mean?” she queried, as he brought the dipper of now tepid water to her side. “He—he’s dead?”

He hesitated to answer.

“Dead! Yes, I understand!” she interpreted his silence. “You needn’t tell me. I know!”

He nodded.

“Yes,” said he. “Your chauffeur has paid the penalty of trying to drive a six-cylinder car with alcohol. Now, think no more of him! Here, let me see how badly you’re cut.”

“Let me sit up, first,” she begged. “I—I’m not hurt enough to be lying here like—like an invalid!”

She tried to rise, but with a strong hand on her shoulder he forced her back. She shuddered, with the horror of the chauffeur’s death strong upon her.

“Please lie still,” he begged. “You’ve had a terrific shock, and have lived through it by a miracle, indeed. You’re wounded and still bleeding. You *must* be quiet!”

The tone in his voice admitted no argument. Submissive now to his greater strength, this daughter of wealth and power lay back, closed her tired eyes and let the revolutionist, the proletarian, minister to her.

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Dipping the piece of shawl into the warm water, he deftly moistened the dried blood on her brow and cheek, and washed it all away. He cleansed her sullied hair, as well, and laid it back from the wound.

“Tell me if I hurt you, now,” he bade, gently as a woman. “I’ve got to wash the cut itself.”

She answered nothing, but lay quite still. And so, hardly wincing, she let him lave the jagged wound that stretched from her right temple up into the first tendrils of the glorious red-gold hair.

“H’m!” thought Gabriel, as he now observed the cut with close attention. “I’m afraid there’ll have to be some stitches taken here!” But of this he said nothing. All he told her was: “Nothing to worry over. You’ll be as good as new in a few days. As a miracle, it’s *some* miracle!”

Having completed the cleansing of the cut, he fetched his knapsack and produced a clean handkerchief, which he folded and laid over the wound. This pad he secured in place by a long bandage cut from the edge of the shawl and tied securely round her shapely head.

“There,” said he, surveying his improvisation with considerable satisfaction. “Now you’ll do, till we can undertake the next thing. Sorry I haven’t any brandy to give you, or anything of that sort. The fact is, I don’t use it, and have none with me. How do you feel, now?”

She opened her eyes and looked up at him with the ghost of a smile on her pale lips.

“Oh, much, much better, thank you!” she answered. “I don’t need any brandy. I’m—-awfully strong, really. In a little while I’ll be all right. Just give me a little more water, and—and tell me—who are you?”

“Who am I?” he queried, holding up her head while she drank from the tin cup he had now taken from his knapsack. “I? Oh, just an out-of-work. Nobody of any interest to you!”

A certain tinge of bitterness crept into his voice. In health, he knew, a woman of this class would not suffer him even to touch her hand.

“*Don’t* ask me who I am, please. And I—I won’t ask *your* name. We’re of different worlds, I guess. But for the moment, Fate has levelled the barriers. Just let it go at that. And now, if you can stay here, all right; perhaps I can hike back to the next house, below here, and telephone, and summon help.”

“How far is it?” she asked, looking at him with wonder in her lovely eyes—wonder, and new thoughts, and a strange kind of longing to know more of this extraordinary man, so strong, so gentle, so unwilling to divulge himself or ask her name.

“How far?” he repeated. “Oh, four or five miles. I can make it in no time. And with luck, I can have an auto and a doctor here before dark. Well, does that suit you?”

“Don’t go, please,” she answered. “I—I may be still a little weak and foolish, but—-somehow, I don’t want to be left alone. I want to be kept from remembering, from thinking of those last, awful moments when the car was running away; when it struck the wall, at the turn; when I was thrown out, and—and knew no more. Don’t go just yet,” the girl entreated, covering her eyes with both hands, as though to shut out the horrible vision of the catastrophe.

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“All right,” Gabriel answered. “Just as you please. Only, if I stay, you must promise to stop thinking about the accident, and try to pull together.”

“I promise,” she agreed, looking at him with strange eyes. “Oh dear,” she added, with feminine inconsequentiality, “my hair’s all down, and Lord knows where the pins are!”

He smiled to himself as she managed, with the aid of such few hairpins as remained, to coil the coppery meshes once more round her head and even somewhat over the bandage, and secure them in place.

At sight of his face as he watched her, she too smiled wanly—the first time he had seen a real smile on her mouth.

“I’m only a woman, after all,” she apologized. “You don’t understand. You can’t. But no matter. Tell me—why need you go, at all?”

“Why? For help, of course.”

“There’s sure to be a motor, or something, along this road, before very long,” she answered. “Put up some signal or other, to stop it. That will save you a long, long walk, and save me from—remembering! I need you here with me,” she added earnestly. “Don’t go—please!”

“All right, as you will,” the man made reply. “I’ll rig a danger-signal on the road; and then all we can do will be to wait.”

This plan he immediately put into effect, setting his knapsack in the middle of the road and piling up brush and limbs of trees about it.

“There,” he said to himself, as he surveyed the result, “no car will get by *that*, without noticing it!”

Then he returned to the sugar-house, some hundred yards back from the highway in the grove, now already beginning to grow dim with the shadows of approaching nightfall. The glowing coals of the fire gleamed redly, through the rough place. The girl, still lying on her bed of leaves and auto-robes, with the mutilated shawl drawn over her, looked up at him with an expression of trust and gratitude. For a second, only one, something quick and vital gripped at the wanderer’s heart—some vague, intangible longing for a home and a woman, a longing old as our race, deep-planted in the inmost citadel of every man’s soul. But, half-impatiently, he drove the thought away, dismissed it, and, smiling down at her with cheerful eyes and white, even teeth, said reassuringly:

“Everything’s all right now. The first machine that passes, will take you to civilization.”

“And you?” she asked. “What of you, then?”

“Me? Oh, I’ll hike,” he answered. “I’ll plug along just as I was doing when I found you.”

“Where to?”

“Oh, north.”

“What for?”

“Work. Please don’t question me. I’d rather you wouldn’t.”

She pondered a moment.

“Are you—what they call a—workingman?” she presently resumed.

“Yes,” said he. “Why?”

“And are you happy?”

“Yes. In a way. Or shall be, when I’ve done what I mean to do.”

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“But—forgive me—you’re very poor?”

“Not at all! I have, at this present moment, more than eighteen dollars in my pocket, and I have *these*!”

He showed her his two hands, big and sinewed, capable and strong.

“Eighteen dollars,” she mused, half to herself. “Why, I have spent that, and more, for a single ounce of a new perfume—something very rare, you know, from Japan.”

“Indeed? Well, don’t tell *me*,” he replied. “I’m not interested in how you spend money, but how you get it.”

“Get it? Oh, father gives me my allowance, that’s all.”

“And he squeezes it out of the common people?”

She glanced at him quickly.

“You—you aren’t a Socialist, into the bargain, are you?” she inquired.

“At your service,” he bowed.

“This is strange, strange indeed,” she said. “Tell me your name.”

“No,” he refused. “I’d still rather not. Nor shall I ask yours. Please don’t volunteer it.”

Came a moment’s silence, there in the darkening hut, with the fire-glow red upon their faces.

“Happy,” said the girl. “You say you’re happy. While I—”

“Are not unhappy, surely?” asked Gabriel, leaning forward as he sat there beside her, and gazing keenly into her face.

“How should I know?” she answered. “Unhappy? No, perhaps not. But vacant—empty—futile!”

“Yes, I believe you,” Gabriel judged. “You tell me no news. And as you are, you will ever be. You will live so and die so. No, I won’t preach. I won’t proselytize. I won’t even explain. It would be useless. You are one pole, I the other. And the world—the whole wide world—lies between!”

Suddenly she spoke.

“You’re a Socialist,” said she. “What does it mean to be a Socialist?”

He shook his head.

“You couldn’t understand, if I told you,” he answered.

“Why not?”

“Oh, because your ideas and environments and interests and everything have been so different from mine—because you’re what you are—because you can never be anything else.”

“You mean Socialism is something beyond my understanding?” she demanded, piqued. “Of course, that’s nonsense. I’m a human being. I’ve got brains, haven’t I? I can understand a scheme of dividing up, or levelling down, or whatever it is, even if I can’t believe in it!”

He smiled oddly.

“You’ve just proved, by what you’ve said,” he answered slowly, “that your whole concepts are mistaken. Socialism isn’t anything like what you think it is, and if I should try to explain it, you’d raise ten thousand futile objections, and beg the question, and defeat my object of explanation by your very inability to get the point of view. So you see—”

“I see that I want to know more!” she exclaimed, with determination. “If there’s any branch of human knowledge that lies outside my reasoning powers, it’s time I found that fact out. I thought Socialists were wild, crazy, erratic cranks; but if you’re one, then I seem to have been wrong. You look rational enough, and you talk in an eminently sane manner.”

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“Thank you,” he replied, ironically.

“Don’t be sarcastic!” she retorted. “I only meant—”

“It’s all right, anyhow,” said he. “You’ve simply got the old, stupid, wornout ideas of your class. You can’t grasp this new ideal, rising through the ruck and waste and sin and misery of the present system. I don’t blame you. You’re a product of your environment. You can’t help it. With that environment, how can you sense the newer and more vital ideas of the day?”

For a moment she fixed eager eyes on him, in silence. Then asked she:

“Ideals? You mean that Socialism has ideals, and that it’s not all a matter of tearing down and dividing up, and destroying everything good and noble and right—all the accumulated wisdom and resources of the world?”

He laughed heartily.

“Who handed you that bunk?” he demanded.

“Father told me Socialism was all that, and more,”

“What’s your father’s business?”

“Why, investments, stocks, bonds, industrial development and all that sort of thing.”

“Hm!” he grunted. “I thought as much!”

“You mean that father misinformed me?”

“Rather!”

“Well, if he did, what is Socialism?”

“Socialism,” answered the young man slowly, while he fixed his eyes on the smouldering fire, “Socialism is a political movement, a concept of life, a philosophy, an interpretation, a prophecy, an ideal. It embraces history, economics, science, art, religion, literature and every phase of human activity. It explains life, points the way to better things, gives us hope, strengthens the weary and heavy-laden, bids us look upward and onward, and constitutes the most sublime ideal ever conceived by the soul of man!”

“Can this be true?” the girl demanded, astonished.

“Not only can, but is! Socialism would free the world from slavery and slaves, from war, poverty, prostitution, vice and crime; would cleanse the sores of our rotting capitalism, would loose the gyves from the fettered hands of mankind, would bid the imprisoned soul of man awake to nobler and to purer things! How? The answer to that would take me weeks. You would have to read and study many books, to learn the entire truth. But I am telling you the substance of the ideal—a realizable ideal, and no chimera—when I say that Socialism sums up all that is good, and banishes all that is evil! And do you wonder that I love and serve it, all my life?”

She peered at him in wonder.

“You serve it? How?” she demanded.

“By spreading it abroad; by speaking for it, working for it, fighting for it! By the spoken and the printed word! By every act and through every means whereby I can bring it nearer and nearer realization!”

“You’re a dreamer, a visionary, a fanatic!” she exclaimed.

“You think so? No, I can’t agree. Time will judge that matter. Meanwhile, I travel up and down the earth, spreading Socialism.”

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“And what do you get out of it, personally?”

“I? What do you mean? I never thought of that question.”

“I mean, money. What do you make out of it?”

He laughed heartily.

“I get a few jail-sentences, once in a while; now and then a crack over the head with a policeman’s billy, or maybe a peek down the muzzle of a rifle. I get—”

“You mean that you’re a martyr?”

“By no means! I’ve never even thought of being called such. This is a privilege, this propaganda of ours. It’s the greatest privilege in the world—bringing the word of life and hope and joy to a crushed, bleeding and despairing world!”

She thought a moment, in silence.

“You’re a poet, I believe!” said she.

“No, not that. Only a worker in the ranks.”

“But do you write poetry?”

“I write verses. You’d hardly call them poetry!”

“Verses? About Socialism?”

“Sometimes.”

“Will you give me some?”

“What do you mean?”

“Tell me some of them.”

“Of course not! I can’t recite my verses! They aren’t worth bothering you with!”

“That’s for me to judge. Let me hear something of that kind. If you only knew how terribly much you interest me!”

“You mean that?”

“Of course I do! Please let me hear something you’ve written!”

He pondered a moment, then in his well-modulated, deep-toned voice began:

HESPERIDES.

I.

My feet, used to pine-needles, moss and turf,
And the gray boulders at the lip o' the sea,
Where the cold brine jets up its creamy surf,
Now tread once more these city ways, unloved by me,
Hateful and hot, gross with iniquity.
And so I grieve,
Grieve when I wake, or at high blinding noon
Or when the moon
Mocks this sad Ninevah where the throngs weave
Their jostling ways by day, their paths by night;
Where darkness is not—where the streets burn bright
With hectic fevers, eloquent of death!
I gasp for breath....
Visions have I, visions! So sweet they seem
That from this welter of men and things I turn, to dream
Of the dim Wood-world, calling out to me.
Where forest-virgins I half glimpse, half see
With cool mysterious fingers beckoning!
Where vine-wreathed woodland altars sunlit burn,
Or Dryads dance their mystic rounds and sing,
Sing high, sing low, with magic cadences
That once the wild oaks of Dodona heard;
And every wood-note bids me burst asunder
The bonds that hold me from the leaf-hid bird.
I quaff thee, O Nepenthe! Ah, the wonder
Grows, that there be who buy their wealth, their ease
By damning serfs to cities, hot and blurred,
Far from thy golden quest, Hesperides!...

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II.

I see this August sun again
Sheer up high heaven wheel his angry way;
And hordes of men
Bleared with unrestful sleep rise up another day,
Their bodies racked with aftermaths of toil.
Over the city, in each gasping street,
Shudders a haze of heat,
Reverberant from pillar, span and plinth.
Once more, cribbed in this monstrous labyrinth
Sacrificed to the Minotaur of Greed
Men bear the turmoil, glare, sweat, brute inharmonies;
Denial of each simplest human need,
Loss of life's meaning as day lags on day;
And my rebellious spirit rises, flies
In dreams to the green quiet wood away,
Away! Away!

III.

And now, and now...I feel the forest-moss...
Come! On these moss-beds let me lie with Pan,
Twined with the ivy-vine in tendrill'd curls,
And I will hold all gold, that hampers man,
Only the ashes of base, barren dross!
On with the love-dance of the pagan girls!
The pagan girls with lips all rosy-red,
With breasts upgirt and foreheads garlanded,
With fair white foreheads nobly garlanded!
With sandalled feet that weave the magic ring!
Now...let them sing,
And I will pipe a tune that all may hear,
To bid them mind the time of my wild rhyme;
To warn profaning feet lest they draw near.
Away! Away! Beware these mystic trees!
Who dares to quest you now, Hesperides?

IV.

Great men of song, what sing ye? Woodland meadows?
Rocks, trees and rills where sunlight glints to gold?
Sing ye the hills, adown whose sides blue shadows
Creep when the westering day is growing old?

Sing ye the brooks where in the purling shallows
The small fish dart and gleam?
Sing ye the pale green tresses of the willows
That stoop to kiss the stream?
Or sing ye burning streets, foul with the breath
Of sweatshop, tenement, where endlessly
Spawned swarms of folk serve tyrant masters twain—
Profit, and his twin-brother, grinning Death?
Where millions toil, hedged off from aught save pain?
Far from thee ever, O mine Arcady?...

His voice ceased and silence fell between the man and woman in the old sugar-house. Gabriel sat there by the dying fire, which cast its ruddy light over his strongly virile face, and gazed into the coals. The girl, lying on the rude bed, her face eager, her slim strong hands tightly clasped, had almost forgotten to breathe.

At last she spoke.

“That—that is wonderful!” she cried, a tremor of enthusiasm in her voice.

He shook his head.

“No compliments, please,” said he.

“I’m not complimenting you! I think it *is* wonderful. You’re a true poet!”

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“I wish I were—so I might use it all for Socialism!”

“You could make a fortune, if you’d work for some paper or magazine—some regular one, I mean, not Socialist.”

He shook his head.

“Dead sea fruit,” he answered. “Fairy gold, fading in the clutch, worthless through and through. No, if my work has any merit, it’s all for Socialism, now and ever!”

Silence again. Neither now found a word to say, but their eyes met and read each other; and a kind of solemn hush seemed to lie over their hearts.

Then, as they sat there, looking each at each—for now the girl had raised herself on the crude bed and was supporting herself with one hand—a sudden sound of a motor, on the road, awakened them from their musing.

Came the raucous wail of a siren. Then the engine-exhaust ceased; and a voice, raised in some annoyance, hailed loudly through the maple-grove:

“Hello! Hello? What’s wrong here?”

Gabriel stepped to the sugar-house door:

“Here! Come here!” he shouted in a ringing voice that echoed wildly from between his hollowed palms.

As the motorist still sat there, uncomprehending, Gabriel made his way toward the road.

“Accident here,” said he. “Girl in here, injured. Can you take her to the nearest town, at once? She needs a doctor.”

Instantly the man was out of his car, and hastening toward Gabriel.

“Eh? What?” he asked. “Anything serious?”

In a few words, Gabriel told him the outlines of the tale.

“The quicker you get the girl to a town, and let her have a doctor and communication with her family, the better,” he concluded.

“Right! I’ll do all in my power,” said the other, a rather stout, well-to-do, vulgar-looking man.

“Good! This way, then!”

The man followed Gabriel to the sugar-house. They found the girl already on her feet, standing there a bit unsteadily, but with determination to be game, in every feature.

Five minutes later she was in the new-comer's car, which had been turned around and now was headed back toward Haverstraw. The shawl and robe serving her as wraps, she was made comfortable in the tonneau.

"Think you can stand it, all right?" asked Gabriel, as he took in his the hand she extended. "In half an hour, you'll be under a doctor's care, and your father will be on his way toward you."

She nodded, and for a second tightened the grasp of her hand.

"I—I'm not even going to know who you are?" she asked, a strange tone in her voice.

"No," he answered. "And now, good luck, and good-bye!"

"Good-bye," she echoed, her voice almost inaudible. "I—I won't forget you."

He made no answer, but only smiled in a peculiar way.

Then, as the car rolled slowly forward, their hands separated.

Gabriel, bareheaded and with level gaze, stood there in the middle of the great highway, looking after her. A minute, under the darkening arches of the forest road, he saw her, still. Then the car swung round a bend, and vanished.

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Had she waved her hand at him? He could not tell. Motionless he stood, a while, then cleared away the barrier of branches that obstructed the road, took up his knapsack, and with slow steps returned to the sugar-house.

Almost on the threshold, a white something caught his eye. He picked it up. Her handkerchief! A moment he held the dainty, filmy thing in his rough hand. A vague perfume reached his nostrils, disquieting and seductive.

“More than eighteen dollars an ounce, perhaps!” he exclaimed, with sudden bitterness; but still he did not throw the handkerchief away. Instead, he looked at it more keenly. In one corner, the fading light just showed him some initials. He studied them, a moment.

“C. J. F.” he read. Then, yielding to a sudden impulse, he folded the kerchief and put it in his pocket.

He entered the sugar-house, to make sure, before departing, that he had left no danger of fire behind him.

Another impulse bade him sit down on a rough box, there, before the dying embers. He gazed at the bed of leaves, a while, immersed in thought, then filled his pipe and lighted it with a glowing brand, and sat there—while the night came—smoking and musing, in a reverie.

The overpowering lure of the woman who had lain in his arms, as he had borne her thither; her breath upon his face; the perfume of her, even her blood that he had washed away—all these were working on his senses, still. But most of all he seemed to see her eyes, there in the ember-lit gloom, and hear her voice, and feel her lithe young body and her breast against his breast.

For a long time he sat there, thinking, dreaming, smoking, till the last shred of tobacco was burned out in the heel of his briar; till the last ember had winked and died under the old sheet-iron stove.

At last, with a peculiar laugh, he rose, slung the knapsack once more on his shoulders, settled his cap upon his head, and made ready to depart.

But still, one moment, he lingered in the doorway. Lingered and looked back, as though in his mind’s eye he would have borne the place away with him forever.

Suddenly he stooped, picked up a leaf from the bed where she had lain, and put that, too, in his pocket where the kerchief was.

Then, looking no more behind him, he strode off across the maple-grove, through which, now, the first pale stars were glimmering. He reached the road again, swung to

the north, and, striking into his long marching stride, pushed onward northward, away and away into the soft June twilight.

CHAPTER XVI.

TIGER WALDRON “COMES BACK.”

Old Isaac Flint loved but two things in all this world—power, and his daughter Catherine.

I speak advisedly in putting “power” first. Much as he idolized the girl, much as she reminded him of the long-dead wife of his youth, he could have survived the loss of her. The loss of power would inevitably have crushed and broken him, stunned him, killed him. Yet, so far as human affection could still blossom in that withered heart, shrunk by cold scheming and the cruel piracies of many decades, he loved the girl.

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And so it was that when the message came in, that evening, over the telephone, the news that Kate had been injured in an auto-accident which had entirely destroyed the machine and killed Herrick, he paled, trembled, and clutched the receiver, hardly able to hold it to his ear with his shaking hand.

“Here! You!” he cried. “She—she’s not badly hurt? She’s living? She’s safe? No lies, now! The truth!”

“Your daughter is very much alive, and perfectly safe,” a voice answered. “This is Doctor MacDougal, of Haverstraw, speaking. The patient is now having a superficial scalp wound dressed by my assistant. You can speak to her, in a few minutes, if you like.”

“Now! For God’s sake, let me speak *now*!” entreated the Billionaire; but the doctor refused. Not all Flint’s urging or bribing would turn him one hair’s breadth.

“No,” he insisted. “In ten minutes she can talk to you. Not now. But have no fear, sir. She is perfectly safe and—barring her wound, which will probably heal almost without a scar—is as well as ever. A little nervous and unstrung, of course, but that’s to be expected.”

“What happened, and how?” demanded Flint, in terrible agitation.

The doctor briefly gave him such facts as he knew, ending with the statement that a passing automobilist had brought the girl to him, and outlining the situation of the first-aid measures in the sugar-house. At the thought that Herrick, the drunken cause of it all, was dead and burned, Flint smiled with real satisfaction.

“Damn him! It’s too good for the scum!” he muttered. Then, aloud, he asked over the wire:

“And who was the rescuer?”

“I don’t know,” MacDougal answered. “Your daughter didn’t tell me. But from what I’ve learned, he must have been a man of rare strength and presence of mind. It may well be that you owe your daughter’s life to his prompt work.”

“I’ll find him, yet. He’ll be suitably rewarded,” thought the Billionaire. “No matter what my enemies have called me, I’m not incapable of gratitude!”

Some few minutes later, having paced the library floor meanwhile, in great excitement, he called the doctor’s house again by long-distance, and this time succeeded in having speech with his daughter. Her voice, though a little weak, vastly reassured him. Once more he asked for the outline of the story. She told him all the essentials, and finished by:

“Now, come and get me, won’t you, father dear? I want to go home. And the quicker you come for me, the happier I’ll be.”

“Bless your heart, Kate!” he exclaimed, deeply moved. “Nothing like the old man, after all, is there? Yes, I’ll start at once. I’ve only been waiting here, to talk with you and *know* you’re safe. In five minutes I’ll be on my way, with the racing-car. And if I don’t break a few records between here and Haverstraw, my name’s not Isaac Flint!”

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After an affectionate good-bye, the old man hung up, rang for Slawson, his private valet, and ordered the swiftest car in his garage made ready at once, for a quick run.

Two hours later, Doctor MacDougal had pocketed the largest fee he ever had received or ever would, again; and Kate was safe at home, in Idle Hour.

On the homeward journey, Flint learned every detail of the affair, from start to finish; and again grimly consigned the soul of the dead chauffeur to the nethermost pits of Hell. Yes, he realized, he must have the body brought in and decently buried, after the coroner's verdict had been rendered; but in his heart he knew that, save for the eye of public opinion and the law, he would let those charred remnants lie and rot there, by the river bank, under the twisted wreckage of the car—and revel in the thought of that last, barbarous revenge.

Arrived at home, Flint routed specialists out of their offices, and at a large expense satisfied himself the girl had really taken no serious harm. Next day, and the days following, all that money and science could do to make the gash heal without a scar, was done. Waldron called, greatly unnerved and not at all himself; and Kate received him with amicable interest. She had not yet informed her father of the rupture between Waldron and herself, nor did he suspect it. As for "Tiger," he realized the time was inopportune for any statement of conditions, and held his peace. But once she should be well, again, he had savagely resolved this decision of hers should not stand.

"Damn it, it can't! It mustn't!" he reflected, as on the third evening he returned to his Fifth Avenue house. "Now that I'm really in danger of losing her, I'm just beginning to realize what an extraordinary woman she is! As a wife, the mistress of my establishment, a hostess, a social leader, what a figure she would make! And too, the alliance between Flint and myself simply must not be shattered. Kate is the only child. The old man's billion, or more, will surely come to her, practically every penny of it. Flint is more than sixty-three this very minute, he's a dope-fiend, and his heart's damned weak. He's liable to drop off, any moment. If I get Kate, and he dies, what a fortune! What a prize! Added to my interests, it will make me master of the world!

"Then, too, this new Air Trust scheme positively demands that Flint and I should be bound together by something closer than mere financial association. I've simply got to be one of the family. I've got to be his son-in-law. That's a positive necessity! God, what a fool I was at Longmeadow, to have taken those three drinks, and have been piqued at her beating me—to have let my tongue and temper slip—in short, to have acted like an ass!"

Ugly and grim, he puffed at his Londres. Vast schemes of finance and of conquest wove through his busy, plotting brain. Visions of the girl arose, too, tempting him still more, though his chill heart was powerless to feel the urge of any real, self-sacrificing or devoted love. Sensual passion he knew, and ambition, and the lust of power; nothing

else. But these all opened his eyes to the vast blunder he had committed, and nerved him to reconquest of the ground that he had lost.

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“I can win her, yet,” reflected he, as his car swung into the long and brilliant night-vista of Fifth Avenue. “I know women, and I understand the game. Flowers, letters, telephone calls, attention every day—every hour, if need be—these are the artillery to batter down the strongest fortresses of indifference, even of dislike. And she shall have them all—all and more. Wally, old chap, you’ve never been beaten at any game, whether in the Street or in the pursuit of woman. You’ll win yet; you’re bound to win! And Kate shall yet open the door to you, toward wealth and power and position such as never yet were seen on earth!”

Thus fortified by his own determination, he slept more calmly that night. And, on the morrow, his campaign began.

It lasted but a week.

At the end of that time, a friendly little note from Idle Hour told him, frankly and in the kindest manner possible, that—much as she still liked and respected him—Catherine could not, now or ever, think of him in any other way than as a friend.

Stunned by this body-blow, “Tiger” first swore with hideous blasphemies that caused his valet to retreat precipitately from the famous, nymph-frieze bedchamber; then ordered drink, then walked the floor a while in a violent passion; and finally knit up his decision.

“By God!” he swore, shaking his fist in the direction of Englewood. “She’s balky, eh? She won’t, eh? But *I* say she *will*! And if I can’t make her, there’s her father, who can. Together we can break this stiff-necked spirit and bring her to time. Hm! Fancy anybody or anything in this world setting up opposition to Flint and Waldron, combined! Just fancy it, that’s all!

“So then, what’s to do? This: See her father and have a heart-to-heart talk with him. It’s obvious she hasn’t told him, yet, the real state of affairs. I doubt if the old idiot has even noticed the absence of my ring from her finger. And if he has, she’s been able to fool him, easily enough. But not much longer, so help me!

“No, this very morning he shall hear from me, the whole infernal story—he shall learn his daughter’s unreasonable rebellion, the slight she’s put upon me and her opposition to his will. *Then* we shall see—we shall see who’s master in that family, he or the girl!”

With this strong determination in his superheated mind, Waldron rang up Flint, asked for a private talk, at eleven, in the Wall Street office, and made ready the mustering of his arguments; his self-defense; his appeals to Flint’s every sense of interest and liking; his whole plea for the resumption of the broken betrothal.

And Catherine, all this time of convalescence—what were her thoughts, and whither were they straying? Not thoughts of Waldron, that is sure, despite his notes, his

telephoning, his flowers, his visits. Not to him did they wander, as she sat in her sunny bedroom bay-window, looking out over the great, close cropped lawn, through the oaks and elms, to the Palisades and the sparkling Hudson beneath.

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No, not to Waldron. Yet wander they did, despite her; and with persistence they followed channels till then quite unknown to her.

What might these channels be? And whither, I ask again, did the girl's memories and fancies, her wondering thoughts, her vague, half-formulated longings, lead?

You, perhaps, can answer, as well as I, if you but remember that—Billionaire's daughter though she was, and all unversed in the hard realities of life—she was, at heart and soul, very much a woman after all.

CHAPTER XVII.

THOUGHTS.

During the long days, the June days, of her convalescence, Catherine found herself involuntarily reverting, more often than she could understand, to thoughts of the inscrutable and unknown man who had in all probability saved her life.

"Had it not been for him," she reflected, as she sat there gazing out over the river, "I might not be here, this minute. Caught as I was, on the very brink of the precipice, I should almost certainly have slipped and fallen over, in my dazed condition, when I tried to get up. If I'd been alone, if he hadn't found me just when he did—!"

She shuddered at thought of what must almost inevitably have happened, and covered her face with both hands. Her cheeks burned; she knew emotion such as not once had Waldron's kiss ever been able to arouse in her. The memory of how she, half-unconscious, had lain in that stranger's arms, so powerful and tense; had been carried by him, as though she had been a child; had felt his breath upon her face and the quick, vigorous beating of his heart—all this, and more, dwelt in her soul, nor could she banish it.

Gratitude? Yes, and more. For the first time in her two-and-twenty years, Catherine had sensed the power, the virility of a real man—not of the make-believe, manicured and tailored parasites of her own class—and something elemental in her, some urge of primitive womanhood, grappled her to that memory and, all against her will, caused her to live and re-live those moments, time and time again, as the most strange and vital of her life.

Yet, it was not this physical call alone, in her, that had awakened her being. The man's eyes, and mouth and hair, true, all remained with her as a subtly compelling lure; his strength and straight directness seemed to conquer her and draw her to him; but beyond all this, something in his speech, in his ideas and the strange reticence that had so puzzled her, kept him even more constantly in her wondering thoughts.

“A workingman,” she murmured to herself, in uncomprehending revery, “he said he was a workingman—and he knew that I was very, very rich. He knew my father would have rewarded him magnificently, given him money, work, anything he might have asked. And yet, and yet—he would not even tell his name. And he refused to know mine! He didn’t want to know! His pride—why, in all my life, among all the proud, rich people that I’ve known, I’ve never found such pride as that!”

