The Lever eBook

The Lever

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Thelever

By William Dana Orcutt

Author of "*The Spell*," "*The flower of Destiny*," "*Robert* CAVELIER," *Etc*.

1911

"*Give me where I may stand, a lever long enough, and a fulcrum strong enough, and I will move the world*."—*Archimedes*.

TO MY MOTHER

ELLEN DANA ORCUTT

"*Supreme in the strength of asserting that which is ever woman's creed—justice and right*," *This volume is affectionately dedicated*

THE LEVER

I

The girl leaned forward impulsively from the leisurely moving victoria and looked back at the automobile which whizzed by the carriage, along the maple-lined road leading from Washington to Chevy Chase; then she as suddenly resumed her former position when she discovered that the young man, who was the only occupant of the motor-car, had slowed down and was gazing back at her.

“How impertinent!” she exclaimed, flushing, addressing herself rather than the older woman beside her. “Of course, it couldn’t be Allen; but if it wasn’t, why was he looking back at me? Did you recognize him, Eleanor?”

“Who’s impertinent?” queried Patricia, who sat between them and exercised a ten-year-old sister’s prerogative.

Mrs. Gorham was quietly amused. “Which question shall I answer first, Alice—and who is ‘Allen’ supposed to be?”

It was the girl’s turn to sense the situation. “How ridiculous!” she laughed. “Of course you wouldn’t know. Allen Sanford and I used to play together when we were children in Pittsburgh. I haven’t seen him since we moved away after mamma died; but that really looked like him. I wonder if by any chance it could be?”

“Oh, Alice, he’s coming back,” announced Patricia from her point of vantage on her knees, and a moment later the same automobile, driven at a speed at which the most conscientious of traffic guardians could not complain, passed them slowly at the left. The young man made an effort to conceal the fact that he was surveying the girl in the victoria, but Alice cut short his suspense.

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“It is! it is!” she cried, eagerly; and with the recognition made certain the boy shut off his power, and, springing out of the car, was beside her before even the discreet coachman could draw up to the curb.

“I thought I couldn’t be mistaken—” he began.

“But you weren’t sure,” Alice finished for him. “You were trying to remember a little girl with a pigtail down her back and horrid freckles all over her face—now, weren’t you?”

“If that’s the way you really looked, I evidently wasn’t as fussy about such things then as I am now,” he laughed. “All I remember is that you were the dandiest little playmate I ever had.”

The unexpected compliment caused Alice to turn quickly to Mrs. Gorham.

“This is Allen Sanford, Eleanor; and this, Allen, is my mother, sister, and dearest friend all in one.”

“And my name’s Pat,” added the child, refusing to be ignored and holding out her hand cordially.

The boy was even more embarrassed by the unexpected meeting with the second Mrs. Gorham than to find Alice developed into so lovely and fascinating a young woman. He had always thought of Alice’s step-mother, when he had thought of her at all, as of a type entirely different from this slender, attractive woman only a few years older than Alice herself. There was a self-possession about Mrs. Gorham, a quiet dignity, which made the difference in their ages seem greater than it really was; yet, had he not known, Allen would have thought them sisters. His father was sceptical when he heard of Gorham’s second marriage: “It’s bigamy, that’s what it is,” were Stephen Sanford’s words. “Gorham is married to his business. Everything he touches turns into gold. Business to him is what a great passion for a woman would be to one man, or a supreme friendship to another; but the lever which moves Robert Gorham is neither love nor steel; it is cold, hard cash.”

All this flashed through Allen’s mind in that brief moment of silence after the introduction, but the thoughts of at least one of the two women had been equally active. To Alice this chance meeting recalled a time in her life sanctified by the loss of her mother, later made easier to look back upon by the rare sympathy which had existed from the first between herself and the sweet, tactful woman who had come into her life, filling the aching void and awakening her to a new interest in her surroundings. She and Allen had been “chums” in those early days, and it gratified her to discover that the boy whom she had admired in a childish way had become a young man so agreeable to look upon and so little changed, except in growth, from the lad she remembered. His six feet of height carried him to a greater altitude than of old, his well-developed arms

and shoulders showed a physical strength which his youth had not promised, but his face wore the same frank, care-free, irresponsible and good-natured expression which had made him beloved by all his acquaintances and taken seriously by none.

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Allen's smile returned before he found his voice, and was so infectious that Alice, Mrs. Gorham, and Patricia were also smiling broadly.

"It's awfully good to see you again, Alice," he said, with a sincerity which could not be doubted; "and to meet you, too, Mrs. Gorham, not forgetting Lady Pat." And then, as if in explanation, "You see, as Alice says, she and I were pals when we were youngsters in Pittsburgh, and I can't realize that now she's grown up into such a—"

"Do you remember the games of baseball we used to play together?" Alice interrupted.

"Indeed I do," he responded. "She could throw a ball overhand just like a boy," Allen continued, turning to Mrs. Gorham lest he seem to discriminate in his attentions.

"She can't do it now, but I can," Patricia remarked, with an air of superiority, subsiding as Alice glanced meaningly at her.

"And once you thrashed Jim Thatcher for calling me a tomboy. Oh, I looked upon you as a real story-book hero!"

"I suspect that's the only time on record." Allen laughed again consciously. "That's one epithet I haven't had hurled at me enough times to make me nervous." He looked at the horses critically. "You don't suppose there's any chance of a runaway here to give me another opportunity, do you?"

"How about the football games, and the races at New London?" Alice asked.

"What do you know about those?"

"I read all about everything in the papers. Your father was so proud that he told my father and every one about your college record; so, you see, your friends had no difficulty in keeping posted."

"My father was proud of me?" Allen demanded, in genuine astonishment. "Haven't you gotten things a little mixed? That doesn't sound like the pater at all. He didn't boast any of my record in my studies, did he?"

"Father didn't say." Alice leaned forward mischievously. "Did you get your degree *cum laude*, Allen?"

"Not exactly," he answered, frankly. "*Cum difficultate* would be more like it; but I got it, anyhow."

"And what have you been doing since?" Mrs. Gorham asked.

"I went abroad right after Commencement."

“To perfect yourself in the languages?”

“Well”—the boy hesitated—“that may have been the pater’s intention, but he didn’t state it audibly. As a matter of fact, I perfected myself in running an automobile more than anything else, but I had a corking good time.”

“And now what? You see how inquisitive I am,” Alice said.

“And now”—he repeated it after her—“I want to go into business, and the pater says diplomacy for mine. We’ve had lots of arguments over it, until we finally compromised it just as we usually do—by my doing it his way. So here I am in Washington, awaiting my country’s call, ready to steer the great U.S.A. through any old international complication they can scare up. But I mustn’t keep you and Mrs. Gorham here any longer. It is just fine to see you again.”

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“You will come and see us at the hotel,” Mrs. Gorham said, warmly seconded by Alice. “Won’t you dine with us to-morrow evening? Mr. Gorham will be glad to hear about you from yourself.”

To-morrow evening seemed far away to Allen, so he supplemented Mrs. Gorham’s invitation by a suggestion that they take a motor ride with him the following afternoon, which brought the time of their meeting that much nearer.

For some little time after Allen’s machine had disappeared Alice and Mrs. Gorham continued their drive in silence, and it was Patricia who spoke first.

“Isn’t he the grandest thing?” she remarked. “He’s just like one of King Arthur’s knights. And he called me ‘Lady Pat.’”

“You dear child,” Eleanor cried, impulsively pressing the little form to her.

“That is exactly what I ought to be,” Alice said, abruptly. “Just think how pleased father would be.”

“What ought you to be that you are not, my dear?” Mrs. Gorham inquired, surprised.

“Why, a boy like Allen just ready to start off on a business career. That’s about the only disappointment father has ever experienced, not having a son to succeed him. You know as I do how much it would mean to him to ‘found a house,’ as he calls it. I’ve seen him looking at Pat and me so many times with an expression in his eyes which I understood, and it has hurt me all through that I couldn’t have been the son he longed for. The aggravating part of it all is that nothing interests me so much as business. I must have inherited father’s love for it. I adore listening to him when he is discussing some great problem with Mr. Covington. It seems to me the grandest thing in the world to be able to influence people, and to create or expand industries and actually to accomplish results.”

Mrs. Gorham understood the girl’s mood and knew that it was wiser to let her run on without interruption.

“I don’t feel the same about other things,” Alice continued, pausing from time to time as she became more introspective. “I’m fond of poetry, of course, but I can’t understand how any one can be satisfied to do nothing else but write poems; I admire art, but with my admiration for the artist’s work there’s a real pity for the man because he is debarred from the world of action. If I were a man I would have to do something which had a physical as well as an intellectual struggle in it, with a reward at the end to be striven for which was not expressed alone in the praise of the world—it would have to be power itself.”

“I would rather be a damosel,” Patricia put in.

“You are your father’s own daughter, Alice,” Mrs. Gorham said, as the girl ceased speaking. “You could not be his child and feel otherwise.”

“But that makes it all the harder,” Alice rebelled. “It doesn’t give me any chance to do the things I want to do. I must

’*Sigh and cry And still sit idly by*.’”