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She reflected what would have happened had any man of the usual type rescued her, even a man of wealth and position. Of course, thought she, that man would have made himself known and would have called on her, ostensibly to inquire after her condition, yet really to ingratiate himself. At this reflection she shuddered again.

“Ugh!” she whispered. “He’d have tried to take liberties, any other man would. He’d have presumed on the accident—he’d have been—oh, everything that *that* man was not, and could never be!”

Now her thoughts wandered to the brief talk they two had had there in the old sugar-house. Every word of it seemed graven on her memory. Disconnected bits of what he had told her, seemed to float before her mental vision—: “I? Oh, I’m just an out-of-work—don’t ask me who I am; and I won’t ask who *you* are. We’re of different worlds, I guess—don’t question me; I’d rather you wouldn’t. Am I happy? Yes, in a way, or shall be, when I’ve done what I mean to do!”

Such were some of his phrases that kept coming back to her, as she sat there in that luxurious and beautiful room, her book lying unread in her lap, the scent of flowers everywhere, and, merely for her taking, all the world’s treasures hers to command. Strange man, indeed, and stranger speech, to her! Never had she been thus spoken to. His every word and thought and point of view, commonplace enough, perhaps, seemed peculiarly stimulating to her, and wakened eager curiosity, and would not let her live in peace, as heretofore.

“He said he was a Socialist, too,” she murmured, “whatever that may be. But he—he didn’t *look* it! On the contrary, he looked remarkably clean and intelligent. And the words he used were the words of an educated man. Far better vocabulary than Waldron’s, for example; and as for poor little Van Slyke, and that set, why this man’s mind seems to have towered above them as the Palisades tower above the river!

“Happy? Rich? He said he was both—and all he had was eighteen dollars and his two big hands! Just fancy that, will you? He might as well have said eighteen cents; it would have been about as much! And I—what did I tell him? I told him I, with all my money and everything, was vacant, empty, futile! Just those words. And—God help me, I—I am!”

Suddenly, she felt her eyes were wet. What was the reason? Herself she knew not. All she knew was that with her beautiful and queenly head bowed on the arm of her Japanese silk morning gown, as its loose sleeves lay along the edge of the Chippendale table, she was crying like a child.

Crying bitterly; and yet in a kind of new, strange joy. Crying with tears so bitter-sweet that she, herself, could not half understand them; could not fathom the deeper meaning that lay hidden there.

“If!” she whispered to her heart. “If only I were of his class, or he of mine!”

And Gabriel, what of him?

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As he swung north and westward, day by day, on the long hike toward Niagara, the memory of the girl went with him, and hour by hour bore him company.

He was not forgetting. Could he forget? Strive as he might, to thrust her out of his heart and soul, she still indwelt there.

Not all his philosophy, nor all his realization that this woman he had saved, this woman who had lain in his two arms and mingled her breath with his, belonged to another and an alien class, could banish her.

And as he strode along, swinging his knotted stick at the daisies and pondering on all that might have been and now could never be, a sudden, passionate longing burst over him, as a long sea-roller, hurled against a cliff, flings upward in vast tourbillions of spume.

Raising his face to the summer sky, his bare head high with emotion and his eyes wide with the thought of strange possibilities that shook and intoxicated him, he cried:

“Oh—would God she were an orphan and an outcast! Would God she had no penny in this world to call her own!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

FLINT AND WALDRON PLAN.

“Tiger” Waldron’s interview with old man Flint, regarding Catherine’s breaking of the engagement, was particularly electric. Promptly at the appointed hour, Waldron appeared, shook hands with the older man, sat down and lighted a cigar, then proceeded to business.

“Flint,” said he, without any ado, “I’ve come here to tell you some very unpleasant news and to ask your help. Can you stand the one, and give me the other?”

The Billionaire looked at him through his pince-nez, poised on that vulture-beak, with some astonishment. Then he smiled nervously, showing his gleaming tooth of gold, and answered:

“Yes, I guess so. What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong? Everything! Catherine has broken our engagement!”

For a moment old Flint sat there motionless and staring. Then, moving his head forward with a peculiar, pecking twitch that still further enhanced his likeness to a buzzard, he stammered:

"You—you mean—?"

"I mean just what I say. Your daughter has severed the betrothal. Haven't you noticed my ring was gone from her finger?"

"Gone? Bless my soul, no—that is, yes—maybe. I don't know. But—but at any rate, I thought nothing of it. So then, you say—she's broken it off? But, why? And when? And—and tell me, Wally, what's it all about?"

"Listen, and I *will* tell you," Tiger answered. "And I'll give it to you straight. I'm partly at fault. Mostly so, it may be. Let me assume all the blame, at any rate. I'm not sparing myself and have no intention of doing so. My conduct, I admit, was beastly. No excuses offered. All I want to do, now, is to make the *amende honorable*, be forgiven, and have the former status resumed."

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Thus spoke Waldron. But all the time his soul lay hot within him, at having so to humble himself before Flint; at being thus obliged to eat crow, and fawn and feign and creep.

“If I didn’t need your billion, old man,” his secret thought was, as he eyed Flint with pretended humility, “you might go to Hell, for all of me—you and your daughter with you, damn you both!”

The Billionaire sat blinking, for a moment. Then, picking up a pencil and idly scrawling pothooks on the big clean sheet of blotting-paper that covered his reference-book table, beside which the men were sitting, he asked:

“Well, what’s the trouble all about? What are the facts? I must have those, in full, before I can guarantee to do anything toward changing my daughter’s opinion. Much as I deplore her action, Wally, I don’t know whether she’s right or wrong, till you tell me. Now, let’s have it.”

“I will,” the other answered; and he was as good as his word. Realizing the prime futility of any subterfuge, or any misstatement of fact—which Catherine would surely discover and tell her father, and which would react against him—Waldron began at the beginning and narrated the entire affair, with every detail precisely accurate. Nay, he even exaggerated the offensiveness of his conduct, at the Longmeadow Club, and in various ways gave the Billionaire to understand that he was a more serious offender than in truth he really was. For, after all, the only real offense was the lack of any compatibility between the girl and himself—the total absence of love.

Flint listened carefully and with a judicial expression. If he blamed Waldron, he made no statement of that fact. A man himself, and one who viewed man’s weaknesses and woman’s foibles with a cynic eye, he could judge motives and weigh actions with considerable skill.

“I see, I see,” he commented, when Waldron had quite done, and had poured forth a highly false declaration of his great love for the girl and his determination that this rupture should not be permanent. “I understand the case, I think. It all seems an unfortunate accident—just one of those unavoidable incidents which strike into and upset human calculations, against all expectation.

“You’re not terribly guilty, Waldron. You acted inconsiderably. Irritatingly, perhaps, and not wholly like a gentleman—for which, blame the rotten Scotch they *will* persist in selling, out there at Longmeadow. But even that’s not fatal. Many men have done worse and been forgiven. I’ll have a talk with Catherine, inside a day or two, when the psychological moment offers. And you may be sure, if a father’s advice and good offices are of any avail, this little quarrel will be all patched up between you two. Surely will be! I can almost positively promise you that!”

“Promise it?” asked Waldron, leaning eagerly forward, a strange light in those close-set, greenish eyes.

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Flint nodded. “Yes,” he answered. “I’ve never yet failed to bring Kate to reason and good common-sense, when I’ve set out to. This will be no exception. My word and my counsel possess the greatest weight with her. She’ll listen and be advised, I’m sure. So have no uneasiness,” he concluded, holding out his hand to his partner. “Leave everything to me. You’ll see, it will all come right, in the end.”

“Tiger” shook his hand, cordially.

“I haven’t words to thank you!” he exclaimed, with as much emotion as he could simulate from a perfectly cold heart and calculating soul.

“Don’t try to,” the Billionaire replied, with seeming benevolence. “All the thanks I want, Wally, is to patch up this little difficulty and reunite two—that is—two loving, sympathetic hearts!”

“You old hypocrite!” Waldron thought, eyeing him. “All *you* want of me, if anything, is to keep me as your partner, because you know you’re growing old and losing your grip, and I’m still in the game with all four claws! Paternal philanthropist *you* are—I don’t think!”

Wally was dead right.

“I can’t lose this man,” the Billionaire was thinking. “Whether or no, Kate has got to marry him. This Air Trust business demands a strong, a quick, a perfectly unscrupulous hand. And no outsider will do. My partner has got to be my son-in-law. Love be damned! Romantic slush can go to Hell! Kate will marry him—she’s *got* to—or I’ll know the reason why!

“Though, after all,” he soothed his conscience, as Waldron stood up, walked to the window and stood gazing out as he smoked, “after all, Wally will make her as happy, I fancy, as any man. He’s a fine figure in the world, commanding, heavily propertied, energetic and successful, also of the finest family connections. Yes, a husband any woman might admire and be proud of. Certainly, the only son-in-law for *me*. Even if she can’t idolize and worship him, as some fool women think they must, a man, she can respect and be respected with him. And with him she can take the highest position in the land, without a qualm as to his competence and manner. Beside all that, what’s love? Love? Bah!”

With which philosophy, he too arose, went back into his own office, and returned to the dictating of some very private letters to Slade, the Cosmos Detective Agency manager, *in re* the ferreting-out and jailing or deporting of all Socialists and labor leaders at Niagara. This preparatory work on the ground of the huge new Air Trust plant, he deemed most essential. The Cosmos people, scenting a big contract, had fostered his

belief, and now, already, the work was well under way. Subterranean methods were still sufficing; but, should these fail, others lay in the background.

Flint smiled a grim, vulturine smile as he read over the finished letters of instruction, a few minutes later.

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“And to think,” he mused, as he finished them, “that these fanatics believe—really believe—they can make headway anywhere in this country, now! Ten years ago, yes, they might have. But that’s not today. Then, publie opinion—stupid and futile as it was—could still be aroused. Then, there was a really effective labor and Socialist press. And the Limited Franchise Bill hadn’t gone through. Neither had the enlarged Military Bill, the National Censorship nor even the Grays—the National Mounted Police. While *now*—ah, thank Heaven, it’s all so different and so easy that I call myself a fool, at times, for even giving these matters a single thought!

“Well,” he concluded, handing the letters back to his confidential secretary, for mailing, “well, now *that’s* done, at any rate. So then, to the S. & S. committee meeting. And tonight my little talk with Kate. I’ll soon bring her to reason, I’m sure. There’s nothing can’t be accomplished by a little patience and persuasion.”

The old Billionaire chose his time well, that night, for the vital interview with his daughter, who had so far rebelled against his authority as to break with the man most eminently acceptable to him. After a simple but exquisite dinner in the Venetian room, he asked the girl to play for him, which (he knew) always pleased her and put her in a receptive mood.

“Play for you, father?” she answered. “Of course I will, anything and as much as you like! What shall it be, tonight? Chopin, or Grieg, or—?”

“Anything that pleases you, suits me, my dear,” he answered, smiling with satisfaction at his ruse. Never had he felt more masterful. He had allowed himself a trifle more morphia than usual that day, by reason of the approaching interview; and now the subtle drug filled him with well-being and seemed to enhance his self-control and power. Lighting a cigar—rare treat for him—he offered Kate his arm; and together, unattended by any valet or domestic, they walked along the high, paneled hallway, hung with Gobelin tapestries, and so reached the magnificent music-room which Kate claimed, in a way, as her own special place at Idle Hour.

Here everything suggested harmony. The mahogany wainscotted walls were decked with fine portraits of the world’s great masters of melody. Handsome cabinets contained costly and elaborate collections and folios of music, a complete library of the entire world’s best productions. The girl’s harp—a masterpiece by Pestalozzi of Venice—-stood at one side; on the other, a five hundred dollar Victrola, with a wonderful repertoire of records. But the grand piano itself dominated all, especially made for Catherine by Durand Freres, in Paris, and imported on the Billionaire’s own yacht, the “Bandit.” A wondrous instrument, this, finer even than the pipe-organ in an alcove at the far end of the room. It summed up all that the world’s masters knew of instrument-production; and its cost, from factory to its present place at Idle Hour, represented twenty years’ wages, and more, of any of Flint’s slaves in the West Virginia mines or the Glenn Pool oil-fields of Oklahoma.

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At this magnificent piano the girl now seated herself, on a bench of polished teak, from Mindanao. And, turning to her father, who had sunk down in his favorite easy-chair of Russia leather, she asked with a smile:

“Well, daddy, what shall I play for you, to-night?”

He looked at her a minute, before replying. Never had she seemed to dear, so beautiful to him. The rose-tinted light that fell softly from a Bohemian chandelier over her head, flooded her coiled hair, her face, her hands, with soft warm color. The slight dressing that her wound now required was covered by a deft arrangement of her hair. She had regained her usual tint. Nothing now told of the accident, the close call she had had, from death, so short a time before. And old Flint smiled, as he answered her:

“What shall you play? Anything you like, my dear. You know best—only, don’t make it too classical. Your old father isn’t up to that ultra music, you know, and never will be!”

She smiled again with understanding, and turned to the keyboard. Then, without notes, and with a delicate touch of perfectly modulated interpretation, she began to render “Trauemerei,” as though she, too, had been dreaming of something that might have been.

Flint listened, with perfect content. The music soothed and quieted him. Even the foreknowledge of the difficult task that lay before him, the interview that he must have with his daughter, faded from his mind, a little, and left him wholly calm. Eyes closed, every sense intent on the delicious harmony, he followed the masterpiece to the end; and sighed when the last notes had died away, and kept silence.

Then Kate, still needing no music on the rack before her, played the “Miserere” from “Il Trovatore,” a Hungarian “Czardas,” Mendelssohn’s “Fruehlingslied” and the overture from “William Tell.” She followed these with the “Intermezzo” and the “Pizzicato” from “Sylvia,” and then with “Narcissus” and “Sans Souci.” And at the end of this, she paused again; for now her father had arisen and come close to her. With a hand on her shoulder, looking down at her with stern yet kindly eyes, he said:

“‘Sans Souci’? That means ‘Without Care,’ doesn’t it, Kate?”

“Yes, Daddy. Why?” she answered.

“Oh, I was just thinking, that’s all,” said he. “It made me wish *I* had no cares, no troubles, no sorrows.”

“Sorrows, father? Why should you have sorrows?” she queried, turning to him and taking both his shriveled hands in her warm, strong ones.

“Sorrows? Why shouldn’t I?” said he. “Every man of large affairs has them. Every father has them, too.” And he bent over her and kissed her, with unusual emotion.

“Every father?” asked she. “What do you mean? Am *I* a sorrow to you?”

“A joy in many ways,” he answered. “In some, a sorrow.”

“In what ways?” she asked quickly, her eyes widening.

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“In this way, most of all,” he told her, as he took her left hand up, and pointed at the finger where Waldron’s ring had been and now no longer was.

She looked at him a moment, hardly understanding; then bowed her head.

“Father,” she whispered. “Forgive me—but I couldn’t! I—I couldn’t! No, not for the world!”

Flint’s drug-contracted eyes hardened as he stood there gazing down at her. Once, twice he essayed to speak, but found no words. At last, however, blinking nervously, he said:

“This, Kate, is what I want to talk with you about, to-night. Will you hear me?”

CHAPTER XIX.

CATHERINE’S DEFIANCE.

“Hear you, best and dearest father in the world?” she cried, looking quickly up at him again. “Of course I will! Only, I beg you, don’t—don’t ask me to—”

“I will ask you nothing, Kate, my girl, save this—to consider everything well, and to act like a reasoning, thinking creature, not like an impetuous and romantic school-girl!”

Releasing her hands, he once more sat down in the easy-chair, crossed his legs and peered keenly at her, to fathom if he could the inner workings of that other brain and heart.

“Well, father,” she said, “I’ll admit, right away, that I’ve done wrong to keep this from you, or to try to. We—I—broke the engagement, that day of the accident, out at Longmeadow. I *meant* to tell you, tell you everything and explain it all, but somehow—”

“You needn’t explain, my dear,” said Flint, judicially. “Wally has already done so.”

“And does he blame me, father?” cried the girl, eagerly, clasping her hands on her knees.

“No, not at all. On the contrary, he claims the fault is all his own. And he’s most contrite and repentant, Kate. Absolutely so. All he asks in the world is to make amends and—-well, resume the old relation, whenever you are willing.”

Kate shook her head.

“That’s noble and big of him, father,” said she, “to assume all the blame. Really, half of it is mine. But he’s acted like a true man, in taking it. However, that can’t change my decision. I want him for a friend, in every way. But for a husband, no, no, never in this world!”

The Billionaire frowned darkly. Already a stronger opposition was developing than he had expected; and opposition was the one thing in all the world that he could neither tolerate nor endure.

“Listen, Kate,” said he. “You don’t grasp the situation at all. Waldron is an extraordinary man in many ways. In refusing him, you seriously injure yourself. Of course, he has never done any spectacular, heroic thing for you, like—for instance—that young man who rescued you, and whom I shall suitably reward as soon as I find him—”

“What!” she exclaimed, peering eagerly at her father. “What do you mean? Find him? Reward him?”

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“Eh? Why, naturally,” the Billionaire replied, scowling at the interruption. “His game of refusing his identity was, of course, just a clever dodge on his part. He certainly must expect something out of it. I have—er—set certain forces at work to discover him; and, as I say, when I’ve done so, I will reward him liberally, and—”

“You’d better *not*!” ejaculated Kate, with animation. “He isn’t the sort of man you can take liberties with!”

“Hm? What now?” said Flint, with vexation. “What do *you* know about him?”

“Oh, nothing, nothing, father,” the girl answered quickly. “Only, I think you’re making a mistake to try and force a reward on a man who doesn’t want it. But no matter,” she added, her face tinged by a warmer glow—which Flint was quick to see. “Forgive my interruption. Now, about Wally?”

The old man peered intently at his daughter, a full minute, then with a peculiar sinking at his heart, made shift to say:

“About Wally, yes; you simply don’t understand. That’s all. Listen now, Kate, and be reasonable.”

“I will, daddy. Only don’t ask me to marry a man I don’t and can’t love, ever, ever, so long as I live!”

“That isn’t anything, my girl. Love isn’t all.”

“It is, to *me*! Without it, marriage is only—” She shuddered. “No, daddy; a thousand times better for me to be an old maid, and—and all that, than give myself to *him*!”

Flint set his teeth hard together.

“Kate,” said he, his voice like wire, “now hear what I have to say! I want you fully to understand the character and desirability of Maxim Waldron!”

Then in a cold, analytic voice, carefully, point by point, he analyzed the suitor, told of his wealth and power, his connections and his prospects, his culture, travel, political influence and world-wide reputation.

“Furthermore,” he added, while Kate listened with an expression as cold as her father’s tone itself, “he is my partner. We are allied, in business. I hope we may be, too, in family. This man is one that any woman in the world might be proud to call her husband—proud, and glad! Love flies away, in a few brief months or years. Wealth and power and respect remain. And, with these, love too may come. Be strong, Kate! Be sensible! You are no child, but a grown woman. I shall not try to force you. All I want to do is show you your own best interest. Think this all over. Sleep on it. Tomorrow, let us

talk of it again. For your own sake, and mine, do as you should, and let folly be averted. Renew the engagement. Hush the breath of gossip and scandal. Conform. Play the game! Do right—be strong!"

She only shook her head; and now he saw the glister of tear-drops in those beautiful gray eyes.

"Father," cried she, standing up and holding out both hands to him. "Have mercy on me! I can't—I can't! My heart refuses and I cannot force it. All this—what is it to me?" She swept her hand at the glowing luxury around her. "Without love, what would such another home be to me? Worse than a prison-cell, I swear! A living death, to one like me! Barter and sale—cold calculation—oh, horrible prostitution, horrible, unspeakable!

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“Poverty, with love—yes, I would choose it. Without love, I never, never can give myself! Never, as long as I live!”

The Billionaire, too, stood up. He was shaking, now, as in a palsy, striving to control his rage. His fingers twitched spasmodically, and his eyes burned like firecoals behind those gleaming lenses.

Then, as he peered at her, he suddenly went even paler than before. Through his heart a stab of understanding had all at once gone home. The veils were lifted, and he knew the truth.

Her manner in speaking of that unknown, wandering rescuer; the blush that had burned from breast to brow, when he had mentioned the fellow; her aversion for Waldron and her reticence in talking of the accident—all this, and more, now surged on Flint’s comprehension, flooding his mind with light—with light and with terrible anger.

And, losing all control, he took a step or two, and raised his shaking hand. His big-knuckled finger, shaken in denunciation, was raised almost in her face. Choking, stammering, he cried:

“Ah! Now I know! Now, now I understand you!”

Terrified, she retreated toward the door of the music-room.

“Father, father! What makes you look so?” she gasped. “Oh, you have never looked or spoken to me this way! What—what can it be?”

“What can it be?” he mouthed at her. “You ask me, you hypocrite, when you well know?”

Suddenly she faced him, stiffening into pride and hard rebellion.

“No more of that, father!” she exclaimed, her eyes blazing. “I am your daughter, but you can’t talk to me thus. You must not!”

“Who—who are *you* to say ‘must not?’” he gibed, now wholly beside himself. “You—-you, who love a vagabond, a tramp, scum and off-scouring of the gutter?”

A strange, half-choking sound was his only answer. Then, with no word, she turned away from him, biting her lip lest she answer and betray herself.

“Go!” he commanded, bloodless and quivering. “Go to your room. No more of this! We shall see, soon, who’s master of this house!”

She was already gone.

Old Flint stood there a moment, listening to her retreating footfalls on the parquetry of the vast hall. Then, as these died he turned and groped his way, as though blind, back to his chair, and fell in it, and covered his eyes with both his shaking hands.

For a long time he sat there, anguished and crucified amid all that unmeaning luxury and splendor.

At last he rose and with uncertain steps sought his own suite, above-stairs.

Billionaire and world-master though he was, that night he knew his heart lay dead within him. He realized that all the fruits of life were Dead Sea fruits, withered to dust and ashes on his pale and quivering lips.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BILLIONAIRE’S PLOT.

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He was aroused from this bitter revery by a rapping at the door. Opening, he admitted Slawson, his valet. The servile one handed him a letter with a special-delivery stamp on it.

“Excuse me for intruding, sir,” said Slawson, meekly smiling, “but I knew this was urgent.”

“All right. Get out!” growled Flint. When the man was gone, he fortified himself with a couple of morphine tablets, and ripped the long envelope. It was from Slade, he knew, of the Cosmos Agency.

With a rapid eye he glanced it over. Then uttering a sudden oath, he studied it carefully, under the electric bulb beside his dressing-table.

“Gods and devils!” he ejaculated. “What next?”

The letter read:

> 142A Park Row, New York City, June 28, 1921.
>
> Isaac L. Flint, Esq.,
>
> Idle Hour, Englewood, N. J.
>
> Dear Sir:
>
> Reporting in the matter of the young man who rescued your daughter, in the recent accident, let me say I have discovered his identity and some important facts concerning him. I take the liberty of thinking that your intention of rewarding him, when found, will be somewhat modified by this information.

This man’s name is Gabriel Armstrong, age 24. Occupation, expert electrical and chemical worker. A Socialist and labor agitator, of the most dangerous type, because intellectual and well-read. A man of considerable power and influence in Socialist and labor circles. Has been something of a wanderer. Is well known to union men and Socialists, all over the country. A powerful speaker, and resourceful.He was last employed at your testing-works on Staten Island. Discharged by your Mr. Herzog, about two weeks ago for having, I understand, been in possession of a certain red-covered note-book, which Mr. Herzog found in his pocket. This book is the same which you commissioned me to find, but which Mr. Herzog returned to you before I undertook the search for it. The inference is that this Armstrong is in possession of some private information about your work, which may make him even more dangerous. Herzog informs me that you and Mr. Waldron have had Armstrong blacklisted. But this seems of no importance to the man, as he is clever and can live anywhere, by casual labor and

by working with the Socialists.Armstrong is now at Syracuse. He has been tramping the roads. Have had two of my operators enter his room at the Excelsior Lodging House and search, his effects, while he was taking a bath. Can find nothing to give me any legal means of proceeding against him. He has some ready money, so a vagrancy-charge will not hold. If you wish me to resort to extreme measures to “get” him, kindly give me carte blanche, and guarantee me protection in case of trouble. The job can be done, but it may be risky, in view of his influence and

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backing among the Socialists and labor people. Before proceeding further I want to know how far you will support me.Am having him shadowed. He cannot get away. As yet he suspects nothing. On receipt of your next, will take measures to put him away for a few months. I know that, once he lands behind bars, his finish can be easily arranged.

> Trusting this information will prove satisfactory to you, and awaiting your further instructions, I am,
>
> Very truly yours,
>
> THE COSMOS AGENCY,
>
> Dillon F. Slade, Mgr.

Old Flint read this extraordinary communication twice through, then, raising his head, growled in his shrunken throat, for all the world like a wild beast. His gold tooth, gleaming in the light, made his rictus of passion more venomous, more malevolent still.

“The—the Hell-hound!” he stammered, his eyes narrowed with hate and rage. “Oh, wait! Wait till we land him! And this—*this* is the devil, the scum, that Kate, my daughter—”

He could not finish; but, clutching at his sparse gray hair, fell to pacing the floor and mouthing execrations. Had he been of the sanguine manner of body, he must inevitably have suffered an apoplexy. Only his spare frame and bloodless type, due to the drug, saved his life, at that first shock of rage and hate.

Grown calmer, presently, he took quick action. Seating himself at a desk in the corner of his bed-chamber—a desk where some of his most important private matters had been put through—he chose a sheet of blank paper, with no monogram, and wrote:

> Take immediate action. Will back you to the limit, and beyond. Ten thousand bonus if you land him behind bars inside a week. Stop at nothing, but get results. F.

This he folded and put in an envelope which he addressed to Slade, and was about to seal, when another idea struck him.

“By God!” he exclaimed, smiting the desk. “It won’t do to have this just some ordinary charge. The thing has got to be disgraceful, unpardonable, hideous!

“There are two things to be considered now. One is to ‘get’ him, in connection with that red book of my plans—to head him off from making any possible trouble in the development of the Air Trust.

“The other is—Kate! Nothing catches a woman, like martyrdom. If anything happens to this cur, and she suspects that I’ve done it, out of spite, all Hell can’t hold her. I know her well enough for *that*. No, this fellow has got to be put away on some charge that will absolutely and utterly ruin him, in her eyes, for good and all—that will blast and wreck him, forever, with her. Something that, when I tell her, will fill her with loathing and horror. Something that will cause a terrible and complete revulsion of feeling in her, and bring her back to Waldron, as to a strong refuge in time of trouble. Something that will crush and quell her, utterly cure her of those idiotic, school-girl notions of hers, and make her—as she should be—submissive to my will and my demands!”

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He pondered a moment, an ugly, crafty smile on those old lips of his; then, struck by sudden inspiration, laughed a dry, harsh laugh.

“The very thing!” he exulted, with the mirth of a vulture that has just found a peculiarly revolting mass of carrion. “Fool that I was, not to have thought of it before!”

Hastily he withdrew the letter from the envelope, opened it, and with eager hand wrote three short sentences. He read these over, nodded approval, and this time sealed and addressed the letter. Then he pushed an electric button over the desk.

“Have this letter carried to this address at once,” he commanded Slawson. “Mr. Dillon Slade, 432 Highland Avenue, Rutherford, N. J. See? Special delivery won’t do. Have Sanders take it at once, in the racer. No answer required. And after you’ve seen it start on its way, come back here. I want to go to bed.”

“Yes, sir. All right, sir,” the valet bowed as he took the letter and departed.

Ten minutes later, he was back again, helping old Flint undress.

Long after the Billionaire was in bed, in the big, luxurious room, with its windows open toward the river—the room guarded all night by armed men in the house and on the lawn outside—he lay there thinking of his plot, chuckling to himself over its infernal cunning, and filled with joy at the prospects now opening out ahead of him.

“Two birds with one stone, this time, for sure,” he pondered. “Ha! They’ll try to beat old Isaac Flint at this or any other game, will they? Man or woman, I don’t care which, they’ll never get away with it—never, so long as life and breath remain in me!”

Then, soothed by these happy thoughts, and by a somewhat increased dosage of his drug, the Billionaire gradually and contentedly fell asleep, to dream of victory, and vengeance, and power.

Not in weeks had he slumbered so peacefully.

But for many hours after her father was asleep, Catherine sat at her window, in a silk kimono, and with fevered pulses and dry eyes, with throbbing heart and leaping pulses, thought long thoughts.

Sleepless she sat there, counting the hours tolled from the church-spire in the town, below.

Morning still found her at the window, her brain afire, her heart laid desolate and waste by the consuming struggle which, that night, had swept and ravaged it.

CHAPTER XXI.

GABRIEL, GOOD SAMARITAN.

On the evening of July third, a week later, Gabriel Armstrong found himself at Rochester, having tramped the hundred miles from Syracuse, by easy stages. During this week, old Flint took good care not to reopen the subject of the break with Waldron; and his daughter, too, avoided it. They two were apparently at an impasse regarding it. But Flint inwardly rejoiced, knowing full well the plot now under way. And though Waldron urged him to take some further action and force the issue, Flint bade him hold his peace, and wait, telling him all would yet be well.

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Outwardly calmer, the old man was raging, within, more and ever more bitterly, against Armstrong. On July first, Slade had reported in person that his operators who were trailing the quarry had—in the night—discovered in one of his pockets a maple leaf wrapped in a fine linen handkerchief marked “C. J. F.” Flint, recognizing his daughter’s initials, well-nigh burst a blood-vessel for wrath. But he instructed Slade not to have the handkerchief abstracted from Armstrong’s possession. By no sign or hint must the victim be made aware that he was being spied upon. When the final blow should fall, then (reflected the Billionaire, with devilish satisfaction) all scores would be paid in full, and more than paid.

July third, then, found Gabriel at Rochester, now seventy-five or eighty miles from Niagara Falls, his goal, where—he had already heard—ground was being actually broken for the huge new power plant of which he alone, of all outsiders, understood the meaning. Gabriel counted on spending the Fourth at Rochester where a Socialist picnic and celebration had been arranged. Ordinarily, he would have taken part in the work and volunteered as a speaker, but now, anxious to keep out of sight, he counted merely on forming one of the crowd. There could be little danger, thought he, in such a mass. Despite the recent stringent censorship and military rule of the district by the new Mounted Police, a huge gathering was expected. The big railway and lake-traffic strikes, both recently lost, had produced keen resentment, and, as political and economic power had been narrowed here, as all over the country, in these last few months of on-sweeping capitalist domination, the Socialist movement had been growing ever more and more swiftly.

“It will be worth seeing,” thought Gabriel, as he stood outside the lodging-house where he had taken a room for the night. The workers are surely awakening, at last. The spirit I’ve been meeting, lately, is uglier and more determined than anything I ever used to find, a year or two ago. It seems to me, if conditions are like this all over the country, the safety-valve is about ready to pop, and the masters had better look out, or some of them are going to land in Hell!

“Yes, I’ll stop over here, one day, and look and listen. Sorry I can’t take part, but I mustn’t. My game, now, is to travel underground as it were. I’ve got a bigger job in view than soap-boxing, just *now*!”

He ate a simple supper at an “Owl” lunch-cart, totally unaware that, across the street, a couple of Cosmos men were waiting for him to come out. And, after this, buying a Socialist paper, he strolled into Evans Park to sit and read, a while, by the red light of the descending sun.

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Here he remained till dark, smoking his briar, watching the dirty, ragged children of the wretched wage-slaves at play; observing the exploited men and women on the park-benches, as they sought a little fresh air and respite from toil; and pondering the problems that still lay before him. At times—often indeed—his thoughts wandered to the maple-grove and the old sugar-house, far away on the Hudson. Memories of the girl would not be banished, nor longings for her. Who she might be, he still knew not. Unwilling to learn, he had refrained from looking up the number he had copied from the plate of the wrecked machine. He had even abstained from reading the papers, a few days, lest he might see some account of the accident. A strange kind of unwillingness to know the woman's name possessed him—a feeling that, if he positively identified her as one of some famous clan of robbers and exploiters, he could no longer cherish her memory or love the thought of how they two had, for an hour, sat together and talked and been good, honest friends.

"No," he murmured to himself, "it's better this way—just to recall her as a girl in need, a girl who let me help her, a girl I can always remember with kind thoughts, as long as I live!"

From his pocket he took the little handkerchief, which wrapped the leaf, once part of her bed. A faint, elusive scent still hung about it—something of her, still it seemed. He closed his eyes, there on the hard park bench, and let his fancies rove whither they would; and for a time it seemed to him a wondrous peace possessed him.

"If it could only have been," he murmured, at last. "If only it could be!"

Then suddenly urged by a realization of the hopelessness of it all, he stood up, pocketed the souvenirs of her again, and walked away in the dusk; away, through the park; away, at random, through squalid, ugly streets, where the first electric-lights were just beginning to flare; where children swarmed in the close heat, wallowing along the gutters, dodging teams and cars, as they essayed to play, setting off a few premature firecrackers and mocking the police—all in all, leading the ugly, unnatural, destructive life of all children of the city proletariat.

"Poor little devils!" thought Gabriel, stopping to observe a dirty group clustered about an ice-cream cart, where cheap, adulterated, high-colored stuff was being sold for a penny a square—aniline poison, no doubt, and God knows what else. "Poor little kids! Not much like the children of the masters, eh? with their lawns and playgrounds, their beaches and flowery fields, their gardens and fine schools, their dogs, ponies, autos and all the rest! Some difference, all right—and it takes a thousand of *these*, yes, ten thousand, to keep one of *those*. And—and *she* was one of the rich and dainty children! Her beauty, health and grace were bought at the price of ten thousand other children's health, and joy and lives! Ah, God, what a price! What a cruel, awful, barbarous price to pay!"

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Saddened and pensive, he passed on, still thinking of the woman he could not banish from his mind, despite his bitterness against her class.

So he walked on and on, now through better streets and now through worse, up and down the city.

Here and there, detonations and red fire marked the impatience of some demonstrator who could not wait till midnight to show his ardent patriotism and his public spirit by risking life and property. The saloons were all doing a land-office business, with the holiday impending and the thermometer at 97. Now and then, slattern women, in foul clothes and with huge, gelatinous breasts, could be seen rushing the growler, at the "family entrance" of some low dive. Even little girls bore tin pails, for the evening's "scuttle o' suds" to be consumed on roof, or in back yard of stinking tenement, or on some fire-escape. The city, in fine, was relaxing from its toil; and, as the workers for the most part knew no other way, nor could afford any, they were trying to snatch some brief moment of respite from the Hell of their slavery, by recourse to rough ribaldry and alcohol.

Nine o'clock had just struck from the church-spires which mocked the slums with their appeal to an impassive Heaven, when, passing a foul and narrow alley that led down to the Genesee River, Gabriel saw a woman sitting on a doorstep, weeping bitterly.

This woman—hardly more than a girl—was holding a little bundle in one hand. The other covered her face. Her sobs were audible. Grief of the most intense, he saw at once, convulsed her. Two or three by-standers, watching with a kind of pleased curiosity, completed the scene, most sordid in its setting, there under the flicker of a gas-light on the corner.

"Hm! What now?" thought Gabriel, stopping to watch the little tragedy. "More trouble, eh? It's trouble all up and down the line, for these poor devils! Nothing but trouble for the slave-class. Well, well, let's see what's wrong *now*!"

Gabriel turned down the alley, drew near the little group, and halted.

"What's wrong?" he asked, in the tone of authority he knew how to use; the tone which always overbore his outward aspect, even though he might have been clad in rags; the tone which made men yield to him, and women look at him with trustful eyes, even as the Billionaire's daughter had looked.

"Search *me*!" murmured one of the men, shrugging his shoulders. "*I* can't git nothin' out o' her. She's been sittin' here, cryin', a few minutes, that's all I know; an' she won't say nothin' to nobody.

"Any of you men know anything about it?" demanded Gabriel, looking at the rest.

A murmur of negation was his only answer. One or two others, scenting some excitement, even though only that of a distressed woman—common sight, indeed!—-lingered near. The little group was growing.

Gabriel bent and touched the woman's shoulder.

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“What’s the matter?” asked he, in a gentle voice. “If you’re in trouble, let me help you.”

Renewed sobs were her only answer.

“If you’ll only tell me what’s the matter,” Gabriel went on, “I’m sure I can do something for you.”

“You—you can’t!” choked the woman, without raising her head from the corner of the ragged shawl that she was holding over her eyes. “Nobody can’t! Bill, he’s gone, and Eddy’s gone, and Mr. Micolo says he won’t let me in. So there ain’t nothin’ to do. Let me alone—oh dear, oh dear, dear!”

Fresh tears and grief. The little knot of spectators, still growing, nodded with approval, and figuratively licked its lips, in satisfaction. Somewhere a boy snickered.

“Come, come,” said Gabriel, bending close over the grief-stricken woman, “pull together, and let’s hear what the trouble is! Who’s Bill, and who’s Eddy—and what about Mr. Micolo? Come, tell me. I’m sure I can do something to straighten things out.”

No answer. Gabriel turned to the increasing crowd, again.

“Any of you people know what about it?” he asked.

Again no answer, save that one elderly man, standing on the steps beside the woman, remarked casually:

“I guess she’s got fired out of her room. That’s all I know.”

Gabriel took her by the arm, and drew her up.

“Come, now!” said he, a sterner note in his voice. “This won’t do! You mustn’t sit here, and draw a crowd. First thing you know an officer will be along, and you may get into trouble. Tell me what’s wrong, and I promise to see you through it, as far as I can.”

She raised her face, now, and looked at him, a moment. Tear-stained and dishevelled though she was, and soiled by marks of drink and debauchery, Gabriel saw she must once have been very beautiful and still was comely.

“Well,” he asked. “Aren’t you going to tell me?”

“Tell you?” she repeated. “I—oh, I can’t! Not in front of all them men!”

“Very well!” said he, “walk with me, and give me your story. Will you do that? At all events, you mustn’t stay here, making a disturbance on the highway. If you knew the police as well as I do, you’d understand that!”

“You’re right, friend,” said she, hoarsely. “I’m on, now. Come along then—I’ll tell you. It ain’t much to tell; but it’s a lot to me!”

She glanced at the curious faces of the watchers, then turned and followed Gabriel, who was already walking up the alley, toward the brighter lights of Stuart Street. For a moment, one or two of the men hesitated as though undecided whether or not to follow after; but one backward look by Gabriel instantly dispelled any desire to intrude. And as Gabriel and the woman turned into the street, the little knot of curiosity-seekers dissolved into its component atoms, and vanished.

CHAPTER XXII.

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THE TRAP IS SPRUNG.

“It—it’s all along o’ that there Mr. Micolo!” the woman suddenly exclaimed, “Him an’ his rent-bill! If he’d ha’ let me in, there, tonight, I could ha’ got Ed’s things an’ then started to my sister’s, out to Scottsville. But he wouldn’t. He claimed they was two-seventy-five still owin’, and I didn’t have but about fifty cents, so I couldn’t pay it. So he wouldn’t let me in. Natchally, anybody’d feel bad, like that, ’specially when a man told ’em he’d hold their kid’s clothes an’ things till they paid—which they couldn’t!”

“Naturally, of course,” answered Gabriel, rather dazed by this sudden burst of details, with which she seemed to think he should already be quite familiar—details all sordid and commonplace, through which he seemed to perceive, dimly as in a dark glass, some mean and ugly tragedy of poverty and ignorance and sin.

“Are you hungry?” he asked, all at once. “If so, come in here, where we can talk quietly and get things straight.” He pointed at a cheap restaurant, across the street.

“Hungry? Gord, yes!” she exclaimed. Only I—I wouldn’t ask, if I fell on the sidewalk! Fifty cents—yes, I got that much, but I been tryin’ to get enough to pay Mr. Micolo, an’ get hold of Ed’s things, an’—”

“All right, forget that, now,” commanded Gabriel. He took her by the arm and piloted her across the thoroughfare, then into the dingy hash-house and to a table in a far corner. A few minutes later, pretty much everything on the bill of fare was before them on the greasy table.

“Not a word till you’re satisfied,” directed Armstrong. “I’ll just take a little bread and coffee, to keep you company.”

The woman adequately proved her statement that she was hungry. Rarely had Gabriel seen anybody eat with such ravenous appetite. He watched her with satisfaction, and when she could consume no more, smiled as he asked:

“Now, then, feel better? If so, let’s tackle the next problem. What’s your grief?”

The woman stared at him a long moment before she made reply. Then she exclaimed suddenly:

“You ain’t no kind of ‘bull,’ are you? Nor plain-clothes man?”

Gabriel shook his head.

“No,” said he, “nothing of that kind. You can trust me. Let’s have the story.”

“Hm! It ain’t much, I s’pose,” she answered still half-suspiciously. “Bill and me was livin’ together, that’s all. No, not married, nor nothin’—but—”

“All right. Go on.”

“That was last winter. When the kid happened—Ed, you know—Bill, he got sore, an’ beat it. Then I—I went on the street, to keep Ed. Nothin’ else to do, Mister, so help me, an’—”

“Never mind, I understand,” said Gabriel. “What next?”

“And after that, I gets sick. *You* know. Almost right away. So I has to go to St. Luke’s hospital. I leaves Ed with Mrs. McCane, at the same house. That place in the alley, you know. Well, when I gets out, the boy’s dead. *An*’ they never even tells me, till I goes back! An’ I can’t even get his things. Because why? Mrs. McCane’s gone, Gord knows where, an’ Mr. Micolo says I still owe two-seventy-five. I want to get down there to Scottsville, to my sister’s; but curse *me* if I’ll go till I pay that devil an’ get them clothes!”

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A sudden savage light in her blurred eyes betrayed the passion of the mother-love, through all the filth and soilure of her degradation. Gabriel felt his heart deeply moved. He bent toward her, across the table, touched her hand and asked:

“Will you accept five dollars, to pay this man and get you down to Scottsville?”

“Huh?” she queried, gazing at him with vacant, uncomprehending eyes.

He repeated his query. Then, as he saw the slow tears start and roll down her wan cheeks, he felt a greater joy within his breast than if the world and all its treasures had been his.

“Will I take it?” she whispered. “Gord, *will* I? You bet I will! That is, if I can have your name, an’ pay it back some time?”

He promised, and wrote it down for her, giving as his address Socialist Headquarters in Chicago. Then, without publicity, he slipped a V into her trembling hand.

“Come on,” said he. “*That’s* all settled!”

He paid the check, and they went out, together. For a moment they stood together, undecided, on the sidewalk.

“Couldn’t I get them things to-night, an’ start?” asked she, eagerly. “There’s a train at 11:08, on the B. R. & P.”

“All right,” he assented. “Can you see this Micolo, now? It’s after ten.”

“Oh, *that* don’t make no difference,” she answered. “He runs a pawnshop over here on Dexter Street, two blocks east. He’ll be open till midnight, easy, tomorrow bein’ the Fourth.”

“Come on, then,” said Gabriel. “I’ll see you through the whole business, and onto the train. Maybe I can help you, all along.”

Without another word she started, with Gabriel at her side. They traversed the main street, two blocks, then turned to the left down a narrower, darker one.

“Here’s Micolo’s,” said she, pausing at a doorway. Gabriel nodded. “All right,” he answered. He had not noted, nor did he dream, that, at the corner behind them, two slinking, sneaking figures were now watching his every move.

The woman turned the knob, and entered. Gabriel followed.

“It’s on the second floor,” said she. Gabriel saw a sign, on the landing: “S. L. Micolo, Pawn Broker,” and motioned her to precede him.

In a minute they had reached the upper hallway. The woman opened another door. The room, inside, was dark.

“This way,” said she. “He’s in the inside office, I guess. The light must ha’ gone out here, some way or other.”

Gabriel hesitated. Some inkling, some vague intuition all at once had come upon him, that all was not well. At his elbow some invisible force seemed plucking. “Come away! Come back, before it is too late!” some ghostly voice seemed calling in his ear.

But still, he did not fully understand. Still he remained there, his mind obsessed by the plausibility of the woman’s story and by the pity he so keenly felt.

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And now he heard her voice again:

“Mr. Micolo! Oh, Mr. Micolo! Where are you?”

Striking a match, he advanced into the room.

“Any gas here?” he asked, peering about for a burner.

Suddenly he started with violent emotion. Behind him, in some unaccountable way, the door had been closed. He heard a key turn, softly.

“What—what’s this?” he exclaimed. He heard the woman moving about, somewhere in the gloom. “See here!” he cried. “What kind of a—?”

The match burned brightly, all at once. He peered about him, wide-eyed.

“This is no office!” shouted he. “Here, you! What’s the meaning of this? This is a bedroom!”

Sudden realization of the trap stunned and sickened him.

“God! They’ve got me! Flint and Waldron—they’ve landed me, at last!” he choked. “But—but not till I’ve broken a few heads, by God!”

The match fell from his burnt fingers. Whirling toward the door, he rained powerful kicks upon it. He would get out, he must get out, at all hazards!

Suddenly the woman began to scream, with harsh and piercing cries that seemed to rip the very atmosphere.

[Illustration: Aiming at the base of the skull she struck.]

At the third scream, or the fourth, the key was turned and the door jerked open.

In its aperture, three men stood—the two who had been so long trailing Gabriel, and a policeman, burly, red-jowled, big-paunched.

Gabriel stared at them. His mouth opened, then closed again without a word. As well for a trapped animal to make explanations to the Indian hunter, as for him to tell these men the truth. The truth? *They* knew the truth; and they were there to crucify him. He read it in their cruel, eager eyes.

The woman had stopped screaming now, and was weeping with abandon, pouring forth a tale of insults and abuse and robbery, with hysterical sobs.

Full in the faces of the three men Gabriel sneered.

“You’ve done a good job of it, this time, you skunks!” he gibed. “I’m on. You’ll get me, in the end; but not just yet. The first man through this door gets his head broken—and that goes, too!”

With a snarl of “You damned white slaver!” the officer raised his night-stick and hurled himself at Gabriel.

Gabriel ducked and planted a terrific left-hander on the “bull’s” ear. Roaring, the majesty of the law careened against the bed, crashed the flimsy thing to wreckage and went down.

Then, fighting back into the gloom of the trap, Gabriel engaged the two detectives. For a moment he held them. One went to the floor with an uppercut under the chin; but came back. The other landed hard on Gabriel’s jaw.

He turned to strike down, again, the first of the two. He heard the bed creaking, and saw the policeman struggling to arise. In a whirlwind of blows, the second detective flailed at him, striving to beat down his guard and floor him with a vicious rib-jolt.

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“All’s fair, here!” thought Gabriel, snatching up a chair. For a moment he brandished it on high. With this weapon, he knew—though final defeat was inevitable, when reinforcements should arrive—he could sweep a clear space.

Perhaps he might even yet escape! He heard feet trampling on the stairs, and his heart died within him. Well, even though escape were impossible, he would fight to a finish and die game, if die he must!

Down swung the chair, and round, crashing to ruin as it struck the policeman who was just getting to his feet again. Oaths, cries, screams made the place hideous. Dust rose, and blood began to flow.

Armed now with one leg of the chair, Gabriel retreated; and as he went, he hurled the bitterness of all his scorn and hate upon these vile conspirators.

And as he flayed them with his tongue, he struck; and like Samson against the Philistines, he did great execution.

Like Samson, too, he lost his power through a woman’s treachery. For, even as the attackers seemed to fall back, shattered and at a loss before such fury and tremendous strength, behind Gabriel the woman rose, a laugh of malice on her lips, the policeman’s long and heavy night-stick in her hand.

A moment she poised it, crouching as he—seeing her not—swung his weapon and hurled his defiance at the baffled men in front.

Then, aiming at the base of the skull, she struck.

Sudden bright lights spangled the darkness, for Gabriel. Everything whirled about, in dizzying confusion. A strange, far roaring sounded in his ears.

Then he fell; and oblivion took him to its blessed peace and rest; and all grew still and black.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BEAST GLOATS.

“Fer Gawd’s sake, let’s have a light here, somebody!” panted the dishevelled policeman. Outside, the ringing of a gong became audible. Then came a clattering of hoofs, as the police-patrol, nicely-timed by the conspirators, and summoned by a confederate, drew up at the box on the corner.

Somebody struck another match, and a raw gas-light flared. From the hallway, two or three others crowded into the wrecked room. Disjointed exclamations, oaths and curses intermingled with harsh laughter.

The woman—Lillian Rafter, probably the finest actress and stool-pigeon in the whole detective world of graft and crookedness—lighted a cigarette at the gas-burner, and laughed with triumph.

“Some make-up, eh kid?” she demanded of the taller detective, who was now nursing a bad “shiner,” as a black eye is known in the under-world, and whose face was battered to a bleeding pulp. “Believe me, as a job, this is some job! From start to finish, a pippin. He was bound to fall for it though. No help for him. Even if he hadn’t butted into the ‘plant’ we fixed for him in the alley, there, I could have braced him in the street with my tale of woe. He was just bound to be ‘it,’ this time. We had him going, all ways for Sunday!”

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Scornfully the woman Gabriel had befriended in her seeming misery, spat at him as he lay there stunned and scarcely breathing on the dirty floor.

“And just pipe this, will you, too?” she exulted, holding up the five-dollar bill he had given her. “And this?” She exhibited his name and address, written on a card. “In his own writing, boys. As evidence to hold him on a white slave charge, is this some evidence or isn’t it?”

“Oh, we’ll hold him, all right!” growled the other detective, whose right arm dangled limp, where the chair had struck him. “The —— —— of a ——! He’ll go up for a finif, a five-spot, or I’m a liar! And once we get him behind bars, good-night!”

He deliberately drew back his heavy boot and kicked Gabriel full in the face.

“You —— ——!” he cursed. “Try to bean *me*, will you? Damn you! You’ve made *your* last soap-box spiel!”

“Come on, now, boys, out with him, an’ no more rag-chewin’!” the policeman exclaimed. “Git him in the wagon, an’ away, before a gang piles in here! You, Caffery, take his feet. I’ll manage his head. Jesus, but he’s some big guy, though, the —— —— of a ——!”

Together, the battered policeman and the detective who still had some strength left in him, raised Gabriel’s limp body and carried it from the room. The woman, meanwhile, stood there inhaling cigarette-smoke and laughing viciously to herself.

“You easy mutt!” she exclaimed. “Dead baby, room-rent due, wanted to get home to sister—and you fell for that old gag with whiskers on it! You’re some wise guy all right, all right, I don’t think. Well, as a stall it was a beaut. And I must say I never screamed better in all my life. And that wallop I handed out, was a peach. If I don’t pull down five hundred for this night’s work—”

“Shut up, you ——!” snarled Caffery, as he turned into the stairway. “Keep that lip o’ yours quiet, will you, or—”

The woman stared at him a moment, then laughed insolently and snapped her smoke-yellowed fingers at him in defiance.

“Mind you show up in court, in the mornin’!” panted the officer, staggering downstairs under the weight of Gabriel’s huge shoulders.

“Better arrest her now,” suggested Caffery, “an’ hold her.”

“You will, like Hell!” retorted the woman.

“Shhh! In one door an’ out the other,” the second detective whispered in her ear, as she stood there in the doorway. “I’ll see to it you get fifty extra for *that*!”

“Oh, if that’s the game, fine business!” she smiled. “Go to it—I’m your huckleberry!”

Thus it befell that, while a large and growing crowd observed, under the arc-light on the corner—a crowd where no fewer than six reporters, all duly tipped off in advance, were taking notes—Gabriel Armstrong, the Socialist speaker and leader, was bundled, unconscious, into a patrol wagon of the City of Rochester; and with him, a drunken-acting harlot, babbling charges of white-slave extortion and violence against him; and with them both, several witnesses, who would have sworn that Heaven was Hell, for five dollars cash in hand.

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Thus was the stage set, for the next session of the honorable court. Thus were the wires pulled. Thus, the prison doors were swung wide open, and, above all, the honor and the reputation of a man swept to the garbage-heaps of life.

True, at the morrow's great mass-meeting, there were destined to be protests and calls for investigation. The Socialist press was destined to take it up, defend him and demand the truth. But, swamped by a perfectly overwhelming capitalist press, not only naturally hostile but in this case already heavily subsidized; shattered by the close-knit, circumstantial evidence; hamstrung and hampered in every way by the power of unlimited money and Tammany pull, the Socialists might as well have tried to sweep back the sea with a broom as save this man from legal crucifixion. Worse still, they themselves, and the beaten strikers with whom they had been fraternizing, got a black eye in the affair; and many an editorial column, many a pulpit, unctuously discoursed thereon. Many an anti-Socialist thug and grafter, loud-mouthed and blatant, bellowed revamped platitudes of "immorality" and "breaking up the home," and the "nation of fatherless children," pointing at Gabriel Armstrong as a shining example of Socialist hypocrisy and filth.

Press, law, church, capitalism itself nailed this man and the movement he stood for, to the cross. And the pimps and parasites of the private detective agency chuckled in their well-paid glee. The woman, Gabriel's betrayer, counted her "thirty pieces of silver" and laughed in the foul dark. The police cut a fine melon secretly handed them by Flint; and so, too, did the local papers and more than one local pulpit.

So, in Gabriel's grief and woe and desolation, as he sat in his grim cell with aching head, bruised face and bleeding heart, with all his plans now broken, with the very soul within him dead—in this grief and anguish, I say, the foul harpy-brood of Capitalism revelled and rioted like maggots in carrion.

None more viciously than old Flint, himself. None with more brutal joy, more savage satisfaction. One of the culminant moments of his life, he felt, was on the evening after the dastardly plot had been carried to its putrid conclusion.

Opening the Rochester "News-Intelligencer" which Slade had sent him, his glittering eyes seemed to sparkle joy as a blue-penciled column met his gaze.

Eagerly he read it all, every word, and weighed it, and re-read it, as men do when news is dear to their souls. Already, through the New York papers he had got the essentials of the affair. Already, by long distance 'phone he had received the outlines of the news from Slade, as well as a code telegram of more than 500 words, giving him additional details. But this paper especially pleased him. The other Rochester sheets, which Slade would send as fast as they appeared, he already was looking forward to, with keenest pleasure.

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"Ah! *This* is what I call efficiency!" he exclaimed, settling himself in his big chair, adjusting the pince-nez on his hawk-bill and preparing to read the column for the third time. "The way this thing was planned and carried out, and the manner in which Slade has managed to get it played up in the papers, proves to me he's a general in his line, a true Napoleon. I may safely intrust any affair of this sort to him and his agency. No fee of his shall ever be questioned; and as for bonuses—well, he shall have no reason to complain. An admirable man, in every way—a wonderful organization! With men and agencies like *these* at work in our interests, what have we, really, to be uneasy about?"

Smacking his mental lips, if I may be pardoned the phrase, he once more slowly read the delightful, gratifying news:

SOCIALIST WHITE-SLAVER!

Rotten Affair Unearthed by Police!

Gabriel Armstrong, Socialist Leader, Caught With the Goods!!!

Rochester, July 4.

"In one of the most sensational raids ever made in this city, by the vice squad, under the auspices of the Purity League, what is believed to be a well-organized white-slave business was unearthed last night. The leader and brains of the association, Gabriel Armstrong, a Socialist speaker and worker of national prominence, was arrested, and is now lodged in Police Headquarters, with serious charges pending."The arrest was made as a result of the keen work of Officer Michael P. Duffey, sergeant of the vice squad. Hearing screams in the assignation house at 42A Belding street, he made his way up stairs, accompanied by two or three citizens. The screams were coming from a room on the second floor. Duffey promptly battered the door down only to be met by a furious assault from Armstrong, who was intoxicated and extremely violent."A savage hand-to-hand struggle took place, in which furniture was broken, the policeman badly injured and two of the volunteers knocked out. Armstrong was finally subdued, however, by the jiu-jitsu method, in which Duffey is an expert, and was lodged in the Central Station, together with the woman."According to her statement, the man, Armstrong, had not only been guilty of grossly immoral practices with her, but had also been trying to force her to share with him the proceeds of her life of shame, thus making out against him a clear case under the Mann White-Slave Traffic law. She has material evidence of this fact—money which he had given her, to finance her till she could begin bringing in revenue to him, and also his name and address, written by his own hand. A significant fact is that the address given by this white slaver is Socialist headquarters, in Chicago. The police are now working on the theory that the entire Socialist organization is honeycombed with this

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traffic, and that the Socialist movement is only a blind to cover a wholesale distribution of women for immoral purposes. Drastic Federal action against the Socialist Party is now being considered.“Still further and more sensational facts are expected to develop at the preliminary hearing, which will take place tomorrow morning. In case Armstrong is bound over to the Grand Jury, and convicted, he may get a heavy fine and as much as five years in a Federal penitentiary. He is described as being a surly, low type, reticent and vindictive, of vicious characteristics and mentally defective. The local Socialists have already taken up arms in his defense, as was to be expected.“Interest is added to the case by the fact that Armstrong is known to be the man who, at the time of the recent automobile accident to Miss Catherine Flint—daughter of Isaac Flint, of Englewood, N. J.—gave the alarm. A theory is now being formed that he was, in some way, involved in a plot with Miss Flint’s chauffeur to wreck the machine and share a big reward for rescuing the girl. The plot, however, evidently miscarried, for the chauffeur was killed, and Armstrong, after giving the alarm, feared to divulge his identity but fled in disguise.“Public interest is greatly aroused in this matter. And if, as now seems positively certain, this arrest and forthcoming conviction break up the vicious white-slave gang for some time operating in Rochester and Ontario Beach, the public will have a still greater debt of gratitude toward the Purity League, the Vice Squad and the untiring efforts and bravery of Sergeant Duffey.”

“That, ah that,” remarked old Flint, as he finished his last reading, “is what I call literature! It may not be Scott or Shelley or Dickens, but it’s got far more than *they* ever had—tremendous value to—er—to the rightful masters of society. I dare say that this article and also others like it that are bound to be printed during the trial and after, will do more to secure our position in society than a whole army with machine guns. Socialism, eh? After this campaign gets through, by God, we’ll sweep up the leavings in a dustpan and throw them out the window!”

Again he surveyed the article, smiling thinly.

“Literature, yes,” he repeated. “The writer of those lines, and the master-minds who engineered the whole affair, must and shall be liberally rewarded. Editors, preachers, writers, they’re all on our side. All safe and sane—that is, nearly all—enough, at any event, to assure our safety. I rejoice that I have lived to see this day!”

He turned the sheets of the paper, to see if any other notice of the affair was printed; and as he looked, he pondered.

“Imagine the effect of this, on Kate!” thought he. “It will be just as I planned it. Nothing will be left in her mind now, but loathing, hate and rage against this man. In two days, she and Waldron will have patched up their little difference, and all will be well. A master-stroke on my part, eh? Yes, yes indeed, a master-stroke!”

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His eye caught another blue-pencilling.

“Editorial, eh?” said he, adjusting his glasses. “Better and better! This affair will sweep those troublemakers off the map, or I’m a beggar!”

Then, with the keenest of satisfaction, he focussed his attention on the sapient editorial:

SOCIALISM UNVEILED.

The arrest and impending conviction of Gabriel Armstrong, the noted Socialist leader, on a white-slave traffic charge, will do much to set all sane thinkers right in regard to this whole matter of Socialist ethics. Socialists, as we have all heard, contend that their system of thought teaches a high and pure form of morality. How will they square this assertion with the hard, cold facts, as brought to light in this most revolting case?Much more seems to lie beneath the surface than at first sight appears. Though we desire to suspend judgment until all the data are known, it appears conclusively proved that Armstrong is but one of a band of white-slavers operating through the organization of, and with the consent of the Socialist party, or at least of its responsible officials.If this prove to be the case, it will substantiate the suspicion long felt in many quarters that this whole movement, ostensibly political, is really a menace to the moral and social welfare of the nation. A foreign importation, openly standing against the home, the family and religion, may well be expected to foster such crimes and to be a “culture-medium” for the growth of such vile microbes as this man Armstrong, and others of his kind.Turn on the light! Bring the social antiseptics! Let all the facts be established; and when known, if—as we anticipate—they prove this nasty conspiracy, let us make an end, now and forever, to this un-American, immoral and filthy thing, Socialism! To this object this paper now and henceforth pledges its policy; and all decent publications, all citizens who love their country, their God, their homes, their flag, will join with it in a nation-wide crusade to choke this slimy monster of Anarchy and Free-love, and fling it back into the Pit where it belongs.

Long live religion, purity and the flag! Down with Socialism!

Flint regarded this masterpiece with an approving eye. Then, chuckling to himself, he arose and with slow steps advanced toward the dining-room where already Catherine was awaiting him.

“Now,” he murmured to himself, and smiled thinly, “now for a little scene with Kate!”

CHAPTER XXIV.

CATHERINE’S SUPREME DECISION.

The meal was almost at an end—silently, like all their hours spent together, now—-before the old man sprang his *coup*. It was characteristic of him to wait thus, to hold his fire till what he conceived to be the opportune moment; never to act prematurely, under any circumstances whatever.

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“By the way, Kate,” he remarked, casually, when coffee had been served and he had motioned the butlers out of the room, “by the way, I’ve been rather badly disappointed, today. Did you know that?”