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The drive was coming to an end, and Mrs. Gorham was unwilling to leave the conversation at just this point. “There is another side to all this, Alice dear, which you mustn’t overlook,” she said, seriously. “It is woman’s part to inspire rather than to do, and the fact that it is often the more difficult role to play perhaps makes it the nobler part, after all. The world sings of the bravery of men who go forth to battle; we older women know that it takes no less courage to let them go and to content ourselves in our impotency, while they are spurred on by the excitement which is denied to us. Those of us whom experience has tested know this, but this realization cannot yet have come to you.”

Patricia sighed, deeply, “Oh, yes, mamma Eleanor; this waiting is awful.”

“You mean that we must accept the situation as best we may and accomplish our results by proxy?” Alice queried, still rebellious.

Mrs. Gorham smiled at the girl’s interpretation. “No, dear,” she insisted; “I am not willing to admit that ours is a position of self-abnegation. We women are denied the privilege of doing, but we mustn’t be unmindful of the blessing which is given in exchange. To me it is infinitely more satisfying to know that we are the inspiration which urges men on to do what they could not do without us.”

“Of course that’s one way of putting it,” Alice admitted, interested yet not convinced; “but, just the same, I’d rather be the one to receive the inspiration than the one to give it.”

On reaching the comfortable apartment occupied by the Gorhams at the hotel, they found that Mr. Gorham had already returned, accompanied by his first vice-president, John Covington, and that they were engaged in close conversation. Mrs. Gorham took Patricia with her to her room, but Alice immediately joined the two men.

“We have nearly finished our interview, Alice,” her father said, suggestively, after a smile of greeting.

“Please let me sit here and listen,” she begged. “I am so interested in it all.”

Gorham acquiesced with a shrug of his shoulders which the girl saw and felt.

“I don’t know but that we have covered the situation, anyway,” he said to Covington. “I shall see Kenmore to-morrow, and if he can be persuaded to join us, the Consolidated Companies will be just that much strengthened. You had better return to New York to-night to keep your eye on the coffee situation, and I will telephone you if I need you here after I see the Senator.”

The two men offered a striking contrast in their personalities. Robert Gorham was a large man, about fifty years of age, whose whole bearing, when at rest, suggested the

idealist rather than the man of action. His head was large and intellectual, his chin strong, his mouth firm, conveying at once an impression of strength and of impenetrable depth—an inner being which defied complete analysis. Behind the impassive exterior there was a suggestion of latent reserve force, but it was not until some thought or word penetrated below the surface that the real man was revealed. Then it was that the impassive face lighted up, that the quiet gray eyes flashed fire, that the head bent forward decisively, and the strong-willed, large-brained leader of men stood forth.

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Covington, on the other hand, ten years Gorham's junior, was slight, though tall, and was always, in manner, speech, and dress, most carefully adjusted. He was an organizer of men, as Gorham was the organizer of companies. Gorham worked so quietly that his purpose seemed to accomplish itself; Covington won his success by a pitiless force which left flotsam in its wake. Gorham was beloved and trusted, Covington was respected for his abilities but dreaded by his subordinates. It had been necessary for Gorham to supplement himself with a man who possessed the genius of taking hold of the individual organizations assimilated by the Consolidated Companies, and amalgamating those engaged in similar lines into perfect, economic wholes; and Covington's rare service had proved the wisdom of Gorham's selection.

Covington noted Alice's disappointment when her father cut short their interview upon her entrance, though Gorham himself was entirely oblivious to it.

"I'll tell you all about it when we meet next time," he said to her in a low tone as he was leaving. "It is always an inspiration to me to talk these matters over with you."

Alice smiled gratefully but started at the word he used. This man, acknowledged by her father to be one of the cleverest in the business world, said that she was an "inspiration" to him. Could this be possible! This, then, was what Eleanor had meant, this was woman's mission. But still, she insisted to herself, she would rather be the recipient than the giver.

As Covington left the room Gorham turned to Alice. "Now I can give myself wholly to you," he said, holding out his arms affectionately.

"Why did you stop talking with Mr. Covington as soon as I came in?" Alice asked, reproachfully. "Was it a private matter?"

"No indeed," he laughed, patting her affectionately on the head; "it was just plain business."

"But I wanted to hear it," she persisted.

"It would have meant nothing to you," her father answered. "If you had been my son that would be different, but a woman's sphere is outside the business world. Leave that to the men. Now tell me what has happened to-day."

Alice knew her father too well to persist further. "Eleanor and I met Allen Sanford while we were out driving this afternoon," she said.

"Did you?" he asked, with interest. "I knew he was in Washington and should have told you. His father wrote me about him last week, and I was planning to invite him here. How has he developed since we used to know him?"

“Splendidly,” Alice answered. “He’s a big strapping fellow with the same handsome, happy face. I should have known him anywhere. He wants to get started in business, and his father wants him to go into the diplomatic service.”

“So Stephen wrote me.” Gorham laughed quietly, turning to his wife, who had entered a moment before with Patricia. “The boy’s father is the worst enemy he has. He has thoroughly spoiled him all his life, and now expects him to do great things. He scores him because he has no initiative, and the first time the youngster tries to exercise it by expressing his preference for business instead of diplomacy, Stephen calls him obstinate and ungrateful. Now he wants me to talk with Allen and persuade him that his father is right.”

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“If you are not otherwise engaged you’ll have a chance to-morrow evening,” remarked Mrs. Gorham; “we have invited him to dine with us.”

“Good; I shall be glad to see the boy, and can acquit myself of my obligation to his father at the same time. Hello, Mistress Patricia,” he added, catching the child in his arms. “What has my little tyrant been up to?”

“Call me ‘Lady Pat,’” she said, grandly. “*He* named me that.”

“Who did?” her father asked, his mind diverted from the previous conversation.

“Mr. Sanford.” Patricia rolled her eyes impressively. “Oh, he’s the grandest thing! He must be a prince in disguise.”

“That isn’t what his father calls him,” laughed Gorham.

“What are you going to advise him?” Eleanor asked.

“I can’t tell until I see him and discover how much imagination he has.”

“Imagination?” his wife queried.

“Yes; is that a new idea to you? Ability never asserts itself to its utmost unless fed by the imagination, and I don’t know yet whether Allen possesses either. Success in any line depends upon the extent of a man’s power of imagination.”

“Then why don’t poets make business successes? They have imaginative ideas,” argued Alice, thinking of her remarks upon this subject earlier in the afternoon.

“True”—Gorham smiled at her earnestness—“great poets are inspired, but rarely, if ever, do they apply those inspirations to practical purposes. That is why they so seldom enter business, and still more rarely succeed if they do.”

His face sobered as the idea took firmer possession of him.

“I differ from the poet only in that I make use of my imaginative ideas in solving the great business problems of the present and the future instead of in forming rhymes and metres. To do this I must command unlimited resources; but what does money mean except the opportunity to gratify ideals? With this I can force my imagination to produce utilitarian results.”

This would have been Robert Gorham’s exposition of his conception of the Archimedes lever, as opposed to that which Allen Sanford had heard his father give. To Gorham the power of the lever depended upon the strength of the imaginative ideals, and the “cold, hard cash” was simply the necessary fulcrum upon which the lever rested.

II

“The proposition is too gigantic for me even to comprehend.”

The Hon. Mr. Kenmore, member of the United States Senate, laid down the bulky prospectus of the “Consolidated Companies,” and looked up into his caller’s genial face.

Gorham flicked the ash from his cigar and smiled good-naturedly. “That is, perhaps, a natural statement, Mr. Kenmore,” he replied, deliberately. “I am not surprised that you find it difficult to comprehend the vast possibilities of our enterprise; yet its success, already established, must convince you that no good argument can be advanced against its practicability.”

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“But see what it contemplates!” The Senator again took the prospectus in his hand and opened the pages. “You propose to control the building and the manufacturing of the world,” he continued, reading aloud from the prospectus, “and all the allied trades, to construct and deal in all kinds of machinery, to carry on any other kinds of businesses, to acquire patents and concessions, to erect and maintain gas and electric works, to enter into any arrangement with any government, to promote companies, to lend money —”

“It is summed up in that last clause,” Gorham interrupted, quietly; “’to do all such other things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects.’ You see, I know the articles by heart. May I ask you to glance over the names of the present stockholders?”

Gorham handed a leather-covered record-book to his companion and then walked to the window, where he quietly smoked his cigar, looking out on the broad avenue while the Senator scanned the names written in the small volume. He appeared indifferent to the smothered exclamations which escaped involuntarily from Kenmore’s lips as the latter’s eye passed on from page to page, and for the time being he seemed more deeply interested in the people passing below on the street. His calmness was in striking contrast to the Senator’s growing excitement.

“By George!” Kenmore exclaimed at length, rising and advancing toward the window. “This list of names is even more extraordinary than your stupendous plans.”

“Does not each one explain the other?” asked Gorham.

“But how did you ever persuade such men as these to lend themselves to any enterprise—no matter how attractive? Why, there is hardly an omission—the leaders of the world in finance, politics, diplomacy, literature, art, and science.”

“There are many omissions, as you would discover if you examined the list more carefully,” Gorham answered; “not the least of which is the name of the Hon. Mr. Kenmore!”

“I know, I know,” the Senator replied, impatiently; “but how did you get them?”

Gorham looked at his questioner attentively for a moment before he answered. “The proposition itself appeals to that human instinct which is more or less developed in us all —self-interest—”

“But that, my dear sir, is nothing more or less than—”

Gorham held up a protesting hand. “Let me save you from using so ugly a word as you have in mind, Senator. You are fully justified in having this thought suggest itself to you —such is the business code of morals of to-day. Yet I consider myself an idealist, and

the whole plan on which the Consolidated Companies is based a moral one. I must have succeeded in convincing these men, whose characters are admittedly above reproach, or they could not have been persuaded to become associated with our corporation."