“No, father,” she answered. She never called him “daddy,” now. “No, I’m sorry to hear it. What’s gone wrong?”

He looked at her a moment before replying, as though to gauge her mind and the effect his announcement might have. Very charming she looked, that evening, in a crepe de Chine gown with three-quarter lace sleeves and an Oriental girdle—a wonderful Nile-green creation, very simple (she had told herself) yet of staggering cost. A single white rose graced her hair. The low-cut neck of the gown revealed a full, strong bosom. Around her throat she wore a fine gold chain, with a French 20-franc piece and her Vassar Phi Beta Kappa key attached—the only pendants she cared for. The gold coin spoke to her of the land of her far ancestry, a land oft visited by her and greatly loved; the gold key reminded her of college, and high rank taken in studies there.

Old Flint noted some of these details as he sat looking at her across the white and gleaming table, where silver and gold plate, cut glass and flowers and fine Sevres china all combined to make a picture of splendor such as the average workingman or his wife has never even dreamed of or imagined; a picture the merest commonplace, however, to Flint and Catherine.

“A devilish fine-looking girl!” thought he, eyeing his daughter with approval. “She’d grace any board in the world, whether billionaire’s or prince’s! Waldron, old man, you’ll never be able to thank me sufficiently for what I’m going to do for you tonight—never, that is, unless you help me make the Air Trust the staggering success I think you can, and give me the boost I need to land the whole damned world as my own private property!”

He chuckled dryly to himself, then drew the paper from his pocket.

“Well, father, what’s gone wrong?” asked Kale, again. “Your disappointment—what was it?”

She spoke without animation, tonelessly, in a flat, even voice. Since that night when her father had tried to force Waldron upon her, and had taunted her with loving the vagabond (as he said) who had rescued her, something seemed to have been broken, in her manner; some spring of action had snapped; some force was lacking now.

“What’s wrong with me?” asked Flint, trying to veil the secret malice and keen satisfaction that underlay his speech. “Oh, just this. You remember about a week ago, when we—ah—had that little talk in the music room—?”

“Don’t, father, please!” she begged, raising one strong, brown hand. “Don’t bring that up again. It’s all over and done with, that matter is. I beg you, don’t re-open it!”

“I—you misunderstand me, my dear child,” said Flint, trying to smile, but only flashing his gold tooth. “At that time I told you I was looking for, and would reward, if found, the —er—man who had been so brave and quick-witted as to rescue you. You remember?”

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“Really, father, I beg you not to—”

“Why not, pray?” requested Flint, gazing at her through his pince-nez. “My intentions, I assure you, were most honest and philanthropic. If I had found him—*then*—I’d have given him—”

“Oh, but he wouldn’t have taken anything, you see!” the girl interrupted, with some spirit. “I told you that, at the time. It’s just as true, now. So please, father, let’s drop the question altogether.”

“I’m sorry not to be able to grant your request, my dear,” said the old man, with hidden malice. “But really, this time, you must hear me. My disappointment arises from the fact that I’ve just discovered the young man’s identity, and—”

“You—you have?” Kate exclaimed, grasping the edge of the table with a nervous hand. Her father smiled again, bitterly.

“Yes, I have,” said he, with slow emphasis, “and I regret to say, my dear child, that my diagnosis of his character is precisely what I first thought. Any interest you may feel in that quarter is being applied to a very unworthy object. The man is one of my discharged employees, a thorough rascal and hard ticket in every way—one of the lowest-bred and most villainous persons yet unhung, I grieve to state. The fact that he carried you in his arms, and that I owe your preservation to him, is one of the bitterest facts in my life. Had it been any other man, no matter of what humble birth—”

“Father!” she cried, bending forward and gazing at him with strange eyes. “Father! By what right and on what authority do you make these accusations? That man, I know, was all that innate gentleness and upright manhood could make any man. His nobility was not of wealth or title, but of—”

“Nonsense!” Flint interrupted. “Nobility, eh? Read *that*, will you?”

Leering, despite himself, he handed the paper across the table to his daughter.

“Those marked passages,” said he. “And remember, this is only the beginning. Wait till all the facts are known, the whole conspiracy laid bare and everything exposed to public view! *Then* tell me, if you can, that he is poor but noble! Bah! Sunday-school dope, that! Noble, yes!”

Catherine sat there staring at the paper, a minute, as though quite unable to decipher a word. Through a kind of wavering mist that seemed to swim before her eyes, she vaguely saw the words: “Socialist White Slaver!” but that these bore any relation to the man she remembered, back there at the sugar-house, had not yet occurred to her mind. She simply could not grasp the significance of the glaring headlines. And, turning a blank gaze on her father’s face, she stammered:

"Why—why do you give me this? What has this got to do with—*me*? With *him*?"

"Everything!" snarled the Billionaire, violently irritated by his daughter's seeming obtuseness. "Everything, I tell you! That man, that strong and noble hero of yours, is this man! This white slaver! This wild beast—this Socialist—this Anarchist! Do you understand now, or don't you? Do you grasp the truth at last, or is your mind incapable of apprehending it?"

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He had risen, and now was standing there at his side of the table, shaking with violent emotion, his glasses awry, face wrinkled and drawn, hands twitching. His daughter, making no answer to his taunts, sat with the paper spread before her on the table. A wine glass, overset, had spilled a red stain—for all the world like the workers' blood, spilled in war and industry for the greater wealth and glory of the masters—out across the costly damask, but neither she nor Flint paid any heed.

For he was staring only at her; and she, now having mastered herself a little, though her full breast still rose and fell too quickly, was struggling to read the slanderous lies and foul libels of the blue-penciled article.

Silently she read, paling a little but otherwise giving no sign to show her father how the tide of her thought was setting. Twice over she read the article; then, pushing the paper back, looked at old Flint with eyes that seemed to question his very soul—eyes that saw the living truth, below.

"It is a lie!" said she, at last, in a grave, quiet voice.

"What?" blurted the old man. "A—a lie?"

She nodded.

"Yes," said she. "A lie."

Furious, he ripped open the paper, and once more shoved it at her.

"Fool!" cried he. "Read *that*!" And his shaking, big-knuckled finger tapped the editorial on "Socialism Unveiled."

"No," she answered, "I need read no more. I know; I understand!"

"You—you know *what*?" choked Flint. "This is an editorial, I tell you! It represents the best thought and the most careful opinion of the paper. And it condemns this man, absolutely, as a criminal and a menace to society. It denounces him and his whole gang of Socialists or Anarchists or White-slavers—they're all the same thing—as a plague to the world. That's the editor's opinion; and remember, he's on the ground, there. He has all the facts. You—*you* are at a distance, and have none! Yet you set up your futile, childish opinion—"

"No more, father! No more!" cried Catherine, also standing up. She faced him calmly, coldly, magnificently. "You can't talk to me this way, any more. Cannot, and must not! As I see this thing—and my woman's intuition tells me more in a minute than you can explain away in an hour—this fabrication here has all, or nearly all, been invented and carried out by you. For what reason? This—to discredit this man! To make me hate and loathe him! To force me back to Waldron. To—"

“Stop!” shouted the old man, in a well-assumed passion. “No daughter of mine shall talk to me this way! Silence! It is monstrous and unthinkable. It—it is horrible beyond belief! Silence, I tell you—and—”

“No, father, not silence,” she replied, with perfect poise. “Not silence now, but speech. Either this thing is true or it is false. In either case, I must know the facts. The papers? No truth in *those*! The finding of the courts? today, they are a by-word and a mockery! All I can trust is the evidence of my own senses; what I hear, and feel, and see. So then —”

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“Then?” gulped the Billionaire, holding the back of his chair in a trembling grasp.

“Just this, father. I’m going to Rochester, myself, to investigate this thing, to see this man, to hear his side of the story, to know—”

“Do that,” cried Flint in a terrible voice, “and you never enter these doors again! From the minute you leave Idle Hour on that fool’s errand, my daughter is dead to me, forever!”

Swept clean off his feet by rage, as well as by the deadly fear of what might happen if his daughter really were to learn the truth, he had lost his head completely.

With quiet attention, the girl regarded him, then smiled inscrutably.

“So it be,” she replied. “Even though you disinherit me or turn me off with a penny, my mind is made up, and my duty’s clear.

“While things like these are going on in the world, outside, I have no right to linger and to idle here. I am no child, now; I have been thinking of late, reading, learning. Though I can’t see it all clearly, yet, I know that every bite we eat, means deprivation to some other people, somewhere. This light and luxury mean poverty and darkness elsewhere. This fruit, this wine, this very bread is ours because some obscure and unknown men have toiled and sweat and given them to us. Even this cut glass on our table—see! What tragedies it could reveal, could it but speak! What tales of coughing, consumptive glass-cutters, bending over wheels, their lungs cut to pieces by the myriad spicules of sharp glass, so that we, we of our class, may enjoy beauty of design and coloring! And the silken gown I wear—that too has cost—”

“No more! No more of this!” gurgled old Flint, now nearly in apoplexy. “I deny you! I repudiate you, Anarchist that you are! Go! Never come back—never, never—!”

Stumbling blindly, he turned and staggered out of the room. She watched him go, nor tried to steady his uncertain steps. In the hallway, outside, she heard him ring for Slawson, heard the valet come, and both of them ascend the stairs.

“Father,” she whispered to herself, a look of great and pure spiritual beauty on her noble face, “father, this had to come. Sooner or later, it was inevitable. Whatever you have done, I forgive you, for you *are* my father, and have surely acted for what you think my interest.

“But none the less, the end is here and now. Between you and me, a great gulf is fixed. And from tonight I face the world, to battle with it, learn from it, and know the truth in every way. Enough of this false, easy, unnatural life. I cannot live it any longer; it would crush and stifle me! Enough! I must be free, I shall be free, to know, and dare, and do!”

That night, having had no further speech with old Flint, Kate left Idle Hour, taking just a few necessities in a suit-case, and a few dollars for her immediate needs.

Giving no explanation to maid, valet or anyone, she let herself out, walked through the great estate and down Englewood Avenue, to the station, where she caught a train for Jersey City.

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The midnight special for Chicago bore her swiftly westward. No sleeping car she took, but passed the night in a seat of an ordinary coach. Her ticket read “Rochester.”

The old page of her Book of Life was closed forever. A new and better page was open wide.

CHAPTER XXV.

THROUGH STEEL BARS.

True to her plan, Catherine ended her journey at Rochester. She engaged a room at a second-rate hotel—marvelling greatly at the meanness of the accommodations, the like of which she had never seen—and, at ten o’clock of the morning, appeared at the Central Police Station. The bundle of papers in her hand indicated that she had read the latest lies and venom poured out on Gabriel’s defenseless head.

The haughty, full-fed sergeant in charge of the station made some objections, at first, to letting her see Gabriel; but the tone of her voice and the level look of her gray eye presently convinced him he was playing with fire, and he gave in. Summoning an officer, he bade the man conduct her. Iron doors opened and closed for her. She was conscious of long, ill-smelling, concrete-floored corridors, with little steel cages at either side—cages where hopeless, sodden wrecks of men were standing, or sitting in attitudes of brutal despair, or lying on foul bunks, motionless and inert as logs.

For a moment her heart failed her.

“Good Lord! Can such things be?” she whispered to herself. “So this—this is a police station? And real jails and penitentiaries are worse? Oh, horrible! I never dreamed of anything like this, or any men like these!”

The officer, stopping at a cell-door and banging thereon with some keys, startled her.

“Here, youse,” he addressed the man within, “lady to see youse!”

Catherine was conscious that her heart was pounding hard and her breath coming fast, as she peered in through those cold, harsh metal bars. For a minute she could find no thought, no word. Within, her eyes—still unaccustomed to the gloom—vaguely perceived a man’s figure, big and powerful, and different in its bearing from those other cringing wretches she had glimpsed.

Then the man came toward her, stopped, peered and for a second drew back. And then—then she heard his voice, in a kind of startled joy:

“Oh—is it—is it *you*?”

“Yes,” she answered. “I must see you! I must talk with you, again, and know the truth!”

The officer edged nearer.

“Youse can talk all y’ want to,” he dictated, hoarsely, “but don’t you pass nothin’ in. No dope, nor nothin’, see? I’ll stick around an’ watch, anyhow; but don’t try to slip him no dream powders or no ‘snow.’ ’Cause if you do—”

“What—what *on* earth are you talking about?” the girl demanded, turning on the officer with absolute astonishment. But he, only winking wisely, repeated:

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“You heard me, didn’t you? No dope. I’m wise to this whole game.”

At a loss for his meaning, yet without any real desire to fathom it, Kate turned back toward Gabriel.

A moment they two looked at each other, each noting any change that might have taken place since that wonderful hour in the sugar-house, each hungering and thirsting for a sight of the other’s face. In her heart, already Kate knew as well as she knew she was alive, that this man was totally innocent of the foul charges heaped upon him. And so she looked at him with eyes wherein lay no reproach, no doubt and no suspicion. And, as she looked, tears started, and her heart swelled hotly in her breast; for he was bruised and battered and a helpless captive.

“He, caged like a trapped animal!” her thought was. “He, so strong, and free, and brave! Oh, horrible, horrible!”

He must have read something of this feeling, in her face; for now, coming close to the bars, he said in a low tone:

“Girl—your name I don’t know, even yet—girl, you mustn’t pity me! That’s *one* thing I can’t have. I’m here because the master class is stronger than my class, the working class. Here, because I’m dangerous to that master class. This isn’t said to make myself out a martyr. It’s only to make you see things right. I’m not complaining at this plight. I’ve richly earned it—under Capitalism. So, then, *that’s* settled.

“And now, what’s more important, tell me how *you* are! And did your wound cause you much trouble? I confess I’ve passed many an anxious hour, thinking of your narrow escape and of your injury. It wasn’t too bad, was it? Tell me!”

“No,” she answered, still holding to the bars, for she somehow felt quite unaccountably weak. “It wasn’t very bad. There’s hardly any scar at all—or won’t be, when it’s fully healed. But all this is trifling, compared to what *you’ve* suffered and are suffering. Oh, what a horrible affair! What frightful accusations! Tell me the truth, Boy—how, why could—?”

He looked at her a moment, in silence, noting her splendid hair and eyes and mouth, the firm, well-moulded chin, the confident and self-reliant poise of the shapely head; and as he looked, he knew he loved this woman. He understood, at last, how dear she was to him—dearer than anything else in all the world save just his principles and stern life work. He comprehended the meaning of all, his dreams and visions and long thoughts. And, caring nothing for consequences, unskilled in the finesse of dealing with women, acting wholly on the irresistible impulses of a heart that overflowed, he looked deep into those gray eyes and said in a tone that set her heart-strings vibrating:

“Listen! The truth? How could I tell you anything else? I know not who you are, and care not. That you are rich and powerful and free, while I am poor and in captivity, means nothing. Love cares not for such trifles. It dares all, hopes all, trusts all, believes all—and is patient in adversity.”

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“Love?” she whispered, her face paling. “How do you dare to—?”

“Dare? Because my heart bids me. And where it bids, I care not for conventions or consequences!” He flung his hand out with a splendid gesture, his head high, his eyes lustrous in the half-light of the cell. “Where it leads, I have to follow. That is why I am a Socialist! That is why I am here, today, outcast and execrated, a prisoner, in danger of long years of living death in the pestilential tomb of some foul penitentiary!”

“You’re here because—because you are a Socialist?” she asked.

He nodded.

“Yes,” said he. “I tried to help a suffering, outcast woman—or one who posed as such. And she betrayed me to my enemies. And so—”

“There *was* a woman in this affair, then?” Catherine queried with sudden pain. “The newspapers haven’t made the story *all* up out of whole cloth?”

“No. There *was* a woman. A Delilah, who delivered me into the hands of the Philistines, when I tried to help her in what she lied in telling me was her need. Will you hear the story?”

Still very pale, she formed a half-inarticulate “Yes!” with her full lips. Then, seeming to brace herself by a tighter clasp on the hard steel grating, she listened while he spoke.

Earnestly, honestly and with perfect straightforwardness, omitting nothing, adding nothing, he gave her the narrative of that fatal night’s events, from the first moment he had laid eyes on the wonderfully-disguised woman, till her cudgel-blow had laid him senseless on the floor.

He told her the part that every actor therein had played; how the whole drama had been staged, to dishonor and convict him, to railroad him to the Pen for a long term, perhaps to kill him. He spoke in a low voice, to prevent the watching officer from overhearing; and as he talked, he thanked his stars that in all this network of conspiracy and crime against the Party and against himself, his captors had not yet placed him incommunicado. For some reason—perhaps because they thought their case against him absolutely secure and wanted to avoid any appearance of unfairness or of martyrizing him—this restriction had not yet been laid upon him. So now his message of the truth could reach the ears of her who, more than all the world beside, had grown dear to him and precious beyond words.

He told her, then, not only the story of that night, but also all that had since happened—-the newspaper attacks on him and on the Party; the deliberate attempt to poison the community and the nation against him; the struggle to fix a foul and lasting blot upon his name, and ruin him beyond redemption.

“And why, all this?” he added, while she—listening so intently that she hardly breathed—knew that he spoke the living, vital truth. “Why this persecution, this plotting, this labor and expense to ‘get’ me. Do you want to know?”

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“Yes, tell me!” she whispered. “I don’t understand. I can’t! It—it all seems so horrible, so unreal, so—so different from what I’ve always believed about the majesty and purity of the law! Can these things be, indeed?”

He laughed bitterly.

“Can they?” he repeated. “When you see that they *are*, isn’t that answer enough? And the reason of it all is that I’m a Socialist and know certain secrets of certain men, which—if I should tell the world—might, nay, surely would precipitate a revolution. So, these men, and the System behind them, have tried to discredit me by this foul charge. After this, if the charge sticks, I may shout my head off, exposing what I know; and who will listen? You know the answer as well as I! Do I complain? No, not once! What I must suffer, for this wondrous Cause, is not a tenth what thousands suffer every day, in silence and high courage. What has happened to me, personally, is but the merest trifle beside what has already happened to thousands, fighting for life and liberty, for wife and home and children; for the right to work and live like men, not beasts!”

“You mean the—the working class?” she ventured, wonderingly. “Is this outrage really a minor one, compared with what they, who feed and warm and carry the whole world, have to suffer? Tell me, for I—God help me, I am ignorant! I am beginning to see, to half-see, awful, dim, ghostly shapes of huge, unspeakable wrongs. Tell me the truth about all this, as you have told it about yourself—and let me know!”

Then Gabriel talked as never he had talked before. To this, his audience of one, there in the dirty and ill-smelling police station, he unfolded the sad tale of the disinherited, the enslaved, the wretched, as never to a huge, and spell-bound audience in hall or park or city street. His eloquence, always convincing, now became sublime.

With master strokes he painted vast outlines of the whole sad picture—the System based on robbery and fraud and exploitation; its natural results in millionaire and tramp and harlot and degenerate; the crime of armies of unemployed and starving men, of millions of women forced into the factories and shops, there to compete with men and lower wages and lose their finest feminine attributes in the sordid and heartless drudging for a pittance.

He told her of child slavery, and brought before her eyes the pictures he himself had seen, of the pale, stunted little victims of Mammon’s greed, toiling by day and night in stifling, dangerous mines; in the Hell-glare of the glass-factories; in the hand-bruising, soul-obliterating Inferno of the coal-breakers; in the hot, linty, sickening atmosphere of the southern cotton-mills. And as he talked, she saw for the first time the figures of these bowed and bloodless little boys and girls, giving their lives drop by drop, and cough by cough, that *she* might have purple and fine linen and the rich, soft, easy paths of life.

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Then, pausing not, he spoke to her of white slavery, of girls and women by the uncounted thousand forced to barter their own bodies for a mockery of life; and, stinging as a nagaika, he laid the lash of blame on Capitalism, evil cause of an evil and rotten fruit, of disease and crime, and misery, and death. He told her of political corruption beyond belief; of cheating, lying, trickery and greed, for power. Of war, he told her, and made all its inner, hideous motives clear. She seemed verily to see the trenches, the "red rampart's slippery edge," the spattered blood and brains and all the horror of Hell's nethermost infamy—and then the blasted, wrecked and wasted homes, the long trail of mourning and of hopeless ruin—the horror of this crime of crimes, all for profit, all for gold and markets, all for Capitalism!

And then, while the girl stood there listening, spell-bound by her first insight, her first understanding of the true character of this, our striving, slaving world, held by a few for their own inordinate pride and power, the man's voice changed.

With new intonations and a deeper tone, he launched into some outlines of the great hope, the splendid vision, the Wondrous Ideal—Socialism, the world-salvation.

Sentence by sentence, imagery of this vast, noble thought flowed from his inspired lips. Clearly he showed this woman all the causes of the world's travail and pain; and clearly made her see that only in one way, only through the ownership of the world by the world's children as a whole, could peace and justice, life and joy and plenty and the New Time come to pass, dreamed of and yearned for by many sages and prophets, and now close at hand on the very threshold of reality!

Socialism! It leaped from his spirit like a living flame, consuming dross and waste and evil, lighting up the future with its shining beacon, its message of hope to the hopeless, of rest and cheer and peace to all who labored and were heavy laden.

Socialism! The glory of the vision seemed to blind and dazzle Catherine. In its supernal light, things grievous to be understood and borne were now made clear. For the first time in all her life, the woman saw, and knew, and grasped the truths of this strange nexus of conflict, pain and sorrow, that we know as our existence.

"Socialism! The Hope of the World!" Gabriel finished. "And for this, and for what I know about its enemies, I stand here in this cell and may yet go to a living death. This is my crime, and nothing else—this battle for the freedom and the joy of the world—this struggle against the powers of ignorance and darkness, priestcraft and greed, lust, treachery and foulness, cruelty and hate and war! This, and this only. You have heard me. I have spoken!"

He fell silent, crossed his arms upon the bars of the cage that pent him, and laid his head upon them with a motion of weariness.

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Something strangely stirred the heart of the woman. Her hand went out and touched his thick, black hair.

“Be of good cheer,” she whispered. “Though I am ignorant and do not fully understand, as yet, some glimmer of the light has reached my eyes. I can learn, and I *will* learn, and dare, and do! All my life I have eaten the bread of this bitter slavery, taken the thing I had no right to take, unknowingly wielded the lash on bleeding backs of men and women and children.

“All my life have I, in ignorance and idleness, done these things. But never shall I do them again. That is all past and gone, an evil dream that is no more. From now, if you will be patient and forgive and teach me, I will stand with you and yours, and glory in the new-found strength and majesty of this supreme ideal!”

He made no answer, save to reach one hand to her, through the bars. Their hands met in a long, clinging tension. The policeman, somewhat down the corridor, moved officiously in their direction.

“Here, now, none o’ that!” he blurted. “Break away! An’ say, time’s up. Yuh stayed too long, miss, as it is!”

Their hands parted. Still Gabriel did not look up.

“Are—are you coming back again?” he asked.

“Yes, Gabriel. Tomorrow.”

“And will you tell me then who you are?”

“I’ll tell you now, if you want to know.”

“I do,” he answered, and raised his head. Their eyes met, steadily. “I do, now that you too have seen the light, and that you understand. Tell me, who are you?”

A moment’s pause.

Then, facing him, she answered:

“I am Catherine Flint, only daughter of Isaac Flint, the Billionaire!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

“GUILTY.”

Speechless and dazed, Gabriel stared at her as though at some strange apparition.

“Daughter of—of Isaac Flint?” he stammered, clinging to the bars.

“Come, come, lady, yuh can’t stay no longer!” the officer again insisted, tapping her on the shoulder. “Yuh’d oughta been out o’ here ten minutes ago! No, nuthin’ doin’!” he concluded, as she turned to him appealingly. “Not today! Time’s up an’ more than up!”

Catherine stretched out her hand to Gabriel, in farewell. He took it, silently.

“Good-bye!” said she. “Until I come again, good-bye. Keep up a stout heart, for I am with you. We—we *can’t* lose. We shall win—we *must* win! Don’t condemn me for being what I am and who I am, Gabriel. Only think what—with your help—I may yet be! And now again, good-bye!”

Their hands parted. Gabriel, still silent, stood there in his cell, watching her till she vanished from his sight down the long corridor of grief and tears. The officer, winking wisely to himself, thrust his tongue into his cheek.

“Daughter of Isaac Flint, th’ Billionaire!” he was thinking, with derision. “Oh, yes, billionaires’ daughters would be visitin’ Socialists an’ bums an’ red-light con-workers like this geezer. Oh yes, sure, sure they would—I should worry!”

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Which mental attitude was fortunate, indeed; for it, and it alone, preserved the girl from a wild blare of newspaper notoriety. Had the truth been known, who could have imagined the results?

For a long time after the girl had departed, Gabriel sat there in his cell, motionless and sunk in deepest thought. His emotions passed recording. That this woman, his ideal, his best-beloved, the cherished, inmost treasure of his heart and soul—she whom he had rescued, she who had lain in his arms and shared with him that unforgettable hour in the old sugar-house—should now prove to be the daughter of his bitterest enemy, surpassed belief and stunned all clear understanding.

Flint! The very name connoted, for Gabriel, all that was cruel and rapacious, hateful, vicious and greedy; all that meant pain and woe and death to him and his class. Visions of West Virginia and Colorado rose before his mind. He heard again the whistle of the "Bull Moose Death Special" as it sped on its swift errand of barbarism up Cabin Creek, hurling its sprays of leaden death among the slaves of this man and his vulturine associates.

Flint! He whispered the name; and now he seemed to see the burning tents at Ludlow; the fleeing women and children, shot down by barbarous thugs and gunmen, ghouls in human form! He saw the pits of death, where the charred bodies of innocent victims of greed and heartless rapacity lay in mute protest under the far Colorado sky. And more he saw, east and west, north and south, of this man's inhuman work; and his thoughts, projected into the future, dwelt bitterly on the Air Trust now already under way—the terrible, coming slavery which he, Gabriel, had struggled to checkmate, only to find himself locked like a rat in a steel trap!

"And this woman," he groaned in agony of soul, "this woman, all in all to me, is—is *his* daughter!"

Flinging himself upon his hard and narrow bunk, he buried his head in his powerful arms, and tried to blot out thought from his fevered brain; but still the current ran on and on and on, endlessly, maddeningly. And to the problem, no answer seemed to come.

"She must know who I am," he pondered. "Even if her father has not told her, the papers have. True, she doesn't believe the infamous charge against me; but what then? Can she, on the other hand, believe the truth, that her father has conspired with Slade and those Cosmos thugs, and with the press and courts and the whole damnable prostituted system, to suppress and kill me?

"Can she believe her father guilty of all that? And of all the horrors of this capitalist Hell, that I have told her about? No! Human nature is incapable of such vast turnings from all the habits and environments of a lifetime. In her veins flows the blood of that arch-criminal, Flint. Her thoughts must be, to some extent, his thoughts. She must share his

viewpoint, and be loyal to him. After this first flush of reaction against her father, she will go back to him. It is inevitable. Betwixt her and me is fixed a boundless space, wider than Heaven and earth. She is one pole, and I the other. If I have any strength or resolution or philosophy, now is the hour for its trial.

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“This woman must be, shall be put away from every thought and wish and hope. And the word FINIS must be written at the end of the one brief chapter where our life-stories seem to have run along together in a false harmony and a fictitious peace!”

Thus pondered Gabriel, in the gloom of his harsh cell, branded with crime and writhing in the agony of soul that only those who love hopelessly can ever know.

And Catherine, what of her? What were her thoughts, emotions, inspirations as—-seeming to live in a dream, with Gabriel’s eloquence and the new vision of a better, saner, kindlier world shining through her soul—she made her way back to the dingy hotel where now, shabby as it was, she felt she had no right to stay, while others, homeless, walked the brutal streets?

Who shall know them? Who shall tell? A blind man, suddenly made to see, can find no words to express the wonder and bright glory of that sudden sight. A deaf man, regaining his lost sense, cannot describe the sudden burst of sound that fills the new, strange world wherein he finds himself. So, now, this cultured, gently bred woman, for the first time in her life understanding the facts, glimpsing the tragedy and grasping the answer to it all, felt that no words could compass her strange exultation and enlargement.

“It—it’s like a chrysalis emerging into the form of a light, swift butterfly!” she pondered, as, back in her room once more, she prepared to write two letters. “Just for the present, I can’t understand it all. I don’t know, yet, whether I’m worthy to be a Socialist, to be one of that company of earnest, noble men and women striving for life and liberty and joy for all the world. But with the help of the man I trust and honor and believe in, and —and love—perhaps I may yet be. God grant it may be so!”

She thought, a few minutes more, her face lighted by an inner radiance that made its beauty spiritual and pure and calm. Then, having somewhat composed her thoughts, she wrote this letter to Maxim Waldron:

My Dear Wally:

I am writing you without date or place, just as I shall write my father, because whatever happens, I insist that you two let me go my way in peace, without trying to find, or hamper, or importune me. My mind is fully made up. Nothing can change it. We have come to the parting of the ways, forever.Though I may feel bitterly toward you for what I now understand as your harsh and cruel attitude toward the world, and the role you play as an exploiter of human labor, I shall not reproach you. You simply cannot see these things as I have come to see them since my feet have been set upon the road toward Socialism. Don’t start, Wally—that’s the truth. Perhaps I’m not much of a Socialist yet, because I don’t know much about it. But I am learning, and shall learn. My teacher is the best one in the world, I’m sure; and added to

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this, all my natural energy and innate radicalism have flamed into activity with this new thought. So, you see, the past is even more effectively buried than ever. How could anything ever be possible, now, between you and me?Cease to think of me, Wally. I am gone out of your life, for all time, as out of that whole circle of false, insincere, wicked and parasitic existence that we call “society.” That other world, where you still are, shall see me no more. I have found a better and a nobler kind of life; and to this, and to all it implies, I mean to be forever faithful. I beg you, never try to find me or to answer this.

Good-bye, then, forever.

Catherine.

After having read this over and sealed it, she wrote still another:

Dear Father:

It is hard to write these words to you. I owe you a debt of gratitude and love, in many ways; yet, after all, your will and mine conflict. You have tried to force me to a union abhorrent and impossible to me. My only course is this—independence to think, and act, and live as I, no longer a child but a grown woman, now see fit.I shall never return to you, father. Life means one thing to you, another to me. You cannot change; I would not, now, for all the world. I must go my way, thinking my own thoughts, doing my own work, living up to my own ideals, whatever these may be. Your money cannot lure me back to you, back to that old, false, sheltered, horrible life of ease and idleness and veiled robbery! The skill you have given me as a musician will open out a way for me to earn my own living and be free. For this I thank you, and for much else, even as I say good-bye to you for all time.I have written Wally. He will tell you more about me, and about the change in my views and ambitions, which has taken place. Do not think harshly of me, father, and I will try to forgive you for the burden I now know you have laid upon the aching shoulders of this sad, old world.And now, good-bye. Though you have lost a daughter, you may still rejoice to know that that daughter has found peace and joy and vast outlets for the energies of her whole heart and soul and being, in working for Socialism, the noblest ideal ever conceived by the mind of man.

Farewell, father; and think sometimes, not too unkindly, of

Your

Kate.

One week after these letters were mailed, “Tiger” Waldron, fanning the fires of the old man’s terrible rage, had decided Flint to disinherit Catherine and to name him, Waldron, as his executor. Gabriel’s fervent wish that she might be penniless, was granted.

On the very day this business was put through, practically delivering the Flint interests into Waldron's hands in the case of the old man's death, a verdict was reached in Gabriel's case, at Rochester.

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This case, crammed through the calendar, ahead of a large jam of other business, proved how well unlimited funds can grease the wheels of Law. It proved, also, that in the face of infinitely-subsidized witnesses, lawyers, judge and jurymen, black becomes white, and a good deed is written down a crime.

Catherine, working incognito, co-operated with the Socialist defense, and did all that could be humanely done to have the truth made known, to overset the mass of perjury and fraud enmeshing Gabriel, and to force his acquittal.

As easily might she have bidden the sea rise from its bed and flood the dry and arid wastes of old Sahara. Her voice and that of the Socialists, their lawyers and their press, sounded in vain. A solid battery of capitalist papers, legal lights, private detectives and other means—particularly including the majority of the priests and clergy—swamped the man and damned him and doomed him from the first word of the trial.

Money flowed in floods. Perjury overran the banks of the River of Corruption. Herzog branded the man a thief and fire-eater. Dope-fiends and harlots from the Red-Light district, “madames” and pimps and hangers-on, swore to the white-slave activities of this man, who never yet in all his four and twenty years had so much as entered a brothel.

Forged papers fixed past crimes and sentences on him. By innuendo and direct statement, dynamitings, arsons, violence and rioting in many strikes were laid at his door. His Socialist activities were dragged in the slime of every gutter; and his Party made to suffer for evil deeds existing only in the foul imagination of the prosecuting attorneys. The finest “kept” brains in the legal profession conducted the case from start to finish; and not a juryman was drawn on the panel who was not, from the first, sworn to convict, and bought and paid for in hard cash.

After three days—days in which Gabriel plumbed the bitterest depths of Hell and drank full draughts of gall and wormwood—the verdict came. Came, and was flashed from sea to sea by an exulting press; and preached on, and editorialized on, and gloated over by Flint and Waldron and many, many others of that ilk—while Catherine wept tears that seemed to drain her very heart of its last drops of blood.

At last she knew the meaning of the Class Struggle and her terrible father’s part in it all. At last she understood what Gabriel had so long understood and now was paying for—-the fact that Hell hath no fury like Capitalism when endangered or opposed.

The Price! Gabriel now must pay it, to the full. For that foul verdict, bought with gold wrung from the very blood and marrow of countless toilers, opened the way to the sentence which Judge Harpies regretted only that he could not make more severe—the sentence which the detectives and the prison authorities, well “fixed,” counted on making a death-sentence, too.

“Gabriel Armstrong, stand up!”

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He arose and faced the court. A deathlike stillness hushed the room, crowded with Socialists, reporters, emissaries of Flint, private detectives and hangers-on of the System. Heavily veiled, lest some of her father's people recognize her, Catherine herself sat in a back seat, very pale yet calm.

"Prisoner at the bar, have you anything to say, why sentence should not be pronounced upon you?"

Gabriel, also a little pale, but with a steadfast and fearless gaze, looked at the legal prostitute upon the bench, and shook his head in negation. He deigned not, even, to answer this kept puppet of the ruling class.

Judge Harpies frowned a trifle, cleared his throat, glanced about him with pompous dignity; and then, in a sonorous and impressive tone—his best asset on the bench, for legal knowledge and probity were not his—announced:

"*It is the judgment of this court that you do stand committed to pay a fine of three thousand dollars into the treasury of the United States, and to serve five years at hard labor in the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta!*"

CHAPTER XXVII.

BACK IN THE SUNLIGHT.

Four years and two months from the day when this iniquitous verdict fell from the lips of the "bought and paid for" judge, a sturdily built and square jawed man stood on the steps of the Atlanta Penitentiary and, for the first time in all these weary months and years, faced the sun.

Pale with the prison-pallor that never fails to set its seal on the victims of a diseased society, which that society retaliates upon by shutting away from God's own light and air, this man stood there on the steps, a moment, then advanced to meet a woman who was coming toward him in the August glare. As he removed his cheap, convict-made cap, one saw his finely shaped head, close cropped with the infamous prison badge of servitude. Despite the shoddy miserable prison-suit that the prostituted government had given him—a suit that would have made Apollo grotesque and would have marked any man as an ex-convict, thus heavily handicapping him from the start—Gabriel Armstrong's poise and strength still made themselves manifest.

And the smile as they two, the woman and he, came together and their hands clasped, lighted his pale features with a ray brighter than that of the blistering Southern sunshine flooding down upon them both.

“I knew you’d come, Catherine,” said he, simply, his voice still the same deep, vibrant, earnest voice which, all that time ago, had thrilled and inspired her at the hour of her great conversion. Still were his eyes clear, level and commanding; and through his splendid body, despite all his jailers had been able to do, coursed an abundant life and strong vitality.

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Gabriel had served his time with consummate skill, courage and intelligence. Like all wise men, he had recognized *force majeure*, and had submitted. He had made practically no infractions of the prison rules, during his whole "bit." He had been quiet, obedient and industrious. His work, in the brush factory, had always been well done; and though he had consistently refused to bear tales, to spy, to inform or be a stool-pigeon—the quickest means of winning favor in any prison—yet he had given no opportunity for savagery and violence to be applied to him. Not even Flint's eager wish to have his jailers force him into rebellion had succeeded. Realizing to the full the sort of tactics that would be used to break, and if possible to kill him, Gabriel had met them all with calm self-reliance and with a generalship that showed his brain and nerves were still unshaken. On their own ground he had met these brutes, and he had beaten them at their own game.

Their attempt to make a "dope" out of him had ignominiously failed. He had detected the morphine they had cleverly mixed with his water; and, after his drowsiness and weird dreams had convinced him of the plot, had turned the trick on it by secretly emptying this water out and by drinking only while in the shop, where he could draw water from the faucet. The cell guards' intelligence had been too limited to make them inquire of the brush shop guards about his habits. Also, Gabriel, had feigned stupefaction while in the cell. Thus he had simulated the effects of the drug, and had really thrown his tormentors off the track. For months and months they were convinced that they were weakening his will and destroying his mentality, while as a matter of fact his reasoning powers and determination never had been more keen.

By bathing as often as possible, by taking regular and carefully planned calisthenics, by reading the best books in the prison library, by attention to every rule of health within his means, and by allowing himself no vices, not even his pipe, Gabriel now was emerging from the Bastile of Capitalism in a condition of mind and body so little impaired that he knew a few weeks would entirely restore him. The good conduct allowance, or "copper," which they had been forced to allow him for exemplary conduct, had cut ten months off his sentence. And now in mid-August of 1925, there he stood, a free man again, with purpose still unshaken and with a woman by his side who shared his high ambition and asked no better lot than to work with him toward the one great aim—-Socialism!

Now, as these two walked side by side along the sunbaked street of the sweltering Southern town, Gabriel was saying:

"So I haven't changed as much as you expected? I'm glad of that, Kate. Only superficial changes, at most. Just give me a little time to pull together and get my legs under me again, and—forward march! Charge the forts! Eh, Catherine?"

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She nodded, smiling. Smiles were rare with her, now. She had grown sober and serious, in these years of work and battle and stern endeavor. The Catherine Flint of the old times had vanished—the Catherine of country club days, and golf and tennis, and the opera—the Catherine of Newport, of the horse show, of Paris, of "society." In her place now lived another and a nobler woman, a woman known and loved the length and breadth of the land, a woman exalted and strengthened by new, high and splendid race-aspirations; by a vision of supernal beauty—the vision of the world for the workers, each for all and all for each!

She had grown more mature and beautiful, with the passing years. No mark of time had yet laid its hand upon her face or figure. Young, still—she was now but five-and-twenty, and Gabriel only twenty-eight—she walked like a goddess, lithe, strong and filled with overflowing vigor. Her eyes glowed with noble enthusiasms; and every thought, every impulse and endeavor now was upward, onward, filled with stimulus and hope and courage.

Thus, a braver, broader and more splendid woman than Gabriel had known in the other days of his first love for her—the days when he had wished her penniless, the days when her prospective millions stood between them—she walked beside him now. And they two, comrades, understood each other; spoke the same language, shared the same aspirations, dreamed the same wondrous dreams. Their smile, as their eyes met, was in itself a benediction and a warm caress.

"Charge the forts!" Gabriel repeated. "Yes, Kate, the battle still goes on, no matter what happens. Here and there, soldiers fall and die. Even battalions perish; but the war continues. When I think of all the fights you've been in, since I was put away, I'm unspeakably envious. You've been through the Tawana Valley strike, the big Consolidated Western lockout and the Imperial Mills massacre. You were a delegate to the 1923 Revolution Congress, in Berlin, and saw the slaughter in Unter den Linden—-helped nurse the wounded comrades, inside the Treptow Park barricades. Then, out in California—"

She checked him, with a hand on his arm.

"Please don't, Gabriel," she entreated. "What I have done has been so little, so terribly, pitiably little, compared to what *needs* to be done! And then remember, too, that in and through all, this thought has run, like the red thread through every cable of the British navy—the thought that in my every activity, I am working against my own father, combatting him, being as it were a traitor and—"

"Traitor?" exclaimed the man. "Never! The bond between you two is forever broken. You recognize in him, now, an enemy of all mankind. Waldron is another. So is every one of the Air Trust group—that is to say, the small handful of men who today own the whole world and everything in it.

“Your father, as President of that world-corporation which potentially controls two thousand millions of human beings—and which will, tomorrow, absolutely control them, is no longer any father of yours.

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“He is a world-emperor, and his few associates are princes of the royal house. Your life and thought have forever broken with him. No more can bonds and ties of blood hold you. Your larger duty calls to battle against this man. Treachery? A thousand times, no! Treason to tyrants is obedience to God! Or, if not God, then to mankind!”

He paused and looked at her. They had now reached a little park, some half mile from the grim and dour old walls of the Federal Pen. Trees and grass and playing children seemed to invite them to stop and rest. Though strong, moreover, Gabriel had for so long been unused to walking, that even this short distance had tired him a little. And the oppressive heat had them both by the throat.

“Shall we sit down here and wait a little?” asked he. “Plan a little, see where we are and what’s to be done next?”

She nodded assent.

“Of course,” she said, “even if I could have got word in to you, I wouldn’t have given you our real plans.”

“Hardly!” he exclaimed. Then, coming to a fountain, they sat down on a bench close by. Nobody, they made sure, was within ear-shot.

“Thank God,” he breathed, “that you, Kate, and only you, met me as I came out! It was a grand good idea, wasn’t it, to keep my time of liberation a secret from the comrades? Otherwise there might have been a crowd on hand, and various kinds of foolishness; and time and energy would have been used that might have been better spent in working for the Revolution!”

She looked at him a trifle curiously.

“You forget,” said she, “that all public meetings have been prohibited, ever since last April. Federal statute—the new Penfield Bill—’The Muzzler’ as we call it.”

“That’s so!” he murmured. “I forgot. Fact is, Kate, I *am* out of touch with things. While you’ve been fighting, I’ve been buried alive. Now, I must learn much, before I can jump back into the war again. And above all, I must lose my identity. That’s the first and most essential thing of all!”

“Of course,” she assented. “They—the Air Trust World-corporation—will trail you, everywhere you go. All this, as you know, has been provided for. You must vanish a while.”

“Indeed I must. If they ‘jobbed’ me like that, in 1921, what won’t they do now in 1925?”

“They won’t ever get you, again, Gabriel,” she answered, “if your wits and ours combined, can beat them. True, the Movement has been badly shot to pieces. That is, its visible organization has suffered, and it’s outlawed. But under the surface, Gabriel, you haven’t an idea of its spread and power. It’s tremendous—it’s a volcano waiting to burst! Let the moment come, the leader rise, the fire burst forth, and God knows what may not happen!”

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“Splendid!” exclaimed Gabriel. “The battle calls me, like a clarion-call! But we must act with circumspection. The Plutes, powerful as they now are, won’t need even the shadow of an excuse to plant me for life, or slug or shoot me. Things were rotten enough, then; but today they’re worse. The hand of this Air Trust monopoly, grasping every line of work and product in the world, has got the lid nailed fast. We’re all slaves, every man and woman of us. Even our Socialists in Congress can do nothing, with all these muzzling and sedition and treason bills, and with this conscription law just through. Now that the government—the Air Trust, that is to say—is running the railways and telegraphs and telephones, a strike is treason—and treason is death! Kate, this year of grace, 1925, is worse than ever I dreamed it would be. Oh, infinitely worse! No wonder our movement has been driven largely underground. No wonder that the war of mass and class is drawing near—the actual, physical war between the Air Trust few and the vast, toiling, suffering, stifling world!”

She nodded.

“Yes,” said she, “it’s coming, and soon. Things are as you say, and even worse than you say, Gabriel. I know more of them, now, than you can know. Remember London’s ‘Iron Heel?’ When I first read it I thought it fanciful and wild. God knows I was mistaken! London didn’t put it half strongly enough. The beginning was made when the National Mounted Police came in. All the rest has swiftly followed. If you and I live five years longer, Gabriel, we’ll see a harsher, sterner and more murderous trampling of that Heel than ever Comrade Jack imagined!”

“Right!” said he. “And for that very reason, Kate, I’ve got to go into hiding till my beard and hair grow and I can reappear as a different man. Don’t look, just now, but in a minute take a peek. Over on that third bench, on the other side of the park, see that man? Well, he’s a ‘shadow.’ There were three waiting for me, at the prison gates. You couldn’t spot them, but I could. One was that Italian banana-seller that stood at the curb, on the first corner. Another was a taxi driver. And this one, over there, is the third. From now till they ‘get’ me again, they’ll follow me like bloodhounds. I can’t go free, to do my work and take part in the impending war, till I shake them. Look, now, do you see the one I mean?”

Cautiously the girl looked round, with casual glance as though to see a little boy playing by the fountain.

“Yes,” she murmured. “Who is he? Do you know his name?”

“No,” answered Gabriel. “His name, no. But I remember him, well enough. He’s the larger of the two detectives I knocked out, in that room in Rochester. Beside his pay, he’s got a personal motive in landing me back in ‘stir,’ or sending me ‘up the escape,’ as prison slang names a penitentiary and a death. So then,” he added, “what’s the first thing? Where shall I go, and how, to hide and metamorphose? I’m in your hands, now,

Kate. More than four years out of the world, remember, makes a fellow want a little lift when he comes back!”

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She smiled and nodded comprehension.

“Don’t explain, Gabriel,” said she. “I understand. And I’ve got just the place in mind for you. Also, the way to get there. You see, comrade, we’ve been planning on this release. When can you go?”

“When? Right now!” exclaimed Gabriel, standing up. “The quicker, the better. Every minute I lose in getting myself ready to jump back into the fight, is a precious treasure that can never be regained!”

“Go, then,” said she, with pride in her eyes. “I will wait here. Don’t think of me; leave me here; I am self-reliant in every way. Go to the Cuthbert House, on Desplaines Street. Everything has been arranged for your escape. Every link in the chain is complete. Remember, we are working more underground, now, than when you were sentenced. And our machinery is almost perfect. Register at the hotel and take a room for a week. Then—”

“Register, under my own name?” asked he.

“Under your own name. Stay there two days. You won’t be molested so soon, and things won’t be ready for you till the third day. On that day—”

“Well, what then?”

“A message will come for you, that’s all. Obey it. You have nothing more to do.”

He nodded.

“I understand,” said he. “But, Kate—who’s paying for all this? Not *you*? I—I can’t have *you* paying, now that every dollar you have must be earned by your own labor!”

She smiled a smile of wonderful beauty.

“Foolish, rebellious boy!” said she. “Have no fear! All expense will be borne by the Party, just as the Party paid your fine. It needs you and must have you; and were the cost ten times as great, would bear it to get you back! Remember, Gabriel, the Party is far larger than when you were buried alive in a cell. Even though in some ways outlawed and suppressed, its potential power is tremendous. All it needs is the electric spark to cause the world-shaking explosion. All that keeps us from power now is the Iron Heel—that, and the clutch of the Air Trust already crushing and mangling us!

“Go, now,” she concluded. “Go, and rest a while, and wait. All shall be well. But first, you must get back your strength completely, and find yourself, and take your place again in the ranks of the great, subterranean army!”

“And shall I see you soon, again?” he asked, his voice trembling just a little as their hands clasped once more, and once more parted.

“You will see me soon,” she answered.

“Where?”

“In a safe place, where we can plan, and work, and organize for the final blow! Now, you shall know no more. Good-bye!”

One last look each gave the other. Their eyes met, more caressingly than many a kiss; and, turning, Gabriel took his way, alone, toward Desplaines Street.

At the exit of the park, he looked around.

There Catherine sat, on the bench. But, seemingly quite oblivious to everything, she was now reading a little book. Though he lingered a moment, hoping to get some signal from her, she never stirred or looked up from the page.

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Sighing, with a strange feeling of sudden loneliness and a vast, empty yearning in his heart, Gabriel continued on his way, toward what? He knew not.

The detective on the other side of the park, no longer sat there. Somehow, somewhere, he had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN THE REFUGE.

Far on the western slopes of Clingman Dome in the great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, a broad, low-built bungalow stood facing the setting sun. Vast stretches of pine forest shut it off from civilization and the prying activities of Plutocracy. The nearest settlement was Ravens, twenty miles away to eastward, across inaccessible ridges and ravines. Running far to southward, the railway left this wilderness untouched. High overhead, an eagle soared among the “thunder-heads” that presaged a storm up Sevier Pass. And, red through the haze to westward, the great huge sunball slid down the heavens toward the tumbled, jagged mass of peaks that rimmed the far horizon.

Within the bungalow, a murmur of voices sounded; and from the huge stone chimney a curl of smoke, arising, told of the evening meal, within, now being made ready. On the wide piazza sat a man, writing at a table of plain boards roughly pegged together. Still a trifle pale, yet with a look of health and vigor, he sat there hard at work, writing as fast as pen could travel. Hardly a word he changed. Sheet by sheet he wrote, and pushed them aside and still worked on. Some of the pages slid to the porch-floor, but he gave no heed. His brow was wrinkled with the intensity of his thought; and over his face, where now a disguising beard was beginning to be visible, the light of the sinking sun cast as it were a kind of glowing radiance.

At last the man looked up, and smiled, and eyed the golden mountain-tops far off across the valley.

“Wonderful aerie in the hills!” he murmured. “Wonderful retreat and hiding-place—-wonderful care and forethought to have made this possible for me! How shall I ever repay all this? How, save by giving my last drop of blood, if need be, for the final victory?”

He pondered a moment, still half-thinking of the poem he had just finished, half-reflecting on the strange events of the past week—the secret ways, by swift auto, by boat, by monoplane which had brought him hither to this still undiscovered refuge. How had it all been arranged, he wondered; and who had made it possible? He could not tell, as yet. No information was forthcoming. But in his heart he understood, and his lips, murmuring the name of Catherine, blessed that name and tenderly revered it.

At last Gabriel bent, picked up the pages that had fallen, and arranged them all in order.

“Tomorrow this shall go out to the world,” said he, “and to our press—such of it as still remains. It may inspire some fainting heart and thrill some lagging mind. Now, that the final struggle is at hand, more than guns we need inspiration. More than force, to meet the force that has ravished our every right and crushed Constitution and Law, alike, we need spiritual insight and integrity. Only through these, and by these, come what may, can a true, lasting victory be attained!”

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In the doorway of the bungalow a woman appeared, her smile illumined by the sunset warmth.

“Come, Gabriel,” said she. “We’re waiting—the Granthams, Craig, and Brevard. Supper’s ready. Not one of them will sit down, till you come.”

“Have I been delaying you?” asked Gabriel, turning toward the woman, with a smile that matched her own.

“I’m afraid so, just a little,” she answered. “But no matter; I’m glad. When you get to writing, you know, nothing else matters. One line of your verse is worth all the suppers in the world.”

“Nonsense!” he retorted. “I’m a mere scribbler!”

“We won’t argue that point,” she answered. “But at any rate, you’re done, now. So come along, boy—or the comrades will begin ‘dividing up’ without us; for this mountain air won’t brook delay.”

Gabriel took a long breath, stretched his powerful arms out toward the mountains, and raised his face to the last light of day.

“Nature!” he whispered. “Ever beautiful and ever young! Ah, could man but learn thy lessons and live close to thy great heart!”

Then, turning, he followed Catherine into the bungalow.

Beautiful and restful though the outside was, the interior was more restful and more charming still.

In the vast fireplace, to left, a fire of pine roots was crackling. The room was filled with their pitchy, wholesome perfume, with the dancing light of their blaze and with the warmth made grateful by that mountain height.

Simple and comfortable all the furnishings were, hand-wrought for use and pleasure. Big chairs invited. Broad couches offered rest. No hunting-trophies, no heads of slaughtered wild things disfigured the walls, as in most bungalows; but the flickering firelight showed pictures that inspired thought and carried lessons home—pictures of toil and of repose, pictures of life, and love, and simple joy—pictures of tragedy, of reality and deep significance. Here one saw Millet’s “Sower,” and “Gleaners” and “The Man with the Hoe.” There, Fritel’s “The Conquerors,” and Stuck’s “War.” A large copy of Bernard’s “Labor,”—the sensation of the 1922 Paris Salon—hung above the mantelpiece, on which stood Rodin’s “Miner” in bronze. Portraits of Marx, Engels, LaSalle and Debs, with others loved and honored in the Movement, showed between original sketches by Walter Crane, Balfour Kerr, Art Young and Ryan Walker. And in the

well-filled bookshelves at the right, Socialist books in abundance all told the same tale to the observer—that this was a Socialist nest high up there among the mountains, and that every thought and word and deed was inspired by one great ideal and one alone—-the Revolution!

At a plain but well-covered table near the western windows, where fading sunlight helped firelight to illumine the little company, sat three men—two of them armed with heavy automatics—and a woman. Another woman, Catherine, was standing by her chair and beckoning Gabriel to his.

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“Come, Comrade!” she exclaimed. “If you delay much longer, everything will be stone cold, and *then* beg forgiveness if you dare!”

Gabriel laughed.

“Your own fault, if you wait for me,” he answered, seating himself. “You know how it is when you get to scribbling—you never know when to stop. And the scenery, up here, won’t let you go. Positively fascinating, that view is! If the Plutes knew of it, they’d put a summer resort here, and coin millions!”

“Yes,” answered Craig, once Congressman Craig, but now hiding from the Air Trust spies. “And what’s more, they’d mighty soon confiscate this resting-up place of the Comrades, and have us back behind bars, or worse. But they *don’t* know about it, and aren’t likely to. Thank Heaven for at least one place the Party can maintain as an asylum for our people when too hard-pressed! Not a road within ten miles of here. No way to reach this place, masked here in the cliffs and mountains, except by aeroplane. Not one chance in a thousand, fellows, that they’ll ever find it. Confusion take them all!”

The meal progressed, with plenty of serious and earnest discussion of the pressing problems now close at hand. Brevard, a short, spare man, editor of the recently-suppressed “San Francisco Revolutionist” and now in hiding, made a few trenchant remarks, from time to time. Grantham and his wife, both active speakers on the “Underground Circuit” and both under sentence of long imprisonment, said little. Most of the conversation was between Catherine, Craig and Gabriel. Long before the supper was done, lamps had to be brought and curtains lowered. At last the meal was over.

“Dessert, now, Gabriel!” exclaimed Grantham. “Your turn!”

“Eh? What?” asked Armstrong. “My turn for what?”

“Your turn to do your part! Don’t think that you’re going to write a poem and then put it in your pocket, that way. Come, out with it!”

Gabriel’s protests availed nothing. The others overbore him. And at last, unwillingly, he drew out the manuscript and spread it open on his knee.

“You really want to hear this?” he demanded. “If you can possibly spare me, I wish you would!”

For all answer, Craig pushed a lamp over toward him. The warm light on Gabriel’s face, now slightly bearded, and on his strong, corded throat, made a striking picture as he cast his eyes on the manuscript and in vibrant and harmonious voice, read:

I SAW THE SOCIALIST

I saw the Socialist sitting at a great Banquet of Men,
Sitting with honored leaders of the blind, unwitting Multitude;
I saw him there with the writers, editors, painters, men of letters,
Legislators and judges, the Leaders of the People,
Leaders flushed with the wines of price, eating costly and rare
foods,
Making loud talk, and boastful, of that marvel, American Liberty!

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Thinking were they no thought of hunger and pinching cold;
Of the blue-lipped, skinny children, the thin-chested, coughing men,
The dry-breasted mothers, the dirt, disease and ignorance,
The mangled workmen, the tramps, drunkards, pickpockets,
    prostitutes, thieves,
The mad-houses, jails, asylums and hospitals, the sores, the blood
    of war,
And all the other wondrous blessings that attend our civilization—
That civilization through which the wines and foods were given them.

I saw the Socialist there, calm, unmoved, unsmiling, thoughtful,
Sober, serious, full of dispassionate and prophetic vision,
Not like the other men, the all-wise Leaders of the People.
The political economists, the professors, the militarists, heroes
    and statisticians;
Not like the kings and presidents and emperors, the nobles and
    gold-crammed bankers,
But mindful, more than they, of the cellars under the House of Life
Where blind things crawl in the dark, things men and yet not human,
Things whose toil makes possible the Banquets of the Leaders of Men,
Things that live and yet are not alive; things that never taste of
    Life;
Things that make the rich foods, themselves snatching filthy crumbs;
Things that produce the wines of price, and must be content with
    lees;
Things that shiver and cringe and whine, that snarl sometimes,
That are men and women and children, and yet that know not Life!

I saw the Socialist there; I sat at the banquet; beside him,
Listened to the surging music, saw all the lights and flowers,
Flowers and lights and crystal cups, whereof the price for each
Might have brought back from Potter's Field some bloodless,
    starving baby.
I heard the Leaders' speeches, the turgid oratory,
The well-turned phrases of the Captains, the rotund babble of
    prosperity,
(Prosperity for whom? Nay, ask not troublesome questions!)
The Captains' vaunting I heard, their boasts of glory and victory,
While red, red, red their hands dripped red with the blood of the
    butchered workers.

I heard the Judges' self-glorification, Quixotic fighting of
windmills,
Heard also the unclean jests that those respected Leaders told.
And as I looked and listened, I still observed the Socialist,
Unmoved and patient and serious, calm, full of sober reflections.

Then there spake (among many others) an honored and full-paunched
Bishop.
Rubicund he was, and of portly habit of body,
Shepherd of a well-pastured flock, mightily content with God,
Out of whose omnipotent Hand (no doubt) the blessings of his life
descended.
I heard this exponent of Christ

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the Crucified, Christ the Carpenter,
Christ the Leader of Workingmen, the Agitator, the Disturber,
Christ the Labor-organizer, Christ the Archetypal Socialist,
Friend of the dwellers in the pits of Life, Consoler of earth's exploited,
Who once with the lash scourged from the Temple the unclean graft-brood of usurers.
And the rotund Bishop's words were as the crackling of dry thorns
Under a pot, bubbling without use in the desert of dreary platitudes.
The story he told was spiced and garnished with profane words,
Whereat the Leaders laughed in their cups, making great show of merriment,
So that the banquet-hall rang, and wine was spilt on the linen.
Wine as red as blood—the blood of the shattered miner,
Blood of the boy in the rifle-pits, blood of the coughing child-slave,
Blood of the mangled trainman, blood that the Carpenter shed.

And still I watched the Socialist. Sober, judicial, observant
And full of greater wisdom he was than to laugh with the tipsy Leaders.
His eyes were fixed on the Bishop, vice-regent of God upon earth.
And as I watched the Socialist, the unmoved, the contemplative one,
He thoughtfully took his pencil, he took the fine and large card
Whereon the names of the rich foods and all the costly wines were printed,
And made a few notes of the feast, notes of the Bishop's speech,
Notes to remind him to search the slums for the great, God-given prosperity,
Which all the Judges, Lawmakers, Captains and Leaders knew to be "our" portion;
Notes of the flowers, the wine, the lights, the music, the splendor,
Notes of the Leaders' oratory, notes of the Bishop's deep-voiced unctiousness,
Notes he made; and as I looked at the notes he was carefully writing,
The words ran red like wine and blood, they blazed like the blazing lights!
Words they were of blood and fire, that spread, that filled the banquet-hall.
Words of old, I read them—"MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSHIN!—

Weighed in the Balance you are, ye Leaders respected of men,
You Statesmen, Lawmakers, Judges, Captains, Bishops, vice-regents of God!
Weighed and tried and found wanting. Give way, now, to what shall come after!
Make ye way for the Men who shall do what ye have but neglected and shirked!
Make ye way for a Time which hath more than Power and Greed for its watchwords!
Soon your day shall decline forever, your sun shall sink and shall vanish.
Then from the Cellars of Life the darkness-dwellers shall issue,
Greeting another daunt which shall have more than pain for its portion.
Then no more shall the humble, the lowly, the friends of the Nazarene Carpenter
Be starved, be mangled for gold, be crucified, slaughtered, bled.
Make ye way!...Make ye way!...”

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Such was the message I read, the words of that fire-writ warning.
Then peace came back to my spirit, calm peace, and hope and patience:
Then, through my anger and heat, I thought of the Retribution.
But even more clearly I saw the New Birth of this weary world,
This world now groaning in chains, with the bloody sweat of oppression.
These things and many more, such as were hard to write of,
I read in the words of the Socialist, patient, peaceful and sober,
Full of prophetic vision, above all things hopeful and patient,
Written in living flame at the Feast of the Leaders of Men....

CHAPTER XXIX.

"APRES NOUS LE DELUGE!"

As Gabriel's voice fell to silence, after the last words, a stillness came upon the lamp-lit room, a hush broken only by the snapping of the pine-root fire on the hearth and by the busy ticking of the clock upon the chimneypiece. Then, after a minute's pause, Craig reached over and took Gabriel by the hand.

"I salute you, O poet of the Revolution now impending!" he cried, while Catherine's eyes gleamed bright with tears. "Would God that *I* could write like that, old man!"