"Idealism, monopoly, and self-interest seem ill-mated partners, Mr. Gorham."

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“Must monopoly and self-interest always be translated into selfishness and oppression?”

“As far as I have observed they always have been,” Kenmore asserted.

“Perhaps so; but must they necessarily be so exercised? Is it not possible to control these human instincts to the extent of producing beneficent results?”

The Senator considered. “I cannot conceive it to be even within the bounds of possibility.”

“Then, unless I can convince you to the contrary, I shall cheerfully withdraw my proposition,” Gorham replied, with decision. “You will admit, I feel sure, that were I to eliminate self-interest the great consolidation which we are discussing could not exist.”

“Absolutely.”

“Will you also admit the possibility—I do not yet say probability—of conducting an organization such as the Consolidated Companies along lines which might be for the public good?”

“Provided the public received the benefits of such economies as your consolidations effected.”

“Precisely—or even a part of these economies. Now, many of our stockholders, whose names you see on that list, are in positions of trust. Our directors have endeavored to select only those whose reputations guarantee the honorable observance of their responsibilities.”

“Then how can they serve the Consolidated Companies?”

“Let me explain more clearly,” Gorham continued. “A franchise for a street railway expires—here in Washington, in Chicago, in London, or in Vienna. Those who are influential in awarding the new franchise are among our stockholders. It is to their self-interest, truly, to place the franchise in the hands of the Consolidated Companies, but it is also to the best interests of the public, who, after all, are most concerned, because the Companies is equipped with men and funds to give them greater efficiency or cheaper transportation than any smaller organization could possibly afford to do. In awarding us the franchise, therefore, these officials are in no way proving themselves false to their trust.”

Gorham studied the half-averted face of his companion carefully before he proceeded. “Do you follow me?”

“Perfectly, although not wholly sympathetically,” the Senator replied.

Gorham smiled at Kenmore's frankness. "Suppose a government requires a loan of, say, fifty million pounds sterling," he continued. "Here in this little book you will find the names of practically all the financial heads of the governments of the world. You will also find here the leading figures in the world of finance. What is more natural than that the Consolidated Companies be asked to negotiate the loan, to the distinct advantage of both parties and of the Companies itself? Incidentally I might say that we shall eventually establish an international bank which will further simplify details. If it is a matter of building bridges, we have among our stockholders the officials who will award the contracts and the engineers best fitted to execute them. Acting as a medium for both creator and producer, and in serving their mutual self-interest, the Consolidated Companies can easily become the greatest patron of the arts, both fine and mechanical, that the world has ever seen,—and all this, with profit to itself. Could anything be simpler?"

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“You are prepared to build navies and also submarines to destroy them?”

“’To do all such other things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects,’” quoted Gorham; “but our energies are always exerted in constructive directions.”

The Senator became absorbed in his own thoughts and was silent for several moments.

“I don’t see yet how those men were persuaded to associate themselves with your corporation,” he said, more to himself than to his companion. “The vast business advantages which it already possesses are quite apparent, but I cannot reconcile the conflict which must exist between the dual capacities of your stockholders as individuals and as public officials or officers of trust. Without intending to cast reflections upon any name I have seen, I can scarcely resist asking myself if every man has his price.”

“I claim he has,” Gorham stated.

The Senator turned upon him sharply. “Then my first impressions of the principles of your enterprise were correct. I beg—”

“Please hear me out, Senator,” Gorham urged. “I believe implicitly that what I have just said is true, yet I venture to repeat to you that I consider myself an idealist and an optimist. A man’s ‘price’ has come to be associated with money. I know this phase—-what business man does not? But beyond this, are there not far subtler influences, which in one form or another draw every man away from the course he would naturally steer for himself as surely as the iron deflects the magnet’s needle? Ambition influences an honorable legislator apparently to condone acts which he knows are wrong, that he may gain a Governor’s chair, from which position he can more surely crush out the evils he has always recognized and abhorred. I do not say that all our stockholders are influenced by the guarantee I have given them that a franchise or a concession awarded to the Consolidated Companies means an advantage to the people they serve, but I have at least convinced them by word and act of my own sincerity, and of the possibility of so conducting the Companies that these results can be obtained. I do not even say that every public official who co-operates with us is actuated by the highest motives in giving the Consolidated Companies special privileges, but I do say that he may properly be so actuated—and the public receives the benefits.”

“But think of the power which this corporation must eventually possess, and the powerlessness of any individual or organization, business or otherwise, to oppose it.”

“Why should they wish to oppose it?” Gorham continued. “As I have said, the combinations suggested can but result in economies in production and consequent reductions in the living expenses of the masses.”

“Yet you would hardly suggest that the Consolidated Companies has been launched as a philanthropic enterprise?”

Gorham’s smile returned. “Not primarily, yet the people have already been benefited in no small degree. It is entirely possible to conduct it along lines which will reduce the cost of all public utilities and necessities, and yet secure large financial returns to the Companies.”

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“I was thinking—” Kenmore began, and then stopped.

“Well?” Gorham encouraged, interrogatively.

“I was thinking what an easy thing it is to mistake a temptation for an opportunity.”

“Or the reverse,” Gorham remarked, significantly, flushing slightly. “Does it not all depend upon the basis on which the corporation is administered?”

As the Senator ventured no reply, Gorham continued, with more feeling than he had as yet displayed:

“You and I, Mr. Kenmore, are familiar with the contention made by our great captains of industry that they are entitled to the vast fortunes which they have amassed as a return for the benefits which the public enjoys as a result of their energy and the risks they have taken. They have opened up new sections of the country, provided transportation facilities which were previously lacking, or have increased those which already existed; they have multiplied industries which promoted increase in population and trade, and have thus largely contributed to the prosperity enjoyed by the communities themselves and by the country at large.”

“All of which the Consolidated Companies claims to be doing, or about to do, upon a scale which makes similar past achievements seem insignificant,” interrupted Kenmore.

“Yes,” Gorham assented, “but with a fuller appreciation that these accomplishments are not the results alone of individual ability, but far more of the exercise of the corporate power placed in its hands, not for its unlimited personal gain, but intrusted to it by law for public advantage. The law confers upon a corporate organization a power far beyond that which any individual himself could obtain; it enables him to make use of capital which thousands have contributed, toward whom he stands in a relation of trust, and without whom he could not accomplish the individual triumphs which become so magnified in his own mind, and for which he demands so great a recompense. The Consolidated Companies considers itself bound to use franchise privileges and corporate organization for the equal benefit of all those who contribute of their capital, with due regard for those public interests which corporations are created to serve, and to rest content with a fair return upon its own capital and a reasonable compensation for their services, on the part of the officers of the enterprises of which it assumes the responsibility and direction.”

“How long do you think the Consolidated Companies can be run upon such altruistic principles?”

“As long as Robert Gorham remains its president and as long as those men whose names you have seen there remain its directors. This is my pledge. When the

Consolidated Companies, intrusted with the power, credit, and resources of the many corporations which are and will be included in it, but which are not agencies of its own creation and do not belong to it, begins to take advantage of these for personal

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profit beyond legitimate return upon investment and fair compensation for services rendered, it will be guilty of a gross betrayal of trust. When it issues securities in excess of the requirements of its business and manipulates them for its own profit; when it makes use of its power, its funds, or its credit in enterprises which are not for the equal benefit of all who have contributed to its capital or in the interest of the public, which gives it its power; when it employs its profits so as to affect the market value of securities and then speculates in these for its own advantage,—then it will be flagrantly abusing a power which has been given to it in trust, and its unique position in the business world will be destroyed."

There was another long silence, which this time was not broken until the Senator was quite ready to speak. When the moment came the question was asked abruptly:

"How much can you consistently tell me of any of the corporation's transactions? I know of them, of course, by hearsay, but I should be glad to receive more intimate information."

"Nothing, without assurances of your serious interest, provided I can demonstrate to your satisfaction the strength of the facts I have mentioned; everything when you care to give me these assurances."

The Senator winced. He had expected to meet a man with whose type he was perfectly familiar, to explain to him that the private affairs of the Hon. James Kenmore, business or otherwise, were always kept entirely distinct from his political life, and to dismiss him with merely the courtesy demanded by the unusually strong letters which had introduced him. But Robert Gorham did not belong to the expected type. There were no earmarks of the promoter about him, in spite of the fact that the enterprise of which he stood as the head and front was in reality the most gigantic piece of promotion engineering the world had seen. On the contrary, Gorham was the refined man of affairs, confident in himself and in the certainty of his strength. And as for dismissal, the Senator realized that his caller had already made himself the dominant power.

"You wish me to subscribe for stock in this corporation to the extent of a hundred thousand dollars?"

"I am empowered by our directors to offer you the opportunity to subscribe for that amount."

The Senator passed over the obvious correction.

"Why am I selected by your directors rather than others of my colleagues whose names I do not observe upon that list?"

“Because we consider your position in the United States Senate to be one of increasing importance, and of value to the Companies,” Gorham answered, frankly.

“Why has the specific amount of my desired subscription been so carefully stipulated?”

“Because your investment in the Consolidated Companies must be heavy enough in its relation to your personal fortune to make the success of the corporation a matter of real concern to you.”

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“Are these amounts, then, uniform in size?”

“Not at all. A hundred thousand dollars to you may be no more than five thousand to some other stockholder, and no less, on the other hand, than half a million to a third. In every case the amount of the subscription is carefully considered.”

“Your directors have made a preliminary estimate of my financial standing?”

“Certainly.”

Kenmore smiled incredulously. “Would it be asking too much to inquire what the inventory, made by your experts, shows?”

“One million two hundred thousand,” Gorham responded, promptly. “Except for your unfortunate investment in the Arizona oil-wells a year ago, it might have been half a million more—a loss which your fortunate connection during the past three years as a special partner in the well-known banking-house of Gilroy and Company has more than made up.”

The Senator sprang excitedly to his feet. “By George! sir, by what power or authority do you make yourself aware of my private affairs down practically to the last penny?”

“I apologize, Senator, if I answered your question too literally,” Gorham replied, quietly.

“But how do you know it?”

“I neglected to state that the secret-service department of the Consolidated Companies excels in efficiency that of any government. You can readily appreciate its importance.”

“And you know with equal minuteness the financial condition of every man on that list?”

Gorham nodded. “Yes; and of every individual, corporation, business house, and government wherever it is of any value to us to know it.”

Kenmore again relapsed into silence. He was experiencing a larger number of new sensations during his conference than he remembered ever having had aroused by any previous discussion. He was angry with himself for having permitted the interview, he was incensed by the proposition itself and the apparent unassailability of the Companies, he was annoyed by Gorham’s good manners and his complete self-control. Never once had this man, who appeared to have his finger upon the pulse of the world, allowed his attitude even to approach enthusiasm. He simply presented facts, and then allowed them to tell their own story.

“You are at liberty, sir, to acquaint me with the transactions of the Consolidated Companies,” the Senator finally remarked.

“Probably a few specific cases will suffice,” Gorham responded, as if expecting to receive Kenmore’s permission. “You will remember, perhaps, the apparently insurmountable complications which arose over the placing of the recent loan of fifty million dollars to the Chinese government, for their currency reforms and other necessary improvements. As soon as the Consolidated Companies assumed the responsibility of the negotiations, all international bickerings ceased, for the Chinese, French, German, English, and American financiers knew that the loan would be

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handled to the advantage of all. I could cite, perhaps, a hundred cases of similar importance, would time permit. As for the present, you are aware that England is building several great men-of-war to restore its navy to its previous supremacy. The contracts for this work have been placed in the hands of the Consolidated Companies. Our political strength was tested in a small way two years ago in causing a cessation of hostilities between Austria and her neighbors. We shall be strong enough before the war cloud gathers too heavily over England and Germany to prevent the grievous calamity which threatens these nations. Shall I give you other data?"

"But the Consolidated Companies separates the world into two parts—" the Senator began.

"Precisely—into those who are stockholders and those who are not. Both are benefited by the existence of the corporation. But is there any question as to which is the more favored class?"

"None whatever," Kenmore replied, with decision.

"Then may I call to-morrow to learn in which class you decide to place yourself?" Gorham asked, as he rose and slipped into his overcoat.

"No," the Senator replied, after a moment's thought. "I will send my secretary to you to arrange the matter of taking over stock to the amount of one hundred thousand dollars in the Consolidated Companies—Unlimited!"

III

If punctuality is a virtue presaging business success, Allen gave evidence, the following afternoon, of a brilliant future. Previously, he had made no criticism of the condition in which his motor-car was delivered to him at the garage, but this time the men found him strangely unreasonable. The brasses had to be repolished, the hood opened up, and the dust wiped from the long-neglected creases, and every detail was inspected with a carefulness which created comment.

"Goin' to sell his car," one of the men remarked, sententiously, to which sage comment his companion nodded acquiescence.

In spite of the delay thus caused, Allen shut off his power in front of the hotel entrance at exactly the appointed hour. He bounded into the lobby, and a few moments later was ushered into the elevator and guided to the Gorhams' apartment.

“Why, it’s Riley!” the caller exclaimed, enthusiastically, as the door was opened for him by Mr. Gorham’s aged retainer—“it’s the same Riley who used to box my ears when I tramped over his flower-beds in Pittsburgh.”

The old man regarded the visitor attentively. “Shure it’s Misther Allen Sanford, grown out iv his short pants into a fine young man, so he has.” A broad grin replaced the questioning expression on his face. “I did box ye’er ears good, didn’t I, sor? but go along wid yer, th’ trouble ye made me, ye an’ Miss Alice a-traipsin’ over me flower-beds.” Then, with a sigh: “Ah, sor, I remimber it as if ’twas yisterday. Miss Alice’s mother was livin’ thin, God rist her soul. Thank ye, sor, f’r remimberin’ me. I’ll call Mrs. Gorham an’ Miss Alice.”

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It was the girl who appeared first, greeting Allen with frank cordiality.

“Eleanor will be ready in a moment,” she said. “Isn’t this the greatest coincidence?” she continued. “Yesterday at this time I had no idea you were within a thousand miles, and now it seems as if we might almost be back in Pittsburgh again, living the same childish life and playing the same games.”

“It was certainly a dandy coincidence for me,” Allen agreed, “but I don’t quite follow you back to the kid games we played.”

“Why, Allen!” Alice reproached him, “have you forgotten the motor rides you and I took with wash-tubs, turned upside down, for seats, and the remnant of your express-wagon for a steering-wheel? My! how fast we used to go!”

“That’s so!” he admitted. “I’d forgotten all about it. You used to look great sitting on that tub.”

“Freckles and all?”

“I didn’t remember the freckles, either, until you spoke of them. You were a little corker, even then.”

“Even then?” Alice repeated, without intending to.

“No one has told you that you’ve gone backward in looks, has he?” Allen laughed, looking straight into her face. Then he continued: “There’s one other game we played, which I haven’t forgotten: Do you remember how we used to keep house together? You were Mrs. Allen Sanford then, and we had everything fixed up—”

Alice sobered. “I—I think I have forgotten that one,” she said. “Isn’t it ridiculous what games children do play?”

“But the motor-car game has come true,” he insisted, “and you’ll look just as good to me sitting in the real car, as you used to on top of that tub. And as for the other—”

“How long Eleanor is taking!” she interrupted; “I’ll run and find her.” With which she disappeared, returning almost immediately, accompanied by Mrs. Gorham.

“I shan’t be asked again, if I keep you waiting so long, shall I?” Eleanor apologized.

“The appointed time always arrives at the same moment that Mrs. Gorham does,” Allen replied.

“So!” Eleanor was frankly surprised by the boy’s gallantry. “If this is a sample, I must agree with your father that diplomacy is your natural field. It would be a pity to waste that in a business office.”

“Don’t you join the opposition, Mrs. Gorham,” he said, seriously. “I’m going to have a hard enough time with the pater as it is. Now, if you’re ready, shall we start? It isn’t going to be the most sociable arrangement in the world, with me driving the car, but we’ll go slowly, which will give us a chance to visit.”

With Fort Meyer as the objective point, Allen took the road through Rock Creek Park to Chevy Chase, feeling attracted, perhaps unconsciously, because it was there he had renewed this acquaintance which promised to end the *ennui* he had experienced during the weeks he had spent in Washington. Slowing his speed down to a point requiring the least attention, he was able to converse with his guests. Alice had said little since they left the hotel, but at last she found an opportunity to free her mind.

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“Eleanor wasn’t serious in what she said about your going into diplomacy, Allen. Any ability a man has in that line is just as valuable in business.”

Mrs. Gorham laughed as she turned to Alice. “Has that been troubling you, my dear?” Then to Allen: “You touched on a very live wire when you said what you did yesterday, Mr. Sanford. Alice thinks that a man who chooses anything but a business career is blind to what life offers him.”

“You do too, don’t you, Allen?” the girl asked.

“Why—yes,” he answered. “I haven’t exactly analyzed it, but I know I’d rather go into business than into the diplomatic service.”

“But you must have some reason for it,” she urged.

“I have—I don’t want to spend my life in other countries. Little old New York is good enough for me. I have lots of friends there, and that’s where I’d like to settle down.”

“New York is a hard place for a young man to start his career,” said Mrs. Gorham. “You will find there an absolute intolerance for the man in the making. New York demands the finished product.”

“But you don’t have to start in New York,” Alice added. “You could make your success in some other city, and then come to New York if you wanted to.”

Allen became unusually thoughtful as the conversation progressed.

“Gee!” he said; “I knew that I wanted to go into business, but I didn’t realize how much there was to think over before doing it.”

“But it’s worth all the time and thought you can give to it,” the girl said, enthusiastically. “I can’t imagine anything grander than to stand at the threshold of the world ready to enter the battle of life, to struggle with the obstacles and to conquer them. Think, Allen—just think of what you have before you, while we girls never get any such chance at all.”

“Yes.” Allen hesitated, carried off his feet by the intensity of the words and the rapt expression of her face. “Yes, I guess it is grand, though it never struck me just that way before. I say!—” he continued, after a moment’s pause, “you’re an enthusiast on this business question, aren’t you?”

“Could she be Robert Gorham’s daughter and not be an enthusiast?” Mrs. Gorham asked.