"And would God that my paper was still being issued!" Brevard added, making a gesture with the pipe that, in his eagerness to hear, he had allowed to die. "If it were I'd give that poem my front page, and fling its message full in the faces of Plutocracy!"

Gabriel smiled a bit nervously.

"Don't, please don't," he begged. "If you really do like it help me spread it. Don't waste words on praise, but plan with me, tonight, how we can get this to the people—how we can perfect our final arrangements—what we must do, now, at once, to meet the Air Trust and defeat it before its terrible and unrelenting grip closes on the throat of the world!"

"Right!" said Craig. "We must act at once, while there's yet time. today, all seems safe. The Air Trust spies haven't ferreted this place out. A week from now, they may have, and one of the most secure and useful Socialist refuges in the country may be only a heap of ashes—like the ones at Kenwyck, Hampden, Mount Desert and Loftiss. Every day is precious. Every one helps to perfect Gabriel's disguise and adds materially to his strength."

“True,” assented Gabriel. “We mustn’t wait too long, now. That last report we got yesterday, by our wireless, ought to stimulate us. Brainard says, in it, that the Air Trust people are now putting the finishing touches on the Niagara plant. That will give them condensing machinery for over 90,000,000 horsepower, all told. As I see the thing, it looks absolutely as though, when *that* is done, the whole Capitalist system of the world will center right there—focus there, as at a point. Let kings and emperors continue to strut and mouth vain phrases; let our own President and Congress make the motions of governing; even let Wall Street play at finance and power. All, all are empty and meaningless!

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“Power has been sucked dry, out of them all, comrades. You know as well as I know—-better, perhaps—that all real power in the world, today, whether economic or political—-nay, even the power of life and death, the power of breath or strangulation, has clotted at Niagara, in the central offices of the Air Trust; nay, right in Flint and Waldron’s own inner office!”

Gabriel had stood up, while speaking; and now, pacing the floor of the big living-room, glanced first at one eager and familiar face, then at another.

“Comrades,” said he, “we should not sleep, tonight. We should get out all our plans and data, all the dispatches that have come to us here, all the information at hand about our organization, whether open or subterranean. We should make this room and this time, in fact, the place and the hour for the planning of the last great blow on which hangs the fate of the world. If it succeed, the human race goes free again. If it fail—and God forbid!—then the whole world will lie in the grip of Flint and Waldron! With our other centers broken up and under espionage, our press forced into impotence—save our underground press—and political action now rendered farcical as ever it was in Mexico, when Diaz ruled, we have but one recourse!”

“And that is?” asked Catherine. “The general strike?”

“A final, general, paralyzing strike; and with it, the actual, physical destruction of the colossal crime of crimes, the Air Trust works at Niagara!”

A little silence followed. They all drew round the reading-table, now, near the fireplace. Mrs. Grantham brought a lamp; and Brevard, opening a chest near the book-case, fetched a portfolio of papers, dispatches, plans, reports and data of all kinds.

“Gabriel’s right,” said he. “The time is ripe, now, or will be in a week or so. Nothing can be gained by delaying any longer. Every day adds to their power and may weaken ours. Our organization, for the strike and the attack on the works, is as complete as we can make it. We must come to extreme measures, at once, or world-strangulation will set in, and we shall be eternally too late!”

“Extreme measures, yes,” said Gabriel, while Brevard spread the papers out and sorted them, and Craig drew contemplatively at his pipe. “The masters would have it so. Our one-time academic discussion about ways and means has become absurd, in the face of plutocratic savagery. We’re up against facts, now, not theories. God knows it’s against the dictates of my heart to do what must be done; but it’s that or stand back and see the world be murdered, together with our own selves! And in a case of self-defense, no measures are unjustifiable.

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“Whatever happens our hands are clean. The plutocrats are the attacking force. They have chosen, and must take the consequences; they have sown, and must reap. One by one, they have limited and withdrawn every political right. They have taken away free speech and free assemblage, free press and universal suffrage. They have limited the right to vote, by property qualifications that have deprived the proletariat of every chance to make their will felt. They have put through this National Censorship outrage and—still worse—the National Mounted Police Bill, making Cossack rule supreme in the United States of America, as they have made it in the United States of Europe.

“Before they elected that tool of tools, President Supple, in 1920, on the Anti-Socialist ticket, we still had some constitutional rights left—a few. But now, all are gone. With the absorption and annexation of Canada, Mexico and Central America, slavery full and absolute settled down upon us. The unions simply crumbled to dust as you know, in face of all those millions of Mexican peons swamping the labor-market with starvation-wage labor. Then, as we all remember, came the terrible series of strikes in 1921 and 1922, and the massacres at Hopedale and Boulder, at Los Angeles and Pittsburg, and, worst of all, Gary. That finished what few rights were left, that killing did. And then came the army of spies, and the proscriptions, and the electrocution of those hundred and eleven editors, speakers and organizers—why bring up all these things that we all know so well? *We* were willing to play the game fair and square, and *they* refused. Say that, and you say all.

“No need to dwell on details, comrades. The Air Trust has had its will with the world, so far. It has crushed all opposition as relentlessly as the car of Juggernaut used to crush its blind, fanatical devotees. True, our Party still exists and has some standing and some representatives; but we all know what *power* it has—in the open! Not *that* much!” And he snapped his fingers in the air.

“In the open, none!” said Craig, blowing a cloud of smoke. “I admit that, Gabriel. But, underground—ah!”

“Underground,” Gabriel took up the word, “forces are now at work that can shatter the whole infernal slavery to dust! This way of working is not our choice; it is theirs. They would have it so—now let them take their medicine!”

“Yes, yes,” eagerly exclaimed Catherine, her face flushed and intense. “I’m with you, Gabriel. To work!”

“To work, yes,” put in Craig, “but with system, order and method. My experience in Congress has taught me some valuable lessons. The universal, all-embracing Trust made marionettes of us, every one. Our strength was, to them, no more than that of a mouse to a lion. Their system is perfect, their lines of supply and communication are without a flaw. The Prussian army machine of other days was but a bungling experiment by comparison

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with the efficiency of this new mechanism. I tell you, Gabriel, we've got to give these tyrants credit for being infernally efficient tyrants! All that science has been able to devise, or press and church and university teach, or political subservience make possible, is theirs. And back of that, military power, and the courts and the prisons and the electric chair! And back of all *those*, the power to choke the whole world to submission, in a week!"

Gabriel thought, a moment, before replying. Then said he:

"I know it, Craig. All the more reason why we must hit them at once, and hit hard! These reports here," and he gestured at the papers that Brevard had spread out under the lamp-light, "prove that, at the proper signal, every chance indicates that we can paralyze transportation—the keynote of the whole situation.

"True, the government—that is to say, the Air Trust, and *that* is to say, Flint and Waldron—can keep men in every engine-cab in the country. They can keep them at every switch and junction. But this isn't France, remember, nor is it any small, compact European country. Conditions are wholly different here. Everywhere, vast stretches of track exist. No power on earth—not even Flint and Waldron's—can guard all those hundreds of thousands of miles. And so I tell you, taking our data simply from these reports and not counting on any more organized strength than they show, we have today got the means of cutting and crippling, for a week at least, the movements of troops to Niagara. And that, just that, is all we need!"

A little silence. Then said Catherine:

"You mean, Gabriel, that if we can keep the troops back for a little while, and annihilate the Air Trust plant itself, the great revolution will follow?"

He nodded, with a smouldering fire in his eyes.

"Yes," said he. "If we can loosen the grip of this monster for only forty-eight hours, and flash the news to this bleeding, sweating, choking land that the grip *is* loosened—after that we need do no more. *Apres nous, le deluge*; only not now in the sense of wreck and ruin, but meaning that this deluge shall forever wash away the tyranny and crime of Capitalism! Forever and a day, to leave us free once more, free men and women, standing erect and facing God's own sunlight, our heritage and birthplace in this world!"

Catherine made no answer, but her hand clasped his. The light on her magnificent masses of copper-golden hair, braided about her head, enhanced her beauty. And so for a moment, the little group sat there about the table—the group on which now so

infinitely much depended; and the lamp-glow shone upon their precious plans, reports and diagrams.

Into each others' eyes they looked, and knew the moment of final conflict was drawn very near, at last. The moment which, in failure or success, should for long years, for decades, for centuries perhaps, determine whether the world and all its teeming millions were to be slave or free.

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They spoke no word and took no oath of life-and-death fidelity, those men and women who now had been entrusted with the fate of the world. But in their eyes one read unshakable devotion to the Cause of Man, unswerving loyalty to the Great Ideal, and a calm, holy faith that would make light of death itself, could death but pave the way to victory!

CHAPTER XXX.

TRAPPED!

Brevard was the first to speak. “Gabriel,” said he, “we have agreed that you must be the leader in this whole affair. The actual, personal leader. To begin with, you’re younger and physically stronger than any of us men. Your executive ability is, without any question whatever, far and away ahead of ours—for we are more in the analytical, compiling, organizing, preparing line. To cap all, your personality carries more, far more, with the mass of the comrades than any of ours. Your career, in the past, your conflict with Flint and Waldron, and your long imprisonment, have given you the necessary following. You, and you alone, must issue the final call, lead the last, supreme attack, and carry the old flag, the Crimson Banner of Brotherhood, to the topmost battlement of an annihilated Capitalism!”

Gabriel demurred, but they overruled him. So, presently, he consented; and pledged his life to it; and thrilled with pride and joy at thought of what now lay written in the Book of Fate, for him to read.

Catherine’s eyes shone with a strange light, as she looked upon him there, so modest yet so strong. And he, smiling a little as his gaze met hers, foresaw other things than war, and was glad. His heart sang within him, that memorable and wondrous night, up there in the hiding-place among the Great Smokies—there with Catherine and the other comrades—there planning the last great blow to strike away forever the shackles from the bleeding limbs of all the human race!

But serious and urgent things were to be thought of, and at once, for on the morrow Brevard was going down, disguised, to Louisville, in one of the two monoplanes, to attend a final secret meeting of the North-middle Section Committee. From this he would proceed to the refuge near Port Colborne, Ontario.

“Let us make that our meeting-place, one week from tonight,” said Gabriel, “in case anything happens. Should we be detected, or should any accident befall, we must have some time and place to rally by. Is my suggestion taken?”

They all agreed, after some discussion.

“But,” added Mrs. Grantham, “let’s hope we’re still secure here, for a while. It doesn’t seem possible they could find us *here*, in this broad mountain wilderness!”

Brevard, meanwhile, was spreading out diagrams and plans.

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“The plant at Niagara,” said he. “Gabriel, study this, now, as you never yet have studied anything! For on your intimate knowledge of these plans—which, by the way, have been obtained only at the cost of eight lives of our comrades, and through adventures which alone would make a wonderful book—depends everything. With all communications cut, and troops kept away, and our own people storming the works, you will yet fail, Gabriel, unless you know every building, every courtyard, wall and passage, every door and window, almost, I might say. For the place is more than a manufacturing plant. It’s a fortress, a city in itself, a wonderful, gigantic center to the whole web of world-domination!

“So now, to the plans!”

For hours, while Gabriel took notes and listened keenly, asked questions and made minute memoranda, Brevard explained the situation at the great Air Trust works. The others looked on, listened, and from time to time made suggestions; but for the most part they kept silent, unwilling to disturb this most important work.

Carefully and with painstaking accuracy he showed Gabriel how the plant now embraced more than two square miles of territory around the Falls, all guarded by tremendous barricades mounting machine-guns and search-lights. On both sides of the river this huge monster had squatted, effectually shutting out all sight of the Falls and depriving the people of their birthright of beauty, at the same time that it had harnessed the vast waterpower to the task of enslaving the world.

“From the Grand Trunk steel arch bridge up to and including the former plant of the Niagara Falls Power Company,” said Brevard, “you see the plant extends. And, on the Canadian side—or what was the Canadian, before ‘we’ absorbed Canada—it stretches from the Ontario Power Company’s works to those of the Toronto-Niagara Power Company, including both. In addition to having absorbed these, it has taken over the Niagara Falls Hydraulic Power and Manufacturing Company, the Canadian Power Company and half a dozen others, and has, as you see, established its central offices and plant on Goat Island.

“Here Flint and Waldron have what may be called a citadel within a citadel—twelve acres of administration buildings, laboratories (in charge of your old friend Herzog, by the way!) and experimental works, including also the big steel chambers, vacuum-lined, where they are already storing their liquid oxygen to be turned into their pipe-lines and tank-cars. This Goat Island central plant will be the real kernel in the nut, Gabriel. Once *that* is gone, you’ll have ripped the heart out of the beast, smashed the vital ganglia, and given the world the respite, the breathing-space it must have, to free itself!”

“And if I don’t?” asked Gabriel. “If anything happens to upset our blockading tactics, or if our attacking forces are defeated or our aeroplanes shot down, what then?”

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“Then,” said Brevard, slowly, “then the world had better die than survive under the abominable slavery now impending. Already the pipe-lines have been laid to Buffalo, Cleveland, Albany and Scranton. Already they’re under way to New York City itself, and to Cincinnati. Already other plants have been projected for Chicago, Denver, San Francisco and New Orleans, to say nothing of half a dozen in the Old World. At this present moment, as we all sit here in this quiet room on this remote mountain-slope, the world’s air is being cornered! All the atmospheric nitrogen is planned for, by Flint and Waldron, to pass under their control—and with it, every crop that grows. All the oxygen will follow. They’re already having their domestic-service apparatus manufactured—-their cold-pipe radiators, meters, evaporators and respirators. I tell you, comrades, this thing is close upon us, not as a theory, now, but as a terrible, an inconceivably ghastly reality!

“Even as we talk this thing over, those devils in human form are at work impoverishing the atmosphere, the very basis of all life. My oxymeter, today, showed a diminution of .047 per cent. in the amount of free oxygen in the air right on this mountain. And their plant is hardly running yet! Wait till they get it under full swing—wait till their pipe-lines and tanks and instruments and all their vast, infernal apparatus of exploitation and enslavement are in operation! Even in a week from now, or less, by the time you issue the call, Gabriel, you may see wretches gasping in vain for breath, in some dark alley of Niagara where the air is being drained!”

“Oh, devilish and infernal plot against the world!” said Gabriel, bitterly. “Yet in essence, after all, no different from the system of ten years ago, which kept food and shelter, light and fuel, under lock and key—and made the dollar the only key to fit the lock! Yet this seems worse, somehow; and though I die for it, my last supreme blow shall be against such unutterable, such murderous villainy! So then, comrades—”

He paused, suddenly, as Kate laid a hand on his arm.

“Hark! What’s that?” she whispered.

Outside, somewhere, a sound had made itself heard. Then on the porch, a loose board creaked.

Gabriel sprang to his feet. The others stood up and faced the door.

“In heaven’s name, what’s that outside?” demanded Craig.

On the instant, a heavy foot crashed through the panels of their door. The door, burst open, flew back.

In the aperture, stood a man, in aviator's dress, with another dimly visible behind him. Both these men held long, blue-nosed, oxygen-bullet-shooting revolvers levelled at the little group around the table.

"My God! Air Trust spies!" cried Grantham, pale as death.

"Hands up, you!" shouted the man in the doorway, with a wild triumph in his voice. "You're caught, all of you! Not a move, you —— —— ——! Hands up!"

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CHAPTER XXXI.

ESCAPE!

Quick as thought, at sound of the imperative summons and sight of the levelled weapons, Gabriel swept up most of the papers and crammed them into the breast of his loose flannel shirt, then dashed the lamp to the floor, extinguishing it. The room grew dark, for now the fire had burned down to hardly more than glowing coals.

There was no panic; the men did not curse, neither did the women scream. As though the tactic had already been agreed on, Craig tipped the table up, making a kind of barricade; and over it Grantham's revolver, snatched from his belt, spat viciously.

It all happened in a moment.

The foremost spy grunted, coughed and plunged forward. As he fell, he fired his terrible weapon.

The bullet—a small, thin metal shell, filled with a secret chemical and liquid oxygen—-went wild. It struck the wall, some feet to the left of the fireplace, and instantly the wood burst into vivid flame. Flesh would crisp to nothing, solid stone would crumble, metal would gutter and run down, under that awful incandescence.

Again Grantham's revolver barked, while Bevard tugged at his own, which had unaccountably got stuck in its holster. But this second shot missed. And even as Grantham's bullet snicked a long splinter from the door-jamb, the second spy fired.

Brevard's choking cry died as the gushing flame enveloped him. He staggered, flung up both arms and fell stone dead, the life seared clean out of him, as a lamp sears a moth.

Gasping, blinded, the others scattered; and for the third time—while the room now glowed with this unquenchable blossoming of flame—Grantham shot.

The spy's body burst into a sheaf of fire. Up past the lintel streamed the burning swirl. Mute and annihilated, his charred body dropped beside that of his mate.

The total time from challenge to complete victory had not exceeded ten seconds.

"I exploded some of his cartridges!" choked Grantham. shielding his wife from the glare, while Gabriel protected Catherine.

"His—his cartridge belt!" gasped Craig.

"Yes! And now, out—out of here!"

“Brevard? We must save his body!” cried Gabriel, pointing.

“Impossible!” shouted Grantham. “That hellish compound will burn for hours! And in three minutes this whole place will be a roaring furnace! Out of here—out—away! We must save the hangar, at all hazards!”

Against their will, but absolutely unable to approach the now wildly-roaring fire on the floor that marked the spot where Brevard had fallen in the Battle with Plutocracy, the comrades quickly retreated.

Raging fire now hemmed them on three sides. Their only avenue of escape was through the eastern windows, eight or ten feet above the ground. Hastily snatching up such of the plans and papers as he had not already secured—and some of these already were beginning to smoke and turn brown, in the infernal heat—Gabriel shielded Catherine’s retreat. The others followed.

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Craig and Grantham first jumped from the windows, then caught Mrs. Grantham and Catherine as Gabriel helped them to escape. He himself was the last to leave the room, now a raging furnace. Together they all ran from the building, and none too soon; for suddenly the roof collapsed, a tremendous burst of crackling flames and sheaved sparks leaped high above the tree-tops, and the walls came crashing in.

In the welter of incandescence, where now only the stone chimney stood—and this, too, was already cracking and swaying—Brevard had found his tomb, together with the two Air Trust spies. All that pleasant, necessary place was now a mass of white-hot ruin; all those books and pictures now had turned to ash.

The five remaining comrades paused by the hangar, and looked mournfully back at the still-leaping volcano of destruction.

“Poor Brevard! Poor old chap!” said Craig. He peered at the women. Neither one was crying—they were not that type—but both were pale.

“I don’t feel that way,” said Gabriel. “Brevard is not to be pitied. He’s to be envied! He died in the noblest war we can conceive—the war for the human race! And his last act was to take part in a battle that stamped out two vipers, Air Trust spies, who would have joyed to burn us all alive!”

[Illustration: The spy’s body burst into a sheaf of fire.]

“Thank God, I got the Hell-hounds!” muttered Craig. “Two less of Slade’s infamous army, anyhow.” Though Gabriel knew it not, the first one to fall was the same who had battled with him in the trap at Rochester, the same who had trailed him when he, Gabriel, had left the Federal pen. So one score, at least, was settled.

“They’re gone, anyhow,” said Gabriel, “and five of us still live—and I’ve still got the plans and all. Moreover, the monoplanes are safe. The quicker we get away from here, now, the better. Away, and to our last remaining refuge near Port Colborne, on the shores of Lake Erie. Other Air Trust forces may be here, before morning. We must get away!”

A frightful shock awaited them when, entering the hangar—eager now to escape at once from the scene of the tragedy—they beheld their aeroplanes.

By the ruddy light which shone in through the wide doors, from the fire, they saw long strips and tatters of canvas hanging from the ’planes.

“Smashed! Broken! Wrecked!” cried Gabriel, starting back aghast.

The others stared. Only too true; the monoplanes were practically destroyed. Not only had the spies, before attacking the refuge, slashed the ’planes to rags, but they had

also partly dismantled the motors. Bits of machinery lay scattered on the floor of the hangar.

Stunned and unable to gather speech or coherent thought, the five Socialists stood staring. Then, after a moment, Craig made shift to exclaim bitterly:

“A good job, all right! The curs must have got in at the window, and spent an hour in this work. Whatever happened, they didn’t intend we should have any means of retreat—for of course it’s out of the question for anybody to get away from here through the forest over the ridges and down the cliffs!”

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“They meant to trap us, this way, that’s certain,” added Gabriel. “There surely will be others of the same breed, here before morning. They must not find us here!”

“But Gabriel, how shall we escape?” asked Catherine, her face illumined by the leaping flames of the bungalow.

“How! In their own machine! The machine that Slade and the Air Trust secret-service gave them, to come here and catch or murder us!”

“By the Almighty! So we will!” cried Grantham. “Come on, let’s find it!”

The little party hurried off toward the landing-ground, a cleared and levelled space further up the mountainside. The light of the burning bungalow helped show them their path; and Craig had also taken an electric flash-lamp from the hangar. With this he led the way.

“Right! There it is!” suddenly exclaimed Gabriel, pointing. Craig painted a brush of electric light over the vague outlines of the Air Trust machine, a steel racer of the latest kind.

“A Floriot biplane,” said he. “Will hold two and a passenger. Familiar type. I guess all of us, here, can operate it.”

They all—even the women—could. For you must understand that after the Great Massacres had foreshown the only possible trend the Movement could take, practically all the leaders in the work had studied aeronautics, also chemistry, as most essential branches of knowledge in the inevitable war.

“Two, and a passenger,” repeated Gabriel, as though echoing Craig’s words. “Who goes first?”

“You!” said Grantham. “You and Catherine, with Craig to bring the machine back. You’re needed, now, at the front—imperatively needed. Freda and I,” gesturing at his wife, “will hold the fort, here—will keep watch over our dead, over poor old Brevard, the first to fall in this great, final battle!”

A spirited argument followed. Gabriel insisted on being left for the second trip. A compromise was made by having him get the two women out of danger, at once, leaving Craig and Grantham on the mountain.

“I’ll send Hazen or Keyes back with the ’plane, for you,” said he, as he climbed into the driving seat, after the passengers had been stowed. “That will be tomorrow night. Of course, we daren’t fly by day. And mind,” he added, adjusting his spark and throttle, “mind you meet me with this very same machine, safe and sound, at the Lake Erie refuge!”

“Why this same machine?” inquired Craig.

“Why? Because I intend to use this, and no other, in the final attack. Could poetic justice be finer than that the Air Trust works be destroyed with the help of one of their own ’planes?”

No more was said, save brief good-byes. Those were times when demonstrativeness, whether in life or death, was at a discount. A hand-clasp and a few last instructions as to the time and place of meeting, sufficed. Then Gabriel pressed the button of the self-starter and opened the throttle.

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With a sudden gusty chatter, the engine caught. A great wind sprang up, from the roaring, whirling blades. The Floriot rolled easily forward, speeded up, and gathered headway.

Gabriel suddenly rotated the rising-plane. The great gull soared, careened and took the air with majestic power. The watchers on the mountain-side saw its hooded lights, that glowed upon its compass and barometric-gauge, slowly spiralling upward, ever upward, as Gabriel climbed with his two passengers.

Then the lights sped forward, northward, in a long tangent, and, as they swiftly diminished to mere specks, the echo of a farewell hail drifted downward from the black and star-dusted emptiness above.

Craig turned to Grantham, when the last gleam of light had faded in a swift trajectory.

“God grant they reach the last remaining refuge safely!” said he, with deep emotion. “And may their flight be quick and sure! For the fate of the world, its hope and its salvation from infinite enslavement, are whirling through the trackless wastes of air, to-night!”

CHAPTER XXXII.

OMINOUS DEVELOPMENTS.

The first intimation that Flint and Waldron had of any opposition to their plans, of any revolt, of any danger, was at quarter past three on the afternoon of October 8th, 1925. All that afternoon, busy with their final plans for the immediate extension of their system, they had been going over certain data with Herzog, receiving reports from branch managers and conferring with the Congressional committee that—together with Dillon Slade, their secret-service tool, now also President Supple’s private secretary—they had peremptorily summoned from Washington to receive instructions.

In the more than four years that had passed since they had put Gabriel behind bars—-years fruitful in strikes and lockouts, in prostitutions of justice, in sluggings and crude massacres—both men had altered notably.

Though the National Censorship now no longer permitted any cartooning of a “seditious” nature, *i.e.*, representing any of the Air Trust notables, old Flint’s features tempted the artist’s pencil more than ever. Save for a little white fringe of hair at the back of his head, he had become almost bald, thus adding greatly to his strong suggestion of a vulture. His face was now more yellow and shrunken than ever, due to a rather heavier consumption of his favorite drug, morphine; his nose had hooked more strongly, and his one gold tooth of other days now had two more to bear it company. His eyes, too, behind his thick pince-nez, had grown more shifty, cold and cruelly

calculating. If it be possible to conceive a fox, a buzzard and a jackal merged in one, old Isaac Flint today represented that unnatural and hideous hybrid.

Now, as he stood facing “Tiger” Waldron, in the inner and sancrosanct office of the Air Trust plant at Niagara—the office that even the President of these United States approached with deference and due humility—the snarl on his face revealed the beast-soul of the man.

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“Damnation!” he was saying, as he shook a newly-received aerogram at his partner. “What’s this, I’d like to know? What does this mean? All telegraphic communication west of Chicago has suddenly stopped, and from half a dozen points in the Southern States news is coming in that railway service is being interrupted! See here, Waldron, this won’t do! Your part of the business has always been to carry on the publicity end, the newspaper end, the moulding of public opinion and political thought, *and* the maintenance of free, clear rail and aero communication everywhere, all over the world. But now, all at once, see here?”

Waldron raised red, bleared eyes at his irate partner. He, too, was more the beast than four years ago. No less the tiger, now, but more the pig. High, evil living had done its work on him. An unhealthy purple suffused his heavily-jowled face. Beneath his eyes, sodden bags of flesh hung pendant. His lips, loose and lascivious, now sucked indolently at the costly cigar he was smoking as he sat leaning far back in his desk-chair. And so those two, angry accuser and indifferent accused, faced each other for a moment; while, incessant, dull, mighty, the thunders of the giant cataract mingled with the trembling diapason of the stupendous turbines in the rock-hewn caverns where old Niagara now toiled in fetters, to swell their power and fling gold into their bottomless coffers.

“See here!” Flint repeated angrily, once more shaking the dispatches at his mate. “Even our wireless system, all over the west and southwest, has quit working! And you sit there staring at me like—like—”

“That’ll do, Flint!” the younger man retorted in a rough, hoarse voice. “If there’s any trouble, I’ll find it and repair it. Very well. But I’ll not be talked to in any such way. Damn it, you can’t speak to me Flint, as if I were one of the people! If you own half the earth, I’ll have you understand I own the other half. So go easy, Flint—go damned easy!”

Malevolently he eyed the old man’s beast-like face. The scorn and dislike he had conceived for Flint, years ago, when Flint had failed to win back Catherine to him, had long grown keener and more bitter. Waldron took it as a personal affront that Flint, apparently so worn and feeble, could still hang on to life and brains enough to dominate the enterprise. A thousand times, if once, he had wished Flint well dead and buried and out of the way, so that he, Waldron, could grasp the whole circle of the stupendous Air Trust. This, his supreme ambition, had been constantly curbed by Flint’s survival; and as the months and years had passed, his hate had grown more deep, more ugly, more venomous.

“Why, curse it,” Waldron often thought, “the old dope has taken enough morphine in his lifetime to have killed a hundred ordinary men! And yet he still clings on, and withers, and grows yellow like an old dead leaf that will not drop from the tree! When *will* he

drop? When *will* Father Time pick the despicable antique? My God, is the man immortal?”

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Such being the usual tenor of his thoughts, concerning Flint, small wonder that he took the old man's chiding with an ill grace, and warned him pointedly not to continue it. Now, facing the Billionaire, he fairly stared him out of countenance. An awkward silence followed. Both heard, with relief, a rapping at the office door.

"Come!" snapped Flint.

A clerk appeared, with a yellow envelope in hand.

"Another wireless, sir," said he.

Flint snatched it from him.

"Send Herzog and Slade, at once," he commanded, as he ripped the envelope.

"Well, more trouble?" insolently drawled "Tiger" happy in the paling of the old man's face and the sudden look of apprehension there.

For all answer, Flint handed him the message. Waldron read:

Southern and Gulf States all seemingly cut off from every kind of communication this P.M. Can get no news. Is this according to your orders? If not, can you inform me probable cause? I ask instructions. "K."

Silence, a minute, then Waldron whistled, and began pulling at his thick lower lip, a sure sign of perturbation.

"By the Almighty, Flint" said he. "I—maybe I was wrong just now, to be so confoundedly touchy about—about what you said. This—certainly looks odd, doesn't it? It *can't* be a series of coincidences! There must be something back of it, all. But—but *what*? Rebellion is out of the question, now, and has been for a long time. Revolution? The way we're organized, the very idea's an absurdity! But, if not these, what?"

Flint stared at him with drug-contracted eyes.

"Yes, that's the question," he rapped out. "What can it mean? Ah, perhaps Slade can tell us," he added, as the secret-service man quietly entered through a private door at the rear of the office.

"Tell you what, gentlemen?" asked Slade, smirking and rubbing his hands.

"The meaning of that, and that, and *that*!" snapped old Flint, thrusting the telegrams at the newcomer.

“Hm!” grunted the secret-service man, as he glanced them over. “That’s damned odd! But it’s of no real moment. If—if there’s really any trouble, any outbreak or what not, of course it can’t amount to anything. All you have to do is order the President to call out the troops, and—”

“Yes, I can order him, all right,” snarled Flint, “but in case all our wires are down and all our wireless plants put out of commission, to say nothing of our transport service interrupted, what then? There’s no doubt in *my* mind, Slade, that another upheaval is upon us. The fact that we stamped out the 1918 and 1922 uprisings, and that rivers ran red and city streets were flushed with blood, apparently hasn’t made any impression on the cattle! Damn it all, I say, *can’t* you keep things quiet? *Can’t* you?”

In a very frenzy he paced the office, his face twitching, his bony fingers snapping with the extremity of his agitation. Suddenly he faced Slade.

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“See here, you!” he exclaimed. “This certainly means another uprising. It can’t mean anything else! And you’ve allowed it, you hear? No, no, don’t deny the fact!” he cried, as the detective tried to oppose a word of self-defense. “It’s your fault, at last analysis; and if anything happens, you and the President, Supple, have got to answer to me, personally, do you hear? You’ve got to pay!”

“Pay, and with devilish big interest, too!” growled “Tiger,” fixing his bleared, savage eyes on Slade.