“If father would only let me, I know I could make a success in business,” Alice continued. “I watch him, when he least suspects it; I study the papers which he leaves around, and sometimes it seems as if I just must be a boy, and get into the thick of it.”

“What a funny idea!” Allen remarked. “I never thought girls cared anything about business.”

“But it’s no use,” she bemoaned. “I’ve got to be a girl whether I like it or not; but you haven’t any such handicap.”

“Haven’t I?—you forget the pater.”

“If you felt as strongly about it as I do, you could persuade him.”

“Have you—met the pater?” he asked, significantly.

Alice smiled for a moment, and then became serious again. “If you have determination enough to succeed in business, Allen, the same characteristic will win out with your father.”

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The boy did not know quite what to answer. Stephen Sanford insisted that the only reason Allen showed a preference for business was because he knew his father had set his heart on a different career for him. It may have been merely an unconscious assertion of his budding manhood which rebelled against having his life-work laid out for him without consultation, just as his governess used to lay out his clothes. At all events, from his very nature, Allen had not considered the matter as seriously as he now saw Alice had done, and he was entirely unequal to the task of holding up his end of the discussion. So, after a few moments' silence, during which she watched him with eager expectancy, he turned his face toward her, and grinned broadly.

"I'm mighty glad you are a girl," he said, irrelevantly; "and I'm mighty glad you can't go into business."

Alice was disappointed on his account, but she chose to reply only to his reference to her.

"Of course," she pouted. "You men are all alike. You're selfish and unsympathetic. You want all the interesting things for yourselves, and—some of you—don't even know why you want them."

"I really believe you're getting personal." Allen laughed. "Don't knock; come right in. Now, to heap coals of fire upon your head, I'll tell you what I'll do, Alice; I'll divide chances with you, beginning with the first."

"Do you mean to say you haven't had even a first chance yet?"

He nodded cheerfully. "Not a single first, to say nothing of doubtful seconds."

"Then it's because you haven't tried," she asserted.

"Of course; but that doesn't mean that some one else hasn't tried. I've been the dutiful son, waiting for 'papa' to show him that the paternal way is the only way; but even the pater hasn't proved a blooming success in that line. The real trouble is that the old man is too conscientious. Just as the President gets all worked up and just crazy to send me as minister plenipotentiary to the Republic of Zuzu, the pater coughs guiltily, and murmurs, 'Oh, yes; he's a good boy, if he is my son, but he hasn't been brought up in my school,' and shows by every movement that he knows he's passing off a gold brick. Then, of course, the whole game is up."

"Why doesn't he take you into his own business?" Mrs. Gorham asked.

"Jealousy or judgment; can't say which."

“Do be serious, Allen,” Alice insisted. “I don’t believe you have any strong feelings about it anyway. No wonder your father gets out of patience with you if you talk to him about it as you do to us.”

“Oh, he gets out of patience, all right,” Allen admitted, “but it’s simply because he can’t refute my arguments. He talks about what he was doing at my age, but I tell him my record is a whole lot better than his. He couldn’t afford to go to college, while I could, and at the same proud point in our careers I was successfully touching him for five hundred a month, while he was with great difficulty earning a hundred and fifty, on which he supported a family. But the pater—well, the pater has a way of looking at things which is all his own.”

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“There is absolutely no use expecting to talk business with you,” the girl declared. “Father won’t discuss it with me, and you won’t be serious at all, and I know Mr. Covington is really laughing at me all the time, even though he tries to make me think that he looks upon me as a very business-like young woman.”

“Who is Mr. Covington?” Allen asked, bluntly, inwardly resenting the fact that any one except her father was as intimate with Alice as the words indicated.

“He’s father’s right-hand man in the Consolidated Companies. If you could once see him and father at work and hear them talk you would understand the fascination of it.”

“Then you like business conversation?” The boy found it difficult to comprehend.

“Better than anything else in the world.”

Allen became really serious. “If that’s the case,” he said, emphatically, “I’m going to become a man of affairs, just to give you that pleasure.”

Alice clapped her hands with delight. “What are you going to do?” she asked.

He turned so blank a face to the expectant one he saw before him that the seriousness could no longer be preserved. The vacuity turned into a smile, and the smile into a broad grin.

“I guess I lose if I have to answer that question now,” he admitted, frankly; “but you keep your eye on Willie and the push-ball, and watch the professor change him into a big roaring captain of industry. Then you shall talk business with him as much as you like, and he won’t make you feel that he’s laughing at you, as that Mr.—, what’s his name, does.”

“Good for you, Allen!” the girl cried, really pleased by the clumsily expressed compliment.

“So all is settled now except the pater, and I’m almost launched on my career,” Allen replied. “Now suppose we take up your case. What have you been doing all these years?”

“Well,” said Alice, smiling, “the history of my life is yet to be written, but the main facts up to the present are that I have safely passed through school and most of my other childhood diseases; that I had my coming-out ball in New York last winter; that I am happy, and—most important of all—that I have Eleanor.”

She took Mrs. Gorham’s hand affectionately in hers as she spoke, and Allen needed nothing more to demonstrate the strength of the bond which existed between the two. It was not the affection between mother and daughters, or between sisters, or friends, but

rather the best of all three merged and purified by the yearning each had felt for that which now each had found.

The conversation during the ride back to the hotel was in lighter vein, in which Allen showed greater proficiency. Alice's interest in him was mingled with a disappointment that the years had not made him older and less irresponsible. She felt herself distinctly his senior, yet she also felt a confidence in his unexpressed ability. To Mrs. Gorham the passages-at-arms between the two children,

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as she would have called them, were refreshing. She knew that each was being benefited by coming in contact with a different nature. Alice's serious side needed the leaven of a lighter viewpoint on life; Allen's buoyancy was already being tempered by her ambition. This was why, when Alice asked her later, in their apartment, "Don't you think Allen needs a little of that 'inspiration' you spoke of?" she had kissed the girl, and answered without hesitation, "Yes, dear; and you are just the one to give it to him."

"Then this is my chance to enter business by proxy?" Alice asked again; and Mrs. Gorham, smiling quietly to herself, had answered, "Perhaps."

IV

After his interview with Senator Kenmore, Gorham walked rapidly down the slight incline from the Senators' office building to the hotel, where the clerk passed out to him a handful of letters and telegrams. In the lobby, unseasonably crowded by the extra session of Congress, he nodded cordially to three or four men who obviously courted recognition, and ascended in the elevator to his apartment.

"You don't know Gorham?" queried one of the men, turning to his friend—"wonderful man, wonderful organizer, head of the great Consolidated Companies. Thought the Consolidated Companies a myth? Well, well! That's a great compliment to the man and his methods. You'll know both well enough before long. But that's characteristic of Gorham—moves along so quietly that you think he's doing nothing; then you wake up and find that his corporation has tucked away a big government contract you thought you'd tied up yourself. Better keep your eye on Gorham and the Consolidated Companies."

"There you are, daddy!" cried a welcoming voice as Gorham threw open the door, the words being quickly followed by a rustle of skirts and an enthusiastic embrace. "I'm so glad you're back early. You know Allen is coming to dinner, and couldn't we all go to the theatre afterward?"

Alice released her father partially, but still held one of his hands in each of her own. Hat, letters, and telegrams had already fallen in confusion upon the floor, as the result of the girl's onslaught. She caught the look, half amusement, half dismay, upon his face.

"Never mind, daddy dear," she continued, reassuringly; "I'll pick them all up in a moment. You will go with us to the theatre, won't you?"

Gorham looked significantly at the telegrams and the letters on the floor.

“Let me see,” he said, doubtfully. “I really ought to work on these papers after dinner. How can I do that and go with you, Puss? There’s a problem for you!—unless I could use Riley for a secretary,” he continued, jocosely. “That’s the only capacity he hasn’t served in. Where is he, anyway?”

“Couldn’t I help you?” she asked, quickly, without answering his question. “You don’t know how much I’d like to. And I’m sure I could,” she added, with confidence.

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“Tut, tut!” Gorham stroked the soft fair hair affectionately, but discreetly. “Little girls shouldn’t concern themselves with such matters.”

The girl released him, and, dropping on her knees, gathered up the fallen missives. Instead of handing them to her father, she sat back and looked up seriously into his face.

“Girls are no good, anyhow,” she rebelled. “If you would only give me the chance, I know I could help you in lots of ways, and then I’d feel that I was worth something. I just can’t stand it to sit around all the time and have things done for me. Oh, why wasn’t I a boy!”

“Come, come.” Gorham raised her gently to her feet, noting the tears in her eyes, and drew her to him. “I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings, dear; but business and battle are meant for men. The Amazons in ancient history didn’t change the order of things, did they? You should be proud to be just what you are. Now give me my letters. There’s some one else I want to see, you know.”

“She’s waiting for you,” Alice replied, simply, looking into his face with comprehension. “She’s the sweetest thing, daddy,” the girl continued. “One moment she is so wise that she seems old enough to be my truly mother; and then again so young and sympathetic as to be just an older sister. I can’t tell you how much she does for me every day, or how completely she understands me.”

“You and I are mighty lucky to have Eleanor, Alice,” Gorham replied, feelingly. “We should both be very grateful to her, dear.”

“I *am* grateful, daddy; and I love her better every day. There’s Riley; he’ll help you get ready for the theatre.”

Gorham made no answer, but patted his daughter’s cheek affectionately as he turned from her to the genial face of his valet and general factotum. The old man had been in Gorham’s family for forty years, and his loyalty to “Misther Robert” had steadily increased during the period which had elapsed since “Old Gorham,” as his original master had been known in Pittsburgh, delivered him over to his son as a part of the house and household effects which constituted the paternal wedding present. Now, ten years Gorham’s senior, he still adopted an attitude at once protective and admiring, enjoying that intimacy which is the reward of a lifelong service of loyalty.

“Miss Alice wishes me to go to the theatre to-night, Riley,” Gorham remarked as the man relieved him of his coat.

“Yis, sor; ’twill do ye good, Misther Robert—ye wid so manny grand plans in ye’er head. ’Twill do ye good, sor.”

“But I have so much to do, Riley,” Gorham protested. “The more items I cross off my daily memorandum, the more I find left there to be done.”

“Yis, sor; that’s right, sor—I know it’s right; it’s just like th’ Widow Cruse’s oil jug in th’ Bible, sor. But th’ widow come out all right, Misther Robert, and ye’ll do th’ same. I’ll have ye’er things ready f’r ye in a minnit, sor.”

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If Riley was in the conspiracy for the theatre-party, Gorham realized that opposition would be futile, so he turned into his wife's room.

"I thought I heard voices in the hall," Mrs. Gorham greeted her husband, affectionately. "You have returned early, which will give us a little visit together before dinner-time. Has the day been satisfactory?"

Gorham did not reply at once. He held her face between his hands, looking down into the depth of her eyes with a strength of feeling which she could but sense. There was an expression of expectancy, an unspoken desire that she should recognize something which as yet she had failed to see. There was a tenseness which would have frightened her except for the tenderness which accompanied it.

"Why do you look at me like that, Robert?"

"Because I love you, Eleanor," he replied at length. "Isn't that an admission for a man of my age to make? I know it always, but there are times when I must tell you so. Don't call it weakness, dear, or sentimentality. There is a relief which I could never explain in turning from these battles with men and with events to your companionship, which demanded nothing from me except myself."

"Nothing except yourself?" Mrs. Gorham smiled, reassured. "What more could one ask or give? Now that you have confessed, I must do likewise: I simply count the moments every day until you come, but I never should have dared to tell you for fear you would laugh at me. What would this callous world say if it discovered that the great Robert Gorham and his insignificant wife were really in love with each other! But I am so thankful for it, dear. What do the years mean unless they add to one's power to love?"

"The thankfulness is mine, Eleanor," Gorham replied; "but I shan't let you speak of 'the years' at twenty-six. Wait until you add twenty-five more to them and reach my dignified estate."

"It is experience which adds the years, my Robert; and this almost gives me the right to priority."

"I know, I know," her husband replied, drawing her gently to him. "Do you never forget it?"

"You and the dear girls have softened the past into a memory which I can at least endure," she continued, "and you fill the present with so much happiness that I rarely have time to look backward."

"Alice spoke just now of how much you had been to her, and it started something moving in my own heart. That is probably what led me to speak as I did."

“Alice is a darling,” Mrs. Gorham replied, happy beyond words at the double tribute received from father and daughter. “Just now she is passing through what seems to her to be a crisis, and she needs assistance from us both.”

Gorham looked at her in surprise. “A crisis?” he asked.

“Yes, Robert; and the responsibility is yours: you have passed on to her, as directly as heredity can do it, that love of business which has made you what you are. You have been denied a son, but whether you wish it or not your daughter naturally possesses those very business instincts which you would have been proud to recognize in your son.”

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“You amaze me,” Gorham replied. “Alice is forever trying to persuade me to let her help me and all that, but I have attributed it simply to an affectionate desire on her part to be of service to me.”

“It is more than that—there is the reflection of yourself in the girl’s soul which demands expression.”

“But it would be absurd for her to do anything of that kind.”

“Why so? I don’t mean for her to go into a business office, of course. But could you not gratify her by explaining certain problems which she could grasp, and then give her an opportunity to work them out herself in some minor personal matter of which you have so many?”

“It seems ridiculous to me,” Gorham said, after a moment’s silence, “but I will think it over carefully. I am disappointed, I admit, that neither one of my children, especially Alice, should have been a son to perpetuate my name and to continue my work; but that was not to be, and my daughters are all that I could ask.”

“They are indeed,” she assented, feelingly. “I believe Alice realizes your disappointment and actually reproaches herself, poor child, for not being what you wished.”

“Oh, no!” he protested. “I must set her right on that at once. I admit my disappointment, but that does not lessen my appreciation of my blessings. You and the girls are everything to me—and you have given me more than a son in your wonderful conception—the Consolidated Companies is your child, Eleanor, for without your suggestion of an organization founded upon an altruistic basis I should never have thought of creating this corporation which is now certain to be the greatest power the world has seen.”

“You give me too much credit, Robert. That was simply a chance suggestion; it was your master mind which gave it life.”

“It is yours, none the less,” Gorham insisted; “and this great corporation may be the means of giving me my son and successor, after all.”

It was Eleanor’s turn to show surprise, but he did not wait for the question which was on her lips.

“It is my hope that Alice may marry Covington,” he continued, “and I see no reason why this should not be. She is, of course, a free agent, but I think Covington will have little difficulty in winning her. He has an attractive personality, and I know that she already admires and respects him. He is a man of rare ability and is my natural successor.”

“There seems to be no logical obstacle,” Eleanor admitted; “but her heart is yet to be awakened.”

“As far as that is concerned,” Gorham said, decisively, “Alice will not altogether disregard my wishes in the matter; and the awakening will be all the healthier if the child is guided.”

“We must never do more than guide her,” Eleanor said, apprehensively.

“I don’t intend to. Now tell me something of this youngster who seems to have made quite an impression on my entire family.”

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Mrs. Gorham smiled as her mind reverted to the afternoon. “We had a charming ride,” she said. “Allen has an over-developed bump of humor which encourages him to be irresponsible, but he is a likable boy and I enjoyed him.”

“Probably all he needs is a smaller allowance and a greater necessity.”

“I judge he isn’t likely to get either from his father. As you know, Mr. Sanford insists on his becoming a diplomat, while he prefers to go into business. This naturally interested Alice, and they had a most amusing discussion about it. He really doesn’t know why he prefers business, but Alice has helped him to crystallize his ideas. In fact, she has quite fired his ambition. I think you will enjoy your conversation with him at dinner to-night, Robert, for he is really most ingenuous, and a bit of advice from you will help him just now, even if he doesn’t measure up to your standard of business capacity.”

“You think me a stern master, don’t you, Eleanor?” Gorham pressed the hand he held in his.

“It would be unfair to judge him by yourself. Boys of to-day are not having the early training that fell to your lot, and their latent ability is just that much slower in showing itself. You see so much of the serious side of life, it will be diverting to hear the frank expressions of one of the younger generation. I am curious to know what you think of him.”

“I couldn’t take him into the Consolidated Companies,” Gorham said, flatly.

“That isn’t what I mean,” his wife hastened to reply. “You don’t think this a disregard of your desire not to have me refer to business?”

“No, dear; I understand, and shall be glad to talk with the boy. I hope you also understand as clearly why I have had to take this seemingly arbitrary position. My day is filled with problems which require nerve and confidence in my own judgment in order to carry them through. I must let no one influence this judgment, and even a suggested preference from those I love might do it. More than this, my brain is clearer each day when I can claim an evening with you and Alice, with no intruding thoughts of business detail. Now I must send a few telegrams to clear the way for the theatre this evening. You really want me to go with you?”

“Alice has set her heart on it, and as for me—well, you know how little any evening means to me unless we are together.”

“Then I will send Riley to see about the seats.”

“But before you do that, I have a complaint to make.”

Gorham smiled at the expression on his wife’s face, half serious, half humorous.

“Who is the culprit?”

“Riley,” she replied.

“Riley?” her husband repeated. “Good heavens, don’t tell me that you and Riley have been having trouble!”

“Not trouble, exactly; but really, Robert, he treats me as if I were a child.”

“No!” Gorham assumed an incredulity he did not feel. “Tell me all about it.”

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“It is too absurd to speak of, but I was really annoyed with him for the moment. He actually wouldn’t let me go shopping this morning—he said I was too tired, and absolutely refused to order a cab.”

Gorham laughed. “Well, wasn’t he right?”

“That isn’t the question. Even a privileged servant ought not to presume too far.”

Gorham did not speak for a moment. “Do you know, Eleanor,” he said at length, “that idea regarding Riley never entered my head before. He was the bloody tyrant of my childhood, and I would have incurred even my much-dreaded father’s wrath rather than risk a disagreement with Riley. Actually, if he had disapproved, I question whether I should have dared to marry you! Even now I can feel my old-time trembling coming on at the thought of reproving him because he prevented you from overdoing. He would consider me an ingrate for not recognizing that it was done in my best interests, and I should positively lose caste.”

Mrs. Gorham laughed in spite of her temporary chagrin in the face of her husband’s genuine discomfiture, which he tried to conceal by the lightness of his words. She wondered at the extremes he manifested—quiet but firm and immovable as the rock of Gibraltar in his business dealings, unaggressive and yielding in all which had to do with his home life. She hastened to withdraw her complaint.

“Don’t worry about Riley,” she laughed. “The next time I want to do something of which he doesn’t approve, I’ll have it done before he knows anything about it.”

“You don’t think I’m supporting Riley against you, do you?”