“What did I make that man President for, anyhow?” snarled Flint, “if not to do my bidding and keep things still? Why did I put you in as his private secretary, if not to have you watch him and see that he *did* do my bidding? Why did I have Congress pass all those bills and things, except to give you the weapons and tools to hold the lid on?

“You’ve had a huge army and a conscripted militia given you; and hundreds of wireless plants, and military roads and war-equipment beyond all calculating. You’ve had thousands of spies organized and put under your control. At your suggestion I’ve had all political power taken away from the dogs—and everything done that you’ve asked for—and this, *this* is the kind of work you do!”

Livid with rage, the old Billionaire stood there shaking by his desk, his face a fearful mask of passions and evil lusts for vengeance and power. Slade, recognizing his master, even as President Supple on more than one occasion had been forced in terrible personal interviews to recognize him, said no word; but in the secret-service man’s eyes a brutal gleam flashed its message of hate and loathing. Foul as Slade was, he balked at times, in face of this man’s cruel and naked savagery.

“I tell you,” continued Flint, now having recovered his breath, “I tell you, you’re worse than useless, you and your President, ha! ha!—President Puppet, indeed! Take that great Smoky Mountain clue, for instance! On the rumor that the ring-leaders of the swine were up there, somewhere, in the North Carolina mountains, you sent your two best men. And what’s the latest news? What have you to tell me? *You* know! Other airmen of yours have just reported that nothing can be found but ruins of the Socialist refuge, there—nothing but those, and the half-melted vanadium steel identification-tags of your best scouts! *And* their machine is gone—and with it, the birds we wanted! Then, close on the heels of this, all wires go flat, all wireless breaks down, all rails are interrupted, and—and Hell’s to pay!” Fair in Slade’s face he shook his trembling first.

“Urrh! You devilish, impotent faker! You four-flusher! You toy detective! You and your President, too, aren’t worth the liquid oxygen to blow you to Hades! See here, Slade, you get out on this job, now, and do it damned quick, you understand, or there’ll be *some* shake-up in your office and in the White House, too. When I buy and pay for tools, I insist that the tools work. If they don’t—!”

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He snatched up a pencil from the desk, broke it in half and threw the pieces on the floor.

“Like that!” said he, and stamped on them.

Waldron nodded approval.

“Just like that,” he echoed, “and then some!”

“Go, now!” Flint commanded, pointing at the door. “Inside an hour, I want some reports, and I want them to be satisfactory. If you and Supple can’t get things open again, and start the troops and machine-guns before then, look out! That’s all I’ve got to say. Now, *go*!”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“NOW COMES THE HOUR SUPREME.”

Hardly had the secret-service man taken his leave, slinking away like a whipped cur, yet with an ugly snarl that presaged evil, when Herzog appeared.

“Come here,” said Flint, curtly, heated with his burst of passion.

“Yes, sir,” the scientist replied, approaching. “What is it, sir?”

Still shifty and cringing was he, in presence of the masters; though with the men beneath him, at the vast plant—and now his importance had grown till he controlled more than eight thousand—rumor declared him an intolerable tyrant.

“Tell me, Herzog, what’s the condition of the plant, at this present moment?”

“Just how do you mean, sir?”

“Suppose there were to be trouble, of any kind, how are we fixed for it? How’s the oxygen supply, and—and everything? Good God, man, unlimber! You’re paid to know things and tell ’em. Now, talk.”

Thus adjured, Herzog washed his hands with imaginary soap and in a deprecating voice began:

“Trouble, sir? What trouble could there be? There’s not the faintest sign of any organization among the men. They’re submissive as so many rabbits, sir, and—”

“Damn you, shut up!” roared Flint. “I didn’t summon you to come up here and give me a lecture on labor conditions at the works! The trouble I refer to is possible outside

interference. Maybe some kind of wild-eyed Socialist upheaval, or attack, or what not. In case it comes, what's our condition? Tell me, in a few words, and for God's sake keep to the point! The way you wander, and always have, gives me the creeps!"

Herzog ventured nothing in reply to this outburst, save a conciliatory leer. Then, collecting his thoughts, he began:

"Well, sir, in a general way, our condition is perfect. We've got two regiments of rifle and machine gunmen, half of them equipped with the oxygen bullets. I guarantee that I could have them away from their benches and machines, and on the fortifications, inside of fifteen minutes. Slade's armed guards, 2,500 or so, are all ready, too.

"Then, beside that, there are eight 'planes in the hangars, and plenty of men to take them up. If you wish, sir, I can have others brought in. The aerial-bomb guns are ready. As for the oxygen supply, Tanks F and L are full, K is half filled, and N and Q each have about 6,000 gallons, making a total of—let's see, sir—a total of just about 755,000 gallons."

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“How protected? Have you got those bomb-proof overhead nets on, yet?”

“Not yet, sir. That is, not over all the lines of tanks. We ran short of steel wire, last week, and have only got eight of the tanks under netting. But the work is going on fast, sir, and—”

“Rush it! At all hazards, get nets over the rest of the tanks. If anything happens, through this delay, remember, Herzog, I shall hold you personally responsible, and it will go hard with you!”

“Yes, sir; thank you, sir,” murmured the servile wretch. “Anything else, sir?”

Flint thought a moment, glaring at Herzog with angry eyes, then shook his head in negation.

“Very well, sir,” said Herzog, withdrawing. “I’ll go to work at once. By tomorrow, everything will be safe, I guarantee.”

He closed the door softly—as softly as he had spoken—as softly as he always did everything.

Flint glared at the door.

“The sneaking whelp!” he murmured. “He makes my very flesh crawl. I wish to heaven he weren’t so essential to us; we’d let him go, damned quick!”

“You forget,” put in Tiger, “that he knows too much to be let go, ever. No, he’s a fixture. And now, dismiss him from your mind, and let’s go over those telegrams and radiograms again. If there *is* a new Socialist revolt under way—and I admit it certainly begins to look like it—we’ve got to understand the situation. Slade will have some more reports for us, in an hour or so. Till then, these must suffice.”

Flint, curbing his agitation, sat down at the big table and turned on the vacuum-glow light, for the October afternoon was foggy—a fog that mingled with the spray of the vast Falls and hung heavy over the world—and already daylight was beginning to fail.

“Fools!” he muttered to himself. “Fools, to think they can rebel against *us*! Ants would have just as much show of success, charging elephants, as *they* have against the Air Trust! By tomorrow they’ll be wiped out, smeared out, shattered and annihilated, whoever and wherever they are. By tomorrow, at the latest. Again I say, blind, suicidal fools!”

“Right you are,” assented Waldron, drawing up his chair. “They don’t seem to realize, even yet, that we own the whole round earth and all that is in it. They don’t understand that their rebelling is like a tribe of naked savages going against a modern army with

explosive bullets. Ah, well, let them learn, let them learn! It takes a whip to teach a cur. Let them feel the lash, and learn!...”

At this same hour, in the last retreat, near Port Colborne, in the State of Ontario—once a province of Canada—half a dozen grim and determined men were gathered together. We already recognize Craig, Grantham and Gabriel. The other three, like them, all wore the Socialist button and the little tab of red ribbon that marked them as members of the Fighting Sections.

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“Tonight,” Gabriel was saying, as he stood there in the gathering dusk—they dared not show a light, even behind the drawn curtains of their refuge—“tonight, comrades, the final die is cast. Everything is ready, or as nearly ready as we shall ever be able to make it. Our reports already show that every line of communication has been broken by one swift, sharp blow. True, in a few hours all these avenues can be opened up again. By morning, the Niagara works will be in receipt of messages; trains will be running; the troop-planes will be carrying their hordes at the command of Flint. By morning, yes. But in the meantime—”

He spread his fingers, upward, with an expressive gesture.

“By morning,” Craig mumbled, “what will there be left to protect?”

A little silence followed. Each was busy with his own thoughts.

All at once, one of the three newcomers spoke—a tall, light-haired fellow, he seemed, in that dim light, with a strong Southern accent.

“Pardon me for asking, Gabriel,” said he, removing a pipe from his mouth, “or for discussing details familiar to you all. But, coming as I *have* come direct from the New Orleans refuge—they blew it up, last week, you know—of course I haven’t got things as clearly in mind yet, as you-all have. Now, as I understand it, while we manoeuvre over the plant, blow up the barricades and, if possible, ‘get’ the oxygen-tanks, our men on the ground will pour in through the gaps and storm the place, under the command of Edward Hargreaves. Is that the idea?”

“Exactly, Comrade Marion,” answered Gabriel. “You’ve hit it to a T.”

Craig laughed grimly, as he drew at his pipe.

“Just as we’re going to hit those big tanks!” said he. “It’s tonight or never, comrades. They’re putting steel nets over them, already. By tomorrow the whole place will be protected by huge grill-work fully a hundred feet above the tops of the tanks. Oh, they seem to have thought of everything, those plutes! But they’ll be just a shade too late, this time; just a shade too late!”

Another silence, broken again by the tall Southerner.

“Just let me get this thing quite clear,” said he. “We’re to start at 5:30, you say, walk past the Welland Canal Feeder out to the Monck Aviation Grounds, and find everything ready there?”

“Correct,” said Gabriel. “All six of us. That’s our part of the program. Comrades you don’t know, out there—comrades in the employ of the Air Trust itself—will have six machines ready. One of them will be the very machine that they tried to get us with, in

the Great Smokies! So you see, we're going to use the Air Trust equipment, their field and even their own telenite, to put them out of business forever and to free the world!"

"Poetic justice, all right enough!" laughed Marion. "At the same time that we're attacking from an elevation of perhaps three thousand feet, the lateral attack will be delivered. About how many men do you count, on, for that?"

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“Well,” judged Gabriel, “within a ten-mile radius of the plant, at least a hundred thousand men are waiting, this very instant, with every nerve keyed up to fighting tension. Scattered in a vast variety of ingenious and cleverly-devised hiding places, with their chlorine grenades and their revolvers shooting little hydrocyanic acid gas bullets, they’re waiting the signal—a rocket in mid-heaven.”

“Hydrocyanic acid gas!” exclaimed Marion, forgetting to smoke. “Why, one whiff of that is death!”

“It is,” agreed Gabriel. “Remember, this is a war of extermination. It’s a case of *them* or *us*! And if we’re worsted, the whole world loses; while if they are, then liberty is born! That’s why this gas is justifiable. They’ll try to use oxygen-bullets on us, never fear. But where they can kill ten, with those, we can annihilate a hundred with our kind. Swine, they have called us, and fools and apes. Well, we shall see, we shall see, when it comes to an out-and-out fight between Plutocrat and Proletarian, who is the better man!”

Again came silence. And this time it was Grantham who broke it.

“Comrades,” said he, “after you’ve seen as many Socialists shot down as *I* have—shot down and burned, as Brevard was—you’ll lose any lingering ideas of civilized warfare you may still retain. They hunt us like beasts, prison us in foul traps, ride us down, crush us, break and tear us, and burn us alive, because we struggle to be free men and women, not slaves. Now that our hour has struck, now that their lines of communication and defense are breached, and they—though they still don’t fully understand it—are penned there in their heaven-offending, monstrous, horrible plant at the Falls, no true man can hesitate to smash them down with no more compunction than as though they were so many rattlesnakes or scorpions!

“This isn’t 1915, when political and civil rights still existed, and we weren’t hunted outlaws. This is 1925, and conditions are all different. It’s war, war, war to the death, now; and if war is Hell, then *they* are going to get Hell this time, not we.”

Nobody spoke, for a little while; but Marion and Craig smoked contemplatively, and the others sat there in the dusk, sunk in thought.

All at once a door opened, and the vague form of a woman became visible.

“Comrades, you must go,” said she. “It’s nearly half past five. By the time you’ve got everything in readiness, you’ll have no time to lose.”

“Right, Catherine,” answered Gabriel. “Come, comrades! Up and at it!”

Ten minutes later they all issued forth into the soft gloom. All were in aviator’s dress, and each carried a parcel by a handle held with stout straps. Had you seen them, you

would have noticed they took particular pains not to jar or shake these parcels, or approach unduly near each other.

At the door of the refuge, Catherine said good-bye to each, and added some brave word of cheer. Her farewell to Gabriel was longer than to the others; and for a moment their hands met and clung.

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“Go,” she whispered, “go, and God bless you! Go even though it be to death! Their airmen will take toll of some of the attackers, Gabriel. Not all the Comrades will return. Oh, may *you*—may *you*!”

“What is written on the Book of Fate, will be,” he answered. “Our petty hopes and fears are nothing, Catherine. If death awaits me, it will be sweet; for it will come, tonight, in the supreme service of the human race! Good-bye!”

With a sudden motion, the girl took his face between her hands, and kissed his forehead. For all her courage and strength, he sensed her heart wildly beating and he felt her tears.

“Good-bye, Gabriel,” she breathed. “Would I might go with you! Would that my duty did not hold me here! Good-bye!”

Then he was gone, gone with the others, into the thickening obscurity of the fog-shrouded evening. Now Catherine stood there alone, head bowed and wet face hidden in both hands.

As the little fighting band disappeared, back to the girl drifted a few words of song, soft-hummed through the dusk—the deathless chorus of the International:

> “Now comes the hour supreme!
> To arms, each in his place!
> The new dawn’s International
> Shall be the human race!...”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ATTACK.

“Halt! Who goes there?”

The challenge rang sharply on the night air, outside a small gate in the barricade of the Monck Aviation Grounds.

“Liberty!” answered Gabriel, pausing as he gave the password.

“All right, come on,” said a vague figure at the gate. The little group approached. The gate opened. Silently they entered the enclosure.

Another man stepped from a hangar. In his hand he held an electric flash, which he threw upon the newcomers, one by one.

“Right!” he commented, and took Gabriel by the hand. “This way!”

Ten minutes later, all of them were in the air, save only Gabriel, who insisted on staying till his entire squad had made a clean getaway. Then he too rose; and now in a long, swift line, the fighting squadron straightened away to north-eastward, on the twenty-mile run to Niagara.

The night was foggy, chill and dark. All the aviators had instructions to fly not less than 2,500 feet high, to keep a careful lookout lest they collide, and to steer by the lights of the great Air Trust plant. For, misty though the heavens were, still Gabriel could see the dim glow of the tremendous aerial search-lights dominating Goat Island—lights of 5,000,000 candle-power, maintained by current from the Falls, incessantly sweeping the sky on the lookout for just such perils as now, indeed, were drawing near.

Momently, as he flew, Gabriel perceived these huge lights growing brighter, through the mist, and apprehension won upon him.

“Incredibly strong!” he muttered to himself, as he glanced from his barometer to the shining fog ahead. “Even though the mist will be thicker over the Falls than anywhere else, there’s a good possibility they may pierce it and pick us up—and *then*, look out for their ’planes and swift, fighting dirigibles!”

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He rotated the rising-plane, and now soared to 2,800 feet. Below and on either side of him, nothing but tenuous fog. Ahead, the swiftly-approaching fan of radiance, white, dazzling, beautiful, that seemed to gush from earth so far below and to the eastward. Already the thunders of the Falls were audible.

“Where are the others?” Gabriel wondered, his thoughts seeming to hum and roar in his head, in harmony with the shuddering diapason of the muffler-deadened exhaust. “No way of telling, now. Each man for himself—and each to do his best!”

And then his thoughts reverted to Catherine; and round his heart a sudden yearning seemed to strengthen his stern, indomitable resolve—“Victory or death!”

But now there was scant time for thought. The moment of action was already close at hand. Far below there, hidden by night and dark and mist, Gabriel knew a hundred thousand comrades, of the Fighting Sections, were lying hidden, waiting for the signal to advance.

“And it’s time, now!” he said aloud, thrilled by a wondrous sense of vast responsibility—-a sense that on this moment hung the fate of the world. “It’s time for the signal. Now then, up and at them!”

Taking the rocket—a powerful affair, capable of casting an intense, calcium light—he touched the fuse to a bit of smouldering punk fastened in a metal cup at his right hand. Then, as it flared, he launched the rocket far into the void.

Below, came a quick spurt of radiance, in a long, vivid streak that shot away with incredible rapidity. Gabriel followed it a moment, with his gaze, then smiled.

“The Rubicon is crossed,” said he. “The gates of the Temple of Janus are open wide—-and now comes War!”

He rose again, skimming to a still higher altitude as the glare of the great Works drew closer and closer underneath. The wind roared in his ears, louder than the whirling propellers. The whole fabric of the aeroplane quivered as it climbed, up, up above the rushing, bellowing cataract.

“Where are the others?” thought he, and reached for a thanatos projectile, in the rack near the metal cup where the punk still glowered.

All at once, a glare of light burst upward through the white-glowing mist; and the ’plane reeled with the air-wave, as now a thunderous concussion boomed across the empty spaces of the sky.

At the same moment, a faint, ripping noise mounted to Gabriel—a sound for all the world like the tearing of stout canvas. Then followed a chattering racket, something like

distant mowing-machines at work; and now all blent to a steady, determined uproar. Gabriel almost thought to hear, as he launched his own projectile, far sounds as of the shouts and cries of men; but of this he could not make sure.

“They’re at it, anyhow!” he exulted. “At it, at last! By the way our men have launched the attack, the first explosion must have breached a wall! God! What wouldn’t I give to be down there, in the thick of it, rather than here! I—”

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Crash!

Again a spouting geyser of light and uproar burst into mid-air.

“That was *my* thanatos speaking!” cried Gabriel. “Now for another!”

Before he could drop it, as he circled round and round, directly over the great, flailing beams of the Air Trust search-lights, a third detonation shattered the heavens, nearly unseating him. Up sprang the roar, with wonderful intensity, reflected from the earth as from a giant sounding-board. And Gabriel noted, with keen satisfaction, that one of the huge light-beams had gone dark.

“Put out *one* of them, anyway, so far!” thought he, and swung again to westward, and once more dropped a messenger of death to tyranny.

Now the bombardment became general. Trust aerial-gun projectiles began bursting all about. Every second or two, terrible concussions leaped toward the zenith; and the earth, hidden somewhere down there below the fog-blanket, seemed flaming upward like a huge volcano. One by one the search-lights, whipping the sky, went black; and now the glow of them was fast diminishing, only to be replaced by a ruddier and more intermittent glare.

“The plant’s burning, at last,” thought Gabriel. “Heaven grant the fire may spread to the oxygen-tanks! If we can only get *those*—!”

Again he launched a projectile, and again he circled over the doomed plant.

A swift black shape swooped by him. He had just time to exchange a yell of warning, when it was gone. The near peril gripped his heart, but did not shake it.

“Close call!” said he.

If that machine and his had met, good-bye forever! But after all, the danger of collision in mid-air, or of being struck by a projectile from some other machine, above, was no greater than his comrades on the ground were facing. Not so great, perhaps. Many a one would meet his death from the aerial attack. In a war like this, a thousand perils threatened. Gabriel only hoped that Hargreaves, down below there, could hold them back, away, till the walls should have been destroyed.

Circling, ever circling, now hearing some echoes of the earth-battle, some grenade-volleys and rapid-fire clattering, now deafened and all but blinded by the vast, up-belching explosions of the thanatos projectiles, Gabriel flew among the drifting mists and vapors. Still was he guided by one or two search-lights; but most of these were gone, now. Yet the glare of the conflagration, below, was luridly shuddering through the fog, painting it all a dull and awful red.

Red! Suddenly words came into Gabriel's mind—the words of his own poem:

> ... Red as blood, red as blood! The blood of the shattered miner,
> Blood of the boy in the rifle pits, blood of the coughing child-slave,
> Blood of the mangled trainman, blood that the Carpenter shed!

"For your sake! For the world's sake, this!" he cried, and hurled another thanatos. "If ever war of liberation was holy, this is that war!"

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Suddenly, through all the turmoil of shattering explosions, tossing air-currents and drifting, acrid smoke, he became conscious of a sudden, swift-flying pursuer.

By the light of the burning Plant, down there somewhere in the vapors of the thunderous Falls, he saw a hawk-like ’plane that swooped toward him with incredible velocity, savage and lean and black.

Off to the right, a sudden spattering of shots in mid-air told him the battle in the sky was likewise being engaged. He saw vague, veiled explosions, there, then a swift, falling trail of flame. A pang shot through his heart. Had one of his companions fallen and been dashed to death? He could not tell—he had no time to wonder, even, for already the attacker was upon him, the swift Air Trust *epervier,* one of the dreaded air-fleet of the world-monopoly!

Gabriel had just time to swerve from the attack, and swoop aloft—dropping his next to last projectile as he did so—when the whirling shape zoomed past, swung round and once more charged. He saw, vaguely, two men sat in it. One was the pilot, a “Gray” or Cosmos mercenary. The other—could it be? Yes, there was no mistaking! The other was Slade himself, commander of the hireling army of Plutocracy!

Out from the attacking ’plane jetted sadden spurts of fire. Gabriel heard the zip-zip-zip of bullets; heard a ripping tear, as one of his canvas wings was punctured—God help him, had that explosive bullet struck a wire or a stay!

Then, maddened to despair; and burning with fierce rage against this monster of the upper air that now was hurling death at him, he once more “banked,” brought his machine sharp round, and charged, full drive, at the attacker!

This tactic for a second must have disconcerted the Air Trust mercenaries. Gabriel’s speed was terrific. With stupefying suddenness, the *epervier* loomed up ahead of him.

“Now!” he shouted. “Take this, from me!”

Half rising from his seat, he hurled his last remaining projectile full at Slade, then wrenched his own ’plane off sharply to the left.

A thunderous concussion and a dazzling burst of light told him his chance shot had been effective.

He got a second’s vision of a shattered black mass, a tangle of girders, wires, collapsed planes, that seemed to hang a moment in midair—of whirling bodies—of wreckage indescribable. Then the broken debris plunged with awful speed and vanished through the red-glowing mist.

Even as he shuddered, sickened at the terrible, though necessary deed, the deed which alone could save him from swift death, an overwhelming air-wave from the terrible explosion struck his speeding machine, the machine captured in the Great Smokies from the Air Trust itself.

It heeled over like an unballasted yacht under the lash of a hurricane. Vainly Gabriel jerked at wheel and levers; he could not right it.

As it seemed to come under control, a stay snapped. The ’plane swooped, yawned forward and stuck its nose into an air-hole, caused by the vast, uprising smoke and heat of the huge conflagration beneath.

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Then, lost and beyond all guidance, it somersaulted, slid away down a long drop and, whirling wildly over and over, plunged with Gabriel into the glowing, smoking, detonating void!

CHAPTER XXXV.

TERROR AND RETREAT.

When, despite Flint's imperative orders, Slade failed to reopen the lines of communication for him, before nightfall, and when President Supple wired in code for a little more time in obeying Air Trust orders, the Billionaire recognized that something of terrible menace now had suddenly broken in upon his dream of universal power.

He summoned Waldron and Herzog for another conference and together they feverishly planned to put the works under defense, until such time as troops could be got through to them.

The plant regiment was mustered and the Cosmos mercenaries and scabs were made ready. The machine-guns were unlimbered for action and large quantities of ammunition were delivered to them and to the aerial-bomb guns, as nightfall lowered. Herzog set eight hundred men to work covering all the tanks possible, with wire netting of heavy steel. The search-lights were all ordered into use; steam and electrical connections were made, the air-fleet was manned, and everything was done that unlimited wealth and bitter hate of the Workers could suggest.

With curses on the fog, which hid the upper air from view, the old man now stood at one of the west windows of his inner office—the office on the top floor of the main Administration Building, overlooking nearly the whole Plant.

"Damn the weather!" he snarled, his gold teeth glinting. "In addition to all this mist from the Falls, there's a regular cloud-bank settling down, tonight! Under cover of it, what may not happen? Nothing could have been worse, Waldron. Though we shall soon control the air, that won't be enough, so long as fogs and mists escape us. Our next problem—hello! Now what the devil's *that*?"

"What's what?" retorted Waldron, testily. He had been drinking rather more heavily than usual, that day, both because of the dull weather and because the Falls invariably got on his nerves, during his brief sojourns there. Away from New York and his favorite haunts, Waldron was lost. "What's what?" he repeated with an ugly look. "This roaring, glaring, trembling place gives me—"

"That! That light in the sky!" cried Flint, excitedly pointing. "See? No—it's gone now! But it looked like—like a rocket! A signal, of some kind, thrown from an aeroplane! A—"

Waldron laughed harshly.

“Seeing things, eh?” he sneered, coming across to the window, himself, and peering out. “*I* don’t see anything! Nothing here to worry about, Flint. With all these walls and guns, and netting, and air-ships and a private army and all, what more do you want? Not getting nervous in your old age, are you, eh?” he gibed bitterly. “Or is your conscience beginning to wake up, as the graveyard becomes more a probability than—”

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“Enough!” Flint snapped at him. “When you drink, Waldron, you’re an idiot! Now, forget all this, and let’s get down to work. I tell you, I just now saw a signal-light up there in the mist. There’s trouble coming tonight, as sure as we own the earth. Trouble, maybe big trouble. Merciful God, I—I rather think we oughtn’t to be here, in person, eh? We’d be much better off out of here. If there—there should be any fighting, you know—”

His voice broke in a falsetto pipe. Waldron laughed brutally.

“Bravo!” cried he, with flushed and mottled face. “You’ll do, Flint! I see, right now, the firing-line is the life for you! Well, let the row come, and devil take it, say I. Better anything than—”

The sentence was never finished, For suddenly a shattering explosion hurled a vast section of the western encircling wall outward, out into the River, and, where but a moment before, the partners had been gazing at a high concrete-and-steel barrier, with electric lights on top, now only a huge gap appeared, through which the foam-tossed current could be seen leaping swiftly onward toward the Falls.

Hurled back from the window by the force of the explosion, both men were struck dumb with terror and amaze. Flint rallied first, and with a cry of rage, inarticulate as a beast’s howl, sprang to the window again.

Outside, a scene of desolation and wild activity was visible. The great, paved courtyard, flanked by the turbine houses and the wall, on one hand, and on the other by the oxygen tanks’ huge bulk that loomed vaguely through the electric-lighted mist, now had begun to swarm with men.

Flint saw a few forms lying prone under the hard glare of the arcs and vacuum lights. Others were crawling, writhing, making strange contortions. Here, there, men with rifles were running to take their posts. Hoarse orders were shouted, and shrill replies rang back.

Then, all at once, a kind of sputtering series of small explosions began to rip along the edge of the south wall. And now, machine-guns began to talk, with a dry, hard metallic clatter. And—though whence these came, Flint could not see—grenades began flying over the wall and bursting in the court. Though unwounded, men fell everywhere these gas-projectiles exploded—fell, stone dead and stiffening at once—fell, in strange, monstrous, awful attitudes of death.

Steam began billowing up; and crackling electrical discharges leaped along the naked wires of the outer barricades.

The whole Plant shook and rattled with the violent concussions of the aerial-bomb guns, already searching the upper air with shrapnel.

Somewhere, out of the range of vision, another terrible shock made the building tremble to its nethermost foundation; and wild yells and cries, as of a charge, a repulse, a savage and determined rush, echoed through the vast enclosure. Came a third detonation—and, blinding in its intensity, a globe of fire burst almost beneath the window, five stories below.

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The partners, shaking and pale, retreated hastily. A swift, upward-rising shape swept over the courtyard and was gone—one of the air-fleet now launched to meet the attackers.

Far below a sudden crumbling shudder of masonry told the Billionaire not a moment was to be lost, for already one wing of the Administration Building was swaying to its fall.

“Quick, Waldron! Quick!” he shouted, in the shrill treble of senility, and ran into the corridor that led to the north wing. Waldron, suddenly sobered, followed; and from the offices, where the night-shift of clerks were laboring (or had been, till the first explosion), came crowding pale and frightened men. Not the fighting cast of Air Trust slaves, these, but the anaemic chemists and experimenters and clerical workers, scabs, to a man. Now, in the common sentiment of fear, they jostled Flint and Waldron, as though these plutocrats had been but common clay. And in the corridor a babel rose, through which fresh volleys and ever more and more violent explosions ripped and thundered.

Flint struck savagely at some who barred his way; and Waldron elbowed through, with curses.

“Get out of the way, you swine!” shrilled the old Billionaire. “Make way, there! Way!”

The two men reached a door that led by a private passage, through to the steel-and-concrete laboratories.

“Here, this way, Flint!” shouted Waldron. “If those Hell-devils drop a bomb on us, this building will cave in like jackstraws! Our only safety is here, *here*!”

Thoroughly cowed now, with all the brutal bluster and half-drunken swagger gone, Waldron whipped out a bunch of keys, tremblingly unlocked the door and blundered through. Flint followed. Behind them, others tried to press, on toward the armored laboratories; but with vile blasphemies the plutocrats beat them back and slammed the door.

“To Hell with *them*!” shouted Flint, perfectly ashen now and shaking like a leaf, the fear of death strong on his withered soul. “We’ve got all we can do to look after ourselves! Quick, Waldron, quick!”

Both men, sick with panic, with fear of the unknown terror from above, stumbled rather than ran along the passage, and presently reached the laboratory.

Here Waldron unlocked another door, this time a steel one, and—as they both crowded through—pressed a hand to his dizzy head.

“Safe!” he gulped, slamming the door again. “They can’t get us *here*, at any rate, no matter what happens! This place is like a fort, and—”

His speech was interrupted by a dazing, deafening tumult of sound. The earth trembled, and the laboratory, steel though it was, with concrete facing, rocked on its foundation. A glare through the windows, quickly fading, told them the building they had just quitted was now but a smoking pile of ruin.

Flint gasped, unable to speak. Waldron, shaking and cowed, tried to moisten his dry lips with a thick tongue.

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“We—we weren’t any too soon!” he gulped, without one thought of the doomed scabs in the Administration Building. Stern justice was now overtaking these wretches. False to the working-class, and eager to serve the Air Trust—not only eager to serve, but zealous in any attack on the proletariat, and by their very employment serving to rivet the shackles on the world—now they were abandoned by their masters.

Between upper and nether millstone, moving with neither, they were caught and crushed. And as the great building quivered, gaped wide open, swayed and came thundering down in a vast pile of flame-lit ruin, whence a volcanic burst of fire, smoke and dust arose, they perished miserably, time-servers, cowards and self-seekers to the last.

But Flint and Waldron still survived. Though the very earth shook and trembled with the roar of bombs, the crumbling of massive walls, the rattle of volley-fire and the crashing of the terrible grenades that mowed down hundreds as they spread their poisonous gas abroad—though the shriek of projectiles, the thunder of the air-ship guns now sweeping the sky in blind endeavor to shatter the attackers all swelled the tumult to a frightful storm of terror and of death; they still lived, cowered and cringed there in the bomb-proof steel-and-concrete of the inner laboratories.