“No, indeed,” Eleanor replied, smiling; “I understand your feelings about him.”

Gorham drew a sigh of relief. “I always want you to bring everything to me, Eleanor—-everything, no matter how slight, which worries you. You will always do that, won’t you?”

“Of course”; Mrs. Gorham looked up quickly.

“You always have, haven’t you, dear?”

“Why, yes, Robert; do you doubt it?”

“Sometimes I have a feeling that there might have been something in those sad years of yours which I could make lighter if you shared it with me.”

“You have made everything lighter and brighter,” she replied, gratefully, yet without directly answering his question.

V

Patricia would also have made complaints of Riley had she not considered herself entirely competent to cope with the situation. The child's disappointment at being left behind had made this a trying day for the whole family, and Eleanor's delay in joining Alice and Allen for the ride had been caused by her efforts to straighten matters out before leaving Patricia alone for the afternoon with the declaration of open warfare still in force between her and the old man. Nine times out of ten, Patricia played the tune to which Riley danced, but this was the tenth, and an older understanding would have heeded the signals of the approaching storm.

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“I don’t say she has more iv it than other childern,” Riley explained to Mrs. Gorham; “but th’ divvle is in ’em all. Go ’long wid ye’er ride, Missus Gorham, an’ lave her ter me. ‘Tis th’ firm hand I’ll be afther showin’ her, but th’ tinder wan, like I done wid her fa-ather forty year ago. Ye lave her ter me, ma’m.”

So the motor-party set out with one member of it uncertain of what might happen during her absence; but there was no uncertainty in Patricia’s mind. She watched the departure of the car from the window, and then slammed the door, knowing well that the noise would arouse all sorts of apprehensions in Riley’s soul. A vigorous knock soon rewarded her efforts.

“Come in,” she called, innocently.

Riley stood in the doorway, with a hand resting on each hip, astonished into silence by the peaceful scene before him. Patricia was seated in the middle of the bed, completely surrounded with pillows, and fanning herself nonchalantly.

“Phwat made ye slam th’ dure?” he demanded.

“Did it slam?” she asked. “It must have been the draught. There’s an awful draught around this apartment—haven’t you noticed it, Riley?”

“I haven’t noticed nuthin’ excep’ that ye are a bad little gurl.”

“It’s the ‘divvle’ in me—coming out, isn’t it, Riley? That’s what you told mamma Eleanor, and you ought to know.”

“Shure, I ought ter know, an’ I do know.”

“I thought you did.” Patricia smiled sweetly. “But if a person has the ‘divvle’ in him, it is much better to let it get out.”

“’Twud take more room than there is here ter let it all out iv ye,” retorted the irate Riley.

“You are no gentleman, Mr. Riley, to speak to a lady like that,” she said, severely. “You may go now.”

“Will ye be th’ good gurl if I lave ye by yersel’?”

“How do I know if it’s all out of me?”

“Shure, it oughter be,” he declared, in despair. “Will ye thry?”

“Certainly, *I’ll* try.” Patricia was demureness itself. “If anything happens, it will be the ‘divvle’s’ fault, so you mustn’t hold me responsible.”

“It’s ye’er own divvle, ain’t it?—ye can make it do what ye want.”

“*I* don’t know,” protested Patricia. “I didn’t even know I had a ‘divvle.’ It was you who discovered it; and people who discover things have to be responsible for them, don’t they?”

Riley shook his head in desperation. His arguments were exhausted, and all that was left to him was retreat.

“I wuddent be that child’s gov’ness f’r all th’ money in th’ world,” he muttered, as he shuffled through the hall. “An’ ter think they lift her home fr’m ch’ice. ‘Twas th’ lucky day f’r Miss Mary—but I wish her here.”

Finding the coast clear, Patricia moved the scene of her activity to the reception-room. Here she undertook to put into execution the latest idea which had struck her fancy, which was nothing less than a medieval tournament on as elaborate a scale as the properties at hand would permit. The hotel had not been furnished with an eye to contests of chivalry, but chairs, turned wrong-side up and covered with table-cloths, made richly caparisoned steeds; and Patricia’s imagination easily supplied the riders.

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At first the Knights and their horses were ranged together at one end of the room.

“You are Front-de-B[oe]uf,” the child announced, laying her hand upon the first overturned chair; “and you are Bois-Guilbert, and you Malvoisin. We ought to have some others, but there aren’t any more table-covers.”

Then she moved Front-de-B[oe]uf into the centre of the arena.

“You stay there ’til I get my shield and lance,” she said, and the war-like Knight made no protest.

Patricia next appeared with an open umbrella dexterously held in front of her, and a heavy cane belonging to her father in her hand. Front-de-B[oe]uf may have been intimidated by the militant figure which approached him, but he stood his ground bravely.

“I’m the Disinherited Knight,” Patricia announced to the assembled multitude, pausing a moment to receive their enthusiastic plaudits.

“Largesse, largesse, gallant Knights!” she cried, boldly. “That means that I’m bigger than any one else,” she explained. “Love of the Ladies—Glory to the Brave!”

With this ample notice of her intentions, the Disinherited Knight charged Front-de-B[oe]uf with a frenzy which resulted in his utter disgrace. The trappings were torn from his steed by the fury of the onslaught, the horse itself was overthrown, and Patricia surveyed the carnage with the utmost satisfaction.

“We shall meet again, I trust, where there is none to separate us,” she said, solemnly.

A truce was declared while she dragged Bois-Guilbert into the lists.

“To all brave English hearts and to the confusion of foreign tyrants,” was the war-cry, and in a moment more Bois-Guilbert had shared the fate of his predecessor. This time, however, the Disinherited Knight did not escape unscathed, as the front foot of the adversary’s steed made a dismal rent in her umbrella shield.

Malvoisin alone remained, and he in turn took his stand against the redoubtable champion. But Malvoisin, contrary to history as Patricia knew it, proved the most stubborn adversary of the three. The heralds had not properly cleared away the debris from the tilting-field, so when the Disinherited Knight forced Malvoisin back, Bois-Guilbert supported him from behind. Patricia had found the other two so yielding that she was unprepared for this unexpected defence, and the result of her attack was the complete demolition of the umbrella and a bad fall for herself, in the course of which her lance struck the glass door of a bookcase standing near.

The noise of the fall, together with the crash of glass, brought Riley rushing to the room. Patricia recognized his indignation without need of explanation. Forgetful of her bump, she again seized the cane, and repeating her cry, “To the confusion of foreign tyrants,” she charged the old man with such vigor that he stepped aside with astonishing agility, allowing her to pass him into the hall. This was all that the now thoroughly frightened Patricia desired to accomplish. Dropping the cane, she rushed into the bedroom, and retreated underneath the bed, whither she well knew Riley’s infirmities would not permit him to follow.

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“Come out o’ there,” the old man commanded, close behind her.

“It’s lovely under here,” the child answered; “I’d rather stay.”

“Phwat in th’ name o’ Hiven have ye been doin’?”

“Playing tournament, Riley,” came back the voice from under the bed. “It’s a splendid game. Do you want to learn it some time?”

“‘Tis mesel’ has sumthin’ to learn ye,” he retorted. “Come out o’ there, I say.”

“I couldn’t think of it. I’m tired.”

“Well, ye oughter be—smashin’ up th’ furnichure, an’ makin’ a noise like a wake. Wait ’til I gits hold iv ye.”

“You are a foreign tyrant, Riley—I shall never yield to you.”

“Furrin fiddlesticks—I’ll lave th’ whole mess f’r ye’er mother ter see when she gits home, d’ye mind.”

“All right, Riley; I’ll wait for her here.”

Again the old man retreated, his indignation increasing as he waited for the return of the motor-party. Mrs. Gorham was given no opportunity even to remove her wraps before she was solemnly led to the scene of the disaster. Allen and Alice followed close behind, ignorant of the nature of the calamity, but feeling certain by Riley’s manner that it was a serious one. They gazed for a moment at the wreck before them.

“What has happened, Riley?” Eleanor cried, anxiously.

“It looks as if a vacuum-cleaner had been at work,” volunteered Allen.

The old man’s emotions were so strong that he could scarcely speak.

“What has happened?” again demanded Eleanor.

“Miss Pat,” was all that Riley could articulate.

“But where is she—has she been hurt?”

“No, ma’am; but she done it. She’s under th’ bed in ye’er room.”

The entire party rushed to the bedroom, not knowing what they might find. Mrs. Gorham knelt on the floor and raised the counterpane. There lay the Disinherited Knight, fast asleep, exhausted from her first jousting victories.

“Pat!” cried Eleanor, “are you all right?”

“Hello, mamma Eleanor,” she answered, sweetly; “is Riley after you, too?”

VI

Mr. Gorham studied Allen carefully during dinner. What Eleanor had told him of the boy interested him, and his intimate knowledge of Stephen Sanford’s personality made him a more sympathetic adviser than might otherwise have been the case. Allen, too, was distinctly attracted by Gorham, though his eyes rested more often on the girl facing him across the small table, who seemed even more lovely to him now, in a soft, clinging gown of exquisite texture. His memory of Gorham had been indistinct, but he had heard so much of him through his father and others during these intervening years that he was prepared to see a man who would intimidate him by his severity and awe him by the manifestation of his greatness. In fact, associating business success with his father’s

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manners and methods, Allen had come to believe that force meant noise and bluster, and that firmness stood for an intolerance of discussion. But here, in the midst of his family, Robert Gorham displayed a side of his nature which Stephen Sanford had never seen; yet Allen was no less conscious of the man's power. The boy was more quick to sense than he was to analyze, and it was not until he had left the Gorhams, some hours later, that he was able to satisfy his silent query as to what was reminiscent in the strength behind Gorham's genial face and cordial bearing. The thought took him back to his college days, and the course in ancient history which, strange to say, he had enjoyed most of all—to the old-time Roman emperors, born to command, and indifferent to the criticism or the commendation of the world in which they labored, made up of the lesser men they dominated.