“Come, come!” Flint quavered, peering about him at the deserted room, still glaring with electric light—the room now abandoned by all its workers, who, members of Herzog’s regiment, had run to take their posts at the first signal of attack. “Come—this isn’t safe enough, even here. In—in there!”

He pointed toward a vault-like door, leading to the subterranean steel chambers where Herzog eventually counted on storing some hundreds of thousands of tons of liquid oxygen—the reserve-chambers, impregnable to lightning, fire, frost or storm, to man’s attacks or nature’s—the chambers blasted from the living rock, deep as the Falls themselves, vacuum-lined, wondrous achievement of the highest engineering skill the world could boast.

“There! There!” repeated Flint, plucking at the dazed Waldron’s sleeve. “Tool-steel and concrete, twenty-five feet thick—and vacuum chambers all about—*there* we can hide! There’s safety! Come, come quick!”

Staring, white-faced (he who had been so red!) and dumb, Waldron yielded. Together, furtive as the criminals they were, these two world-masters slunk toward the steel door, while without, their empire was crashing down in smoke, and flame, and blood!

They had almost reached it when a smash of glass at the far end of the laboratory whipped them round, in keener terror.

Staring, wild-eyed, they beheld the crouching figure of Herzog. Running, even as he cringed, he had upset a glass retort, which had shattered on the concrete floor. And as he ran, he screamed:

"*They're in! They're coming! Quick—the steel vaults! Let me in, there! Let me in!*"

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The coward was now a maniac with terror, his face perfectly white, writhen with panic, and with staring eyes that gleamed horribly under the greenish vacuum-lights.

“Back, you! Get out!” roared Waldron, raising a fist. “We—”

A sudden belch of flame, outside, split the night with terrible virescence. The whole steel building trembled and swayed. Some of its girders buckled; and the east wall, nearest the oxygen-tanks, caved inward as a mass of many tons was hurled against it.

A stunning concussion flung all three men to the floor; and, as they fell, a withering heat-wave quivered through the place.

“The oxygen-tanks!” gasped Flint. “They’re blown up—they’re burning—God help us!”

Scorching, yet still eager to live, he crawled on hands and knees toward the steel door. Waldron dragged himself along, half-dead with terror. Now, dripping gouts of inextinguishable fire were raining on the roof of the building. A whirlwind of flame was sweeping all its eastern side; and a glare like that of Hell itself seared the eyes of the fugitives.

Quivering, trembling, slavering, the old man and Waldron wrenched the steel door open.

“*Me! Me! Let me in! Me! Save me!*” howled Herzog, dragging himself toward them.

They only laughed derisively, with howls of demoniacal scorn.

“You slave! You cur!” shouted Waldron, and spat at him as he drew the vault door shut. “You cringing dog—stay there, now, and face it!”

The great door boomed shut. In the cool of the winding stairway of steel which led, lighted by electricity, to the trap-door and the ladder down into the tremendous vaults, the world-masters breathed deeply once more, respited from death.

Herzog, screaming like a fiend in torment, clawed at the impenetrable steel door, raved, begged, entreated, and tore his fingers on the lock.

No answer, save the muffled echo of a jeer, from within.

Boom!

What was that?

Mad with terror though he was, he whirled about, and faced the room now quivering with heat.

Even as he looked, a great gap yawned in the western wall, farthest from the flame-belching oxygen-tank that had been struck.

Through this gap, pouring irresistibly as the sea, swept a tide of attackers, storming the inner citadel of the infernal, world-strangling Air Trust.

At the head of this victorious army, this flood triumphant of the embattled proletaire, Herzog's staring eyes caught a moment's glimpse of a dreaded face—the face of Gabriel Armstrong.

Gasping, the coward and tool of the world-masters made one supreme decision. Close by, a rack of vials stood. He whirled to it, snatched out a tiny bottle and waiting not even to draw the cork—craunched the bottle, glass and all, in his fang-like, uneven teeth.

An instant change swept over him. His staring eyes closed, his head fell forward, his whole body collapsed like an empty sack. He fell, twitched once or twice, and was dead—dead ere the attackers could reach the door of steel where his bestial masters had betrayed him.

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Thus perished Herzog, coward and tool, a victim of the very forces he himself had helped create.

And at the moment of his death, the masters he had cringed to and had served, sneering with scorn at him even in their mortal terror, were tremblingly descending the long metal ladder to the impregnable vaults of steel below.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE STORMING OF THE WORKS.

Plunged into the abyss of mist and flame by the attack of the Air Trust *epervier*, Gabriel had abandoned himself for lost. Death, mercifully swift, he had felt could be his only fate; and with this thought had come no fear, but only a wild joy that he had shared this glorious battle, sure to end in victory! This was his only thought—this, and a quick vision of Catherine.

Then, as he hurtled down and over, whirling drunkenly in the void, all clear perception left him. Everything became a swift blur, a rushing confusion of terrible wind, and lurid light, and the wild roar of myriad explosions.

Came a shock, a sudden checking of the plunge, a long and rapid glide, as the DeVreeland stabilizer of the machine, asserting its automatic action, brought it to a level keel once more.

But now the engine was stopped. Gabriel, realizing that some chance still existed to save his life, wrenched madly at his levers.

“If I can volplane down!” he panted, sick and dizzy, “there may yet be hope!”

Hope! Yes, but how tenuous! What chance had he, coasting to earth at that low level, to avoid the detonating bombs, the aerial shrapnel being hurled aloft, the poisonous gas, the surface-fire?

Here, there and yonder, terrific explosions were shattering the echoes, as the Air Trust batteries swept the fog with their aeroplane-destroying missiles. Whither should he steer? He knew not. All sense of direction was lost, nor could the compass tell him anything. A glance at the barometric gauge showed him an altitude of but 850 feet, and this was decreasing with terrible rapidity.

Strive as he might, he could not check the swift descent.

“God send me a soft place to fall on!” he thought, grimly, still clinging to his machine and laboring to jockey it under control.

Close by, a thunderous detonation crashed through the mist. His machine reeled and swerved, then plunged more swiftly still. All became vague, to Gabriel—a dream—a nightmare!

Crash!

Flung from the seat, he sprawled through treetops, caught himself, fell to a lower limb, slid off and landed among thick bushes; and through these came to earth.

The wrecked ’plane, whirling away and down, fell crashing into the river that rushed cascading by, and vanished in the firelit mist.

Stunned, yet half-conscious, Gabriel presently sat up and pressed his right hand to his head. His left arm felt numb and useless; and when he tried to raise it, he found it refused his will.

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“Where am I, now, I’d like to know?” he muttered. “Not dead, anyhow—not *yet*!”

A continuous roar of explosions shuddered the air, mingled with the booming of the mighty Falls. Shouts and cheers and the rattle of machine-guns assailed his ear. The glare of the search-lights, through the mist and steam, was darkened momentarily by thick, greasy coils of smoke, shot through by violent flashes of light as explosions took place.

Gabriel struggled to his feet, and peered about him,

“Still alive!” said he. “And I must get back into the fight! That’s all that matters, now—-the fight!”

He knew not, yet, where he was; but this mattered nothing. His machine had, in fact, fallen near the river bank, in the eastern section of Prospect Park, beyond the Goat Island bridge—this region of the Park having been left outside the fortifications, in the extension of the Air Trust plant.

The trees, here, had saved his life. Had he smashed to earth a hundred yards further north, he would have been shattered against high walls and roofs.

Still giddy, but sensing no pain from his injured left arm, Gabriel made way toward the scene of conflict. He knew nothing of how the tide of battle was going; nothing of his position; nothing as to what men he would first meet, his comrades or the enemy.

But for these considerations he had no thought. His only idea, fixed and grim, was “The fight!” Dazed though he still was, he nerved himself for action.

And so, pressing onward through the livid glare, through the night shattered by stupendous detonations, he drew his revolver and broke into a run.

Strange evidences of the battle now became evident. He saw an unexploded grenade lying beside a wounded man who grasped at him and moaned with pain. Over a wrecked motor-car, greasy smoke was rising, as it burned. Louder shouting drew him down a path to the left. Masses of moving figures became dimly visible, through the mist. And now, stabs of fire pierced the confusion and clamorous night.

Gabriel jerked up his revolver, as he ran, the terrible weapon shooting bullets charged with hydrocyanic-acid gas.

A man rose before him, shouting.

Gabriel levelled the weapon; but a glimpse of red ribbon in the other’s coat brought it down again.

“Comrade!” cried he. “Where’s the attack?”

The other pointed.

“Gabriel! Is that you?” he gasped, staring.

“Yes! I fell—machine smashed—come on!”

“Hurt?”

“No! Arm, maybe. No matter! God! What’s this?”

Toward them a sudden swirl of men came sweeping, stumbling, shouting, in pandemonium.

“Our men!” cried Gabriel, starting forward again. “We’re being driven! Rally, here! Rally!”

Beyond, a louder crackling sounded. Here, there, men plunged down. The retreat was becoming a rout!

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Yelling, Gabriel flung himself upon the men.

“Back there!” he vociferated. “Back, and at the walls! Come on, boys, now! Come on!”

His voice, well known to nearly all, thrilled them again with new determination. A shout rose up; it swelled, deepened, roared to majestic volume.

Then the tide turned.

Back went the fighting men of the great Revolution. back at the machine-guns, mounted in the breached walls.

Gabriel was caught and whirled along in that living tide. He found himself at its crest, its foremost wave. Behind him, a roaring, rushing river of men. Before the Inner Citadel.

Gathering speed and weight as it rolled up, the wave broke like an ocean surge over a crumbling dyke.

Down went the Air Trust gunners and the guns, down, down to annihilation!

Through the breach, foaming and swelling with irresistible power burst the tides of victory.

Silenced now were the Trust guns. The steam-jets had none to man them. Far aloft, a last explosion told the death story of the final *epervier*.

Here and there, from windows and corners of the wrecked and blazing plant, a little intermittent firing still continued; but now the hearts of these Air Trust defenders—scabs, thugs and scourings of the slum—had turned to water, in face of the triumphant army of the working class.

They fled, those mercenaries, and all the ways and inner strongholds—such as still were left—now lay open to Gabriel and his comrades.

Lighted by the blazing buildings and the vast fire torch of an oxygen-tank off to eastward, they stormed the final citadel, the steel and concrete laboratories, heart and soul and center of the hellish world-conspiracy.

Stormed it, as it began to blaze and crumble; stormed it, in search of Flint and Waldron, would-be murderers of the world.

Stormed it, only to see Herzog gnash his teeth upon the flask, and fall, and die; only to know that there, within the rock-hewn, steel-lined tanks, below, their enemies had still outwitted them!

The swift onrush of the fire drove the victors back.

"*Out, comrades! Out of here*!" shouted Gabriel, facing the attackers.

None too soon. Hardly had they beaten a retreat, back into the vast courtyard again, strewn with the dead, when a second oxygen tank exploded, overwhelming the laboratory building with tons of flying steel.

Leaping toward the zenith, a giant tongue of flame roared heavenward. So intense the heat had now become, that the solid brick and concrete walls, exposed to the direct verberation of the flame, began to crack and crumble.

Gabriel ordered a general retreat of the attacking army. Victory was won; and to stay near that gushing tornado of flame, with new explosions bound to occur as the other oxygen tanks let go, must mean annihilation.

So the triumphant Army of the Proletaire fell back and back still further, out into the wrecked and trampled Park, and all through the city, where shattered buildings, many of them ablaze, and broken trees, dead bodies, smashed ordnance and chaos absolute told something of the story of that brief but terrible war.

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Ringed round the perishing ruins of the Air Trust they stood, these mute, thrilled thousands. Silence fell, now, as they watched the roaring, ever-mounting flames that, whipped by the breeze, crashed upward in long and cadenced tourbillions of white, of awful incandescence.

And the river, ever-hurrying, always foaming on and downward to its titanic plunge, sparkled with eerie lights in that vast glow. Its voice of thunder seemed to chant the passing and the requiem of the Curse of the World, Capitalism.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DEATH IN THE PIT OF STEEL.

And Flint, now, what of him! And Waldron?

While the Air Trust plant was burning, crumbling, smashing down, what of its masters, the masters of the world?

A sense of vast relief possessed them both, at first, as the steel door clanged after them.

Now, for a time at least, they realized that they were safe, safe from the People, safe from the awakened and triumphant Proletariat. Even now, had they surrendered, they would have been spared; but nothing was further from their thoughts than any treating with the despised and hated enemy.

Foremost in the mind of each, now, was the thought that if they could but stand siege, a day or so, the troops of the government—their government and their troops, their own personal property—would inevitably rescue them.

With this comforting belief, together they descended the long steel staircase to the trap-door, passed through this, and climbed down the metal ladder to the vast storage-vaults.

Here, everything was cool and quiet and well-lighted. Not yet had the electric-generating plant been put out of action. Though all its workers had either been drafted into the ranks of the Cosmos mercenaries, or Herzog's regiments, or else had fled to hiding, still the huge turbines and enormous dynamos were whirling, unattended. Thus, for the first few minutes, in their living tomb, down over which the ruins of the now white-hot laboratory-building had crashed, the world-masters had electric light.

Reassured a little, they descended to the very bottom of the first huge tank.

“God!” snarled Flint, as he breathed deeply and glared about him. “The curs! The swine! To think of this, *this* really happening! And to think that if we hadn’t got here just in time, they’d actually have—have used violence on *us*—”

Waldron laughed brutally, his body still trembling and his face chalky. His laugh echoed, hollowly, from the metal walls.

“You old fool!” he spat. “Canting old hypocrite to the last, eh? Violence? What the devil do you expect? Rosewater and confetti? Violence was all that ever held ’em, wasn’t it? And when they slipped the leash, naturally they retorted—that’s all! Violence? You make me sick! Damned lucky for us if we get through this yet, without violence, you whining cur!”

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Flint, for the first time hearing Waldron's honest opinion of him, failed even to note it. All his panic-stricken ear had caught was the note of hope, of survival.

Clutching eagerly at Waldron's sleeve, he cackled:

"If we get through? If we get through, you say? Then, in your opinion, there *is* a chance to get through? They can't get us here? We surely shall be rescued?"

"Bah!" Waldron flung at him, some latent spark of courage still smouldering in his sodden breast, whereas old Flint was craven to the marrow. "You nauseate me! Afraid to die, eh? Well, so am I; but not so damned paralyzed and sick with panic as all that! If you'd taken less dope, the last twenty years, you'd have more nerve now, to face the music! World-master, you? Eh? Playing the biggest game on earth—and now, when things break bad, you squeal! Arrrh! You called me a quitter once, you mealy-mouthed old Pecksniff! We'll see, now, who quits! We'll see, at a show-down, who can face it, you or I!"

[Illustration: His fingers lost their hold—he dropped like a Plummet.]

Waldron's brutality, the hard, savage quality that all his life had made him "Tiger" Waldron, now was beginning to reassert itself. His first sheer panic over, a little manhood was returning. But as for Flint, no manhood dwelt in him to be awakened. Instead, each moment found him more abject and more pitiable. Like an old woman he now wrung his hands and groaned, hysterically; and now he paced the steel floor of the vault that was destined to be his tomb; and now he stopped again and stared about him with wild eyes.

On all sides, sheer up a hundred feet or more, the smooth steel sides of the vast oxygen tank rose, studded with long lines of rivets.

Near the top a dark aperture showed where the six-inch pipe joined the tank; the pipe destined to fill it, when Herzog's last process—never, now, to be completed—should have been done.

The huge floor, 150 feet in diameter, sloped gently downward toward the center; and here yawned another pipe, covered by a grating—the pipe to drain the liquid oxygen out to the pumping station.

So deeply set in the rock of the Niagara cliff was this stupendous tank, and so cunningly surrounded by vacuum-chambers, that now no faintest sound of the Falls was audible. All that betrayed the nearness of the cataract was a faint, incessant trembling of the metal walls, as though the solid ribs of Earth herself were shuddering with the impact of the plunge.

Old Flint surveyed this extraordinary chamber with mingled feelings. It surely offered absolute protection, for the present—or seemed to—but his distressed mind conjured alarming pictures of the future, in case no rescue came. Death by starvation, thirst and madness loomed before him. Nervously he recommenced his pacing. Another terribly serious factor was to be considered. He had now been three hours without his dose of morphia, and his nerves were calling, tugging insistently for it.

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“Rotten luck,” he grumbled, “that I’ve got none with me!” Even there, in the imminent presence of disaster and death, his mind reverted to the poison, more necessary to him than food.

Waldron now had grown fairly calm. He stood leaning against the steel ladder, down which they had descended. Choosing a cigar, he proceeded to light up.

“Might as well be comfortable while we wait,” said he. “I only wish we had a couple of chairs, down here. Oversight on our part that we didn’t have some steel ones put in, and a line of canned goods and a few quarts of Scotch. The floor’s a bit damp and cold to sit on, and I want a drink damn bad!”

Flint swung about and faced him, pale and shaking, tortured with fear and with longing for his dope.

“You—you don’t think it *will* be long, eh, do you?” he demanded. “Not long before we’re taken out?”

Waldron shrugged his shoulders and blew a long, thin arrow of smoke athwart the brightly-lighted air.

“Search me!” he exclaimed. “To judge by what was happening when we made our exit, the Plant must be a mess, by this time. We seem to have been checked, even if not mated, Flint. I must admit they caught us by surprise. Caught us napping, damn them, after all! They were stronger than we thought, Flint, and cleverer, and better organized. And so—”

“Don’t say ‘we,’ curse you!” snarled Flint. “Blame yourself, if you want to, but leave me out! *I* knew there was trouble due, I tell you. *I* saw it coming! Who’s been trying to crush the swine completely, if not I? Who’s worked night and day to have those bills put through, and who had the army increased, and conscription started? Who’s driven the President to back all sorts of things? Who’s forced them? Who made the National Mounted Police a reality, if not I? Damn you, don’t include *me* in your blame!”

Waldron shrugged his shoulders, and smoked contemplatively.

“Suit yourself,” he answered. “If we both die, down here, it won’t matter much either way.”

“Die?” quavered the old jackal, suddenly forgetting his rage and peering about with furtive eyes. “Did you say die, Wally? No, no! You didn’t say that! You didn’t mean that, surely!”

Waldron smiled, evilly, joying in this abject fear of his hated partner.

“Oh, yes, I did, though,” he retorted. “It’s quite possible, you know. In case our government—yours, if you prefer—can’t get troops through, here, or a big general revolution sweeps things, inside a day or two, we’re done. We’ll starve and stifle, here, sure as shooting!”

“No, no, no! Not that, not *that*!” whimpered Flint, shuddering. “I can’t die, yet. I—I’m not ready for it! There’s all that missionary work of mine not yet done, and my huge international Sunday School League to perfect; and there’s the tremendous ten-million-dollar Cathedral of Saint Luke the Pious that I’m having built on Riverside Drive, and there’s—”

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"Cut it!" gibed Waldron, spitting with very disgust. "If your time's come, Flint, you'll die, cathedrals or no cathedrals. Your Sunday schools won't save you any more than my investments will—which have largely been wine, women and song. As a matter of fact, if it comes to starvation, if we aren't rescued and taken out from under the red-hot wreckage that's on top of us, I'll outlive *you*! I can exist on my surplus adipose tissue, for a while; but you—*you're* nothing but skin and bone. You'll starve far quicker than I will, old man."

"Don't! Don't!" implored the shaking wretch, covering his eyes with both trembling hands.

"Moral, you oughtn't to have been a dope-fiend, all these years," continued Waldron, cuttingly, determined that now, once for all, his despised partner should hear the truth. "How you've lived so long, as it is, I don't understand. When I tried to marry Kate, and failed, I reckoned you'd pass over in almost no time—and, by the way, that's why I was so insistent. But you've disappointed me, Flint. Disappointed me sorely. You still live. It won't be long, however. Down here, you know, you simply can't get any dope. In a little while you'll begin to suffer the torments of Hell. You'll die of starvation and drug 'yen,' Flint, and you'll die mad, mad, *mad*! Understand me! Mad, for morphine! And I, I shall watch you, and exult!"

Flint cringed, shuddering and stopped his ears. His partner, gloating over him, smoked faster now. A strange light shone in his eyes. His pulse beat faster than usual, and a certain extravagance of thought and speech had become manifest in him.

He tried to compose himself, feeling that he must not push the cowardly Flint too far, but his ideas refused to flow in orderly sequence. Wonderingly he stared at his cigar, the tip of which was now glowing more brightly than before.

And then, suddenly sniffing the air he understood. His eyes widened with horror absolute. He started forward, gasped and cried:

"*Flint! Flint! The oxygen is coming in!*"

Uncomprehending, the old man still stood there, mumbling to himself. His face was now tinged with unusual color, and his heart, too, was thumping strangely.

"*Oxygen*!" shouted Waldron, shaking him by the shoulder. "It—it's leaking in, here, somewhere! If we can't stop it—*we're dead men*!"

"Eh? *What*?" stammered the Billionaire, staring at him with eyes of half-intoxicated fear. "What d'you mean, the oxygen? In—in here?"

"*In here*!" cried "Tiger," casting a wild and terrible gaze about him at the vast, empty trap of steel. "Can't you smell it? That ozone smell? My God, we're lost! We're lost!"

“You’re crazy!” retorted Flint, with vigor. “Nothing of the sort could happen!” His head was held high, now, and new life seemed surging through that spent and drug-wrecked body. “There’s no way those curs could have turned on any gas, here. You’re crazy, ha! ha! ha! Insane, eh? A good joke—capital joke, that! I must tell it at the Union League Club! ‘Tiger’ Waldron, suddenly insane, and—ha! ha! ha!”

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He burst into a long, shrill cacchination. Already his face was scarlet and his mind a whirl. Though neither man understood the reason, yet the fact remained that one of the last great explosions had ruptured a subterranean check-valve closing the six-inch pipe that was to feed the storage-tanks; and now a swift, huge stream of pure oxygen gas was rushing at tremendous velocity into the vast chamber of steel.

Waldron, his heart leaping as though it would burst his ribs, raised a fist to strike down his insulter; then, with drunken indecision, joined in the maniacal laughter of the staggering old man.

In their ears a strange, wild humming now became audible. Lights danced before their eyes; their senses reeled, and violent, extravagant ideas surged through their drunken brains.

"*Ha! Ha! Ha!*" rang Waldron's crazy laughter, echoing the old man's. All at once, his cigar broke into flame. Cursing, he hurled it away, staggering back against the ladder and stood there swaying, clutching it to hold himself from falling.

There he stood, and stared at Flint, with eyes that started from his head, with panting breath and crimson face.

The old man, in a sudden revulsion of terror, was now grovelling along the floor, by one of the massive walls, clawing at the steel with impotent hands and screaming mingled prayers and oaths. His ravings, horrible to hear, echoed through the great tank, now swiftly filling with gas.

"Help! Help!" he screamed. "Save me—my God—save me—. Let me out, let me out! A million, if you let me out! A billion—*the whole world*! The world, ha! ha! ha! Damn it to Hell—the world, I say! I'll give the world to be let out! It's mine—I own it—*all, all mine!* Ha! Dogs! You would rise up against your master and your God, would you? But it's no use—we'll beat you yet—out! *out*!—the world—I own it! All this plant—this gas, all mine! My oxygen—ah! it chokes me! *Help! Help!*—Swine! I'll scourge you yet—-*absolute power—the world*—!"

With one final spark of energy, panting, his heart flailing itself to death under the pitiless urge of the oxygen, old Flint sprang up, ran wildly, blindly straight across the steel floor, and, screaming blasphemies like a soul in Hell, dashed into the opposite wall.

He recoiled, staggered, spun round and fell sprawling most horribly—stone dead.

Waldron, at sight of this awful end, felt an uncontrollable terror sweep over his drunk and maddened senses. Though all his blood was leaping in his arteries, and his breath coming so fast it choked him, yet a moment's seeming sanity possessed his reeling brain.

“The door! The door, up there!” he screamed, with a wild, terrible curse.

Then, turning toward the ladder, in spite of his fat and flabby muscles quivering in terrible spasms, he ran up the long steel structure with a supreme and ape-like agility.

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Fifty feet he made, seventy-five, ninety—

But, all at once, something seemed to break in his overtaxed heart.

A blackness swam before his dazzled eyes. His head fell back. Unnerved, his fingers lost their hold. And, whirling over and over in midair, he dropped like a plummet.

By one wall lay Flint's body. At the foot of the ladder, like a crushed sack of bones, sprawled the corpse of "Tiger" Waldron.

And still the rushing oxygen, with which they two had hoped to dominate the world, poured through the six-inch main, far, far above—senseless matter, blindly avenging itself upon the rash and evil men who impiously had sought to cage and master it!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VISIONS.

Thus perished Flint and Waldron, scourges of the earth. Thus they died, slain by the very force which they had planned would betray mankind and deliver it into their chains. Thus vanished, forever, the most sinister and cruel minds ever evolved upon this planet; the greatest menace the human race had ever known; the evil Masters of the World.

And as they died, massed around their perished Air Trust plant, a throng of silent, earnest watchers stood, with faces illumined by the symbolic, sacrificial flames—a throng of emancipated workers, of toilers from whose bowed shoulders now forever had been lifted the frightful menace of a universal bondage.

Explosion after explosion burst from the tortured Inferno of the vast plant. Buildings came crashing, reeling, thundering down; walls fell, amid vast, belching clouds of dust and smoke; a white, consuming sheet of flame crackled across the sinister and evil place; and in its wake glowed incandescent ruins.

Then, in one final burst of thunderous tumult, the hugest tank of all, exploding with a roar like that of Doom itself, hurled belching flames on high.

For many miles—in Buffalo, Rochester, Toronto and scores of cities on both sides of the Great Lakes—silent multitudes watched the glare against the midnight sky; and many wept for joy; and many prayed. All understood the meaning of that sight. The light upon the heavens seemed a signal and a beacon—a promise that the Old Times had passed away forever—a covenant of the New.

And, as the final explosion shattered the Temple of Bondage to wreckage, flung it far into the rushing river and swept it over the leaping, thundering Falls, the news flashed

on a thousand wires, to all cities and all lands; and though the mercenaries of the two dead world-masters still might struggle and might strive to beat the toilers back to slavery again, their days were numbered and their powers forever broken.

Together in the doorway of the refuge at Port Colborne, Catherine stood with Gabriel, watching the beacon of liberty upon the heavens. The light, a halo round her eager face, showed his powerful figure and the smile of triumph in his eyes. His left arm, broken by the fall in the aeroplane, now rested in a sling. His right, protecting in its strength, was round the girl. And as her head found shelter and rest, at length, upon his shoulder, she, too, smiled; and her eyes seemed to see visions in the glory of the sky.

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“Visions!” said she, softly, as though voicing a universal thought. “Do you behold them, too?”

He nodded.

“Yes,” he answered, “and they are beautiful and sweet and pure!”

“Visions that we now shall surely see?”

“Shall surely see!” he echoed; and a little silence fell. Far off, they seemed to hear a vast and thousand-throated cheering, that the night-wind brought to them in long and heart-inspiring cadences.

“Gabriel,” she said, at last.

“Well?”

“I wish *he* might have seen them, and have understood! In spite of all he did, and was, he was my father!”

“Yes,” answered Gabriel, sensing her grief. “But would you have had him live through this? Live, with the whole world out of his grasp, again? Live, with all his plans wrecked and broken? Live on in this new time, where he could have comprehended nothing? Live on, in misery and rage and impotence?

“Your father was an old man, Catherine. You know as well as I do—better, perhaps—-the whole trend of his life’s thought and ambition. Even if he’d lived, he couldn’t have changed, now, at his age. It would have been an utter impossibility. Why say more?”

Catherine made no reply; but in her very attitude of trust and confidence, Gabriel knew he read the comfort he had given her.

Silence, a while. At last she spoke.

“Visions!” she whispered. “Wonderful visions of the glad, new time! How do you see them, Gabriel?”

“How do I see them?” His face seemed to glow with inspiration under the shining light in the far heavens. “I see them as the realization of a time, now really close at hand, when this old world of ours shall be, as it never yet has been, in truth civilized, emancipated, free. When the night of ignorance, kingcraft, priestcraft, servility and prejudice, bigotry and superstition shall be forever swept away by the dawn of intelligence and universal education, by scientific truth and light—by understanding and by fearlessness.

“When Science shall no longer be ‘the mystery of a class,’ but shall become the heritage of all mankind. When, because much is known by all, nothing shall be dreaded by any. When all mankind shall be absolutely its own master, strong, and brave, and free!”

“Like you, Gabriel!” the girl exclaimed, from her heart.

“Don’t say that!” he disclaimed. “Don’t—”

She put her hand over his mouth.

“Shhhh!” she forbade him. “You mustn’t argue, now, because your arm’s just been set and we don’t want any fever. If my dreams include you, too, Gabriel, don’t try to tell me I’m mistaken—because I’m not, to begin with, and I *know* I’m not!”

He laughed, and shook his head.

“Do you realize,” said he, “that when it comes to bravery, and strength, and the splendid freedom of an emancipated soul, I must look to *you* for light and leading?”

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“Don’t!” she whispered. “Look only to the future—to the newer, better world now coming to birth! The time which is to know no poverty, no crime, no children’s blood wrung out for dividends!

“The future when no longer Idleness can enslave Labor to its tasks. When every man who will, may labor freely, whether with hand or brain, and receive the full value of his toil, undiminished by any theft or purloining whatsoever!”

“The future,” he continued, as she paused, “when crowns, titles, swords, rifles and dreadnaughts shall be known only by history. When the earth and the fulness thereof shall belong to all Earth’s people; and when its soil need be no longer fertilized with human blood, its crops no longer be brought forth watered by sweat and tears.

“Such have been my visions and my dreams, Catherine—a few of them. Now they are coming true! And other dreams and other visions—dreams of you and visions of our life together—what of them?”

“Why need you ask, Gabriel?” she answered, raising her lips to his.

The sound of singing, a triumphal chorus of the accomplished Revolution, a vast and million-throated song, seemed wafted to them on the wings of night.

And the pure stars, witnessing their love and troth, looked down upon them from the heavens where shone the fire-glow of the Great Emancipation.

THE END.

[Transcriber’s note: In the following paragraph, I corrected the second “Flint” to “Waldron”:

“Very likely,” answered Flint, who had now at last entirely recovered his sang-froid. “But in that event, our work would be at a standstill. No, Flint, we mustn’t oppose this fellow. Better let the check go through, if he has nerve enough to fill it out and cash it. He won’t dare gouge very deep; and no matter what he takes, it won’t be a drop in the ocean, compared to the golden flood now almost within our grasp!”]