The conversation at the dinner-table soon turned to Allen's experiences in Europe, and his naive manner of telling about them afforded no little amusement.

"I like everything in London except the telephone," he explained. "It's easy enough to blow in the hot air, but it takes a whole lot of experience on the flute to make the proper connections with your fingers. And to get a number—well, it's a joke, that's what it is."

"Is it really worse than our service?" asked Alice.

"Worse? Why, ours is a direct line without a switchboard compared with theirs. I gave it up altogether after my experience trying to get Crecy & Brown—you know them, Mr. Gorham. I dropped into the office of one of the pater's correspondents and asked to use their telephone. One of the clerks offered to help me out, and I let him.

"'I say, miss,' began the clerk, 'put me through to Crecy & Brown, will you?' Then a few moments went by. 'Oh! thank you very much,' was his reply, and he restored the receiver noisily to its position on the rack. 'They have no telephone,' he said.

"I looked at him a moment, then I said as calmly as I could, 'and yet they say the English are slow.'

"'Do they?' he replied, good-naturedly. 'I don't think I quite follow you.'

"'Why, they have taken that telephone out since four o'clock yesterday afternoon. In America it would have required several days.'

"'Oh, you're joking,' he laughed; 'they couldn't have taken it out since then, you know.'

"'But they have,' I said, boldly, making a noise like the pater. 'I called them up myself at that time yesterday.'

“Then he rang the central office again. ’I say, miss, the gentleman is really positive that Crecy & Brown have a telephone, you know.’

“Some more minutes passed by, and again the clerk said, ’Oh, thank you very kindly,’ and he put the receiver back.

“‘They have no telephone,’ he said.

“‘There you are,’ I cried, ’it has been taken out since four o’clock yesterday afternoon. It’s simply wonderful!’

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"'You Americans are such bally jokers,' the clerk said. 'They really couldn't have done that, you know.'

"'But they have! I still insist.'

"Then the Englishman went into a trance for a moment. 'I believe you think they have a telephone, after all,' he declared.

"'I really do,' I admitted.

"'Well, we'll soon find out,' the clerk cried, with an awful burst of speed, striking a bell upon his desk.

"'George,' he said to the boy, 'run around to Crecy & Brown's, will you, and see if they have a telephone.'

"I sat there for twenty minutes, discussing the weather, the Derby winner, and all the other favorite English subjects before the boy came back.

"'Yes, sir,' the boy reported, 'Crecy & Brown have a telephone, sir. Their number is 485 Gerard, sir.'

"The clerk got me the number this time, and I did fairly well. Then I sat down.

"'Did you want to call another number?' he asked me.

"'No, not two in the same day,' I said; 'but over in America we always pass out something to the operator when she gives us wrong information like that—just for the good of the service.'

"'I suppose I ought to reprimand her,' the clerk admitted—'call her down, as you would say.'

"'If you don't, I will,' I told him.

"'Oh, I had much better do it,' he replied, hastily, taking the receiver in his hand.

"'I say, miss,' he chirped, 'that number you just gave me, 485 Gerard, *is* Crecy & Brown, you know, the one you said had no telephone. Rather a good joke on you, isn't it, miss?' Then he slammed the receiver on its hook.

"'There!' he said, 'I think that will hold her for a while, as you say in your country!'

"Wouldn't you think that would have just mortified her to death?"

Alice laughed. “If you were ambassador to England, Allen, you could change all that. Perhaps that’s the niche for you, after all.”

“What’s a ’niche’?” demanded Patricia, taking advantage of the first opportunity to join in the conversation.

“What do you think it is, dear?” Mrs. Gorham asked, smiling.

“I think an itch is an awful feeling; why do you want him to have that?” Patricia replied, sinking into obscurity at the laugh which her definition evoked.

Her father, who had been an interested listener thus far, came to her rescue, and took advantage of Alice’s remark to turn the conversation in the direction he had previously determined upon.

“You haven’t heard from your father recently, I judge?” he said.

“I have an idea that the pater has overlooked me,” Allen replied; “he’s been so busy with other things.”

“Why don’t you fall in with his ambition to make a diplomat of you?”

“Well—I suppose the strongest reasons are those which I can’t put into words, Mr. Gorham, but one that seems pretty good to me is that I don’t think I’m fitted for it.”

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“Why not?”

“I’m too optimistic, I think, to make a good diplomat. If a man’s a gentleman, and treats me square, I’m apt to think he’s all right—and, from what I hear, in diplomacy the one who fools the others the most times is the best fellow. Isn’t that right?”

“Some people would tell you that the same thing holds true in business.”

“I know; but in business there seems to be something more tangible to work on. Of course I don’t know anything about it, but I think I could make a better show selling bonds or cotton than *ententes cordiales*.”

“Have you made any effort to secure a position?”

“Not yet, Mr. Gorham. The pater would be more than peeved if I didn’t wait for him and his diplomatic expectations. But if he doesn’t get busy pretty soon, I think I’ll hike it over to New York, and see what’s doing.”

Gorham smiled in spite of the boy’s earnestness. “Surely your father would realize how much in earnest you are if you talked to him as you’re talking to me now.”

“Father always looks upon me as a joke,” Allen continued. “He made his own way, you see, and then, because he was rich, he didn’t want me to endure the hardships which really made him what he is. He gave me plenty of money all the way through Harvard, and ever since, in fact; yet he is always wondering why I lack ‘initiative.’ He’s been mighty generous, and I appreciate it all, but don’t you think it’s one thing to build your own character and economize because you have to, and another to economize when you know you don’t have to? I guess that’s my complaint.”

“He was very proud of what you did at college,” Gorham said. “I never used to meet him without hearing about some of your athletic triumphs.”

“I suspect it is you who call them triumphs,” Allen replied; “that doesn’t sound like the pater to me. Of course, some of the things I did in college seemed worth while at the time; I tried for the football team, and I made it—by hard work, with a hundred other fellows doing their best to push me back on the side lines; I tried for the crew, and I made it; I rowed two years at New London, and there was some work about that. I’m afraid I made athletics my vocation and studies my avocation, but I tried to do what I undertook as well as I knew how, and some of the boys still think I’m pretty good in certain lines.”

“Life is scarcely a football-field, my boy,” Gorham remarked, sententiously. “The world of business admits of no vacuum. It is the survival of the fittest, and work is the great secret of success.”

“I know what a ‘vacuum’ is, anyway,” Patricia was recovering from her temporary chagrin.

“Now is your chance to square yourself,” said her father, turning to her, kindly.

“I learned that at school last winter,” the child continued, proudly: “a ‘vacuum’ is the place where the Pope lives when it is vacant.”

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“There, Allen,” laughed Gorham, “you have no excuse for not understanding my statement.”

“Not in the least. Lady Pat has explained my whole difficulty! But, after all, Mr. Gorham, don’t you think there are some things about business and football which are the same?” pleaded Allen, when Patricia was again quieted, his attitude with Mr. Gorham being quite different from the one he had affected with Alice. “I’ve often tried to think what I’d do if I ever got started, and I’ve said to myself that when I came up against the other fellow I’d just grit my teeth and say, ’That confounded Eli shan’t get through’; and I’m pretty certain that he’d find something in his way before he got the contract I was after.”

Gorham was distinctly interested in the boy’s intensity. “Suppose I write a line to your father and suggest that he take active steps to get you started somewhere.”

“Please don’t,” Allen said, quickly. “I’ll write him myself at once. If you do it, he’ll think I haven’t got the spunk. Perhaps I can put it strong enough so he will realize that I’m tired of killing time running about in my motor-car.”

“I thought your father told me you had lost your license, for speeding.”

The boy grinned guiltily. “‘Allen Sanford, owner,’ lost his license, but ‘A. Sanford, chauffeur,’ is still allowed to run a car.” Then turning to Mrs. Gorham: “You didn’t realize you were riding with a chauffeur to-day, did you?”

“You had two licenses?”

“I couldn’t possibly get along without them here in Washington. I guess you don’t know how wise these police guys are.”

Gorham looked at the boy steadily for a moment with an amused expression in his eye.

“I have half a mind to try it,” he said, aloud.

“Taking out two licenses?” Allen asked, innocently.

“No,” Gorham answered; “I was thinking of something else. Your father will be here some day this week, Allen, and you will have a chance to discuss the whole matter. Perhaps you can get him to agree to some compromise. Whatever you go into, remember what one of our great captains of industry once said—and it’s as applicable to diplomacy as it is to business—’The man who starts first gets the oyster; the second man gets the shell.’”

“I’ll settle it definitely when I see the pater,” Allen said, with determination, “and if I live through the interview I’ll go for that oyster with a flying start. Oh, I expect I’ll find plenty of good interference against me, but I can stand that. What’s that story in mythology

about the hydra or something—every time they cut off its head two more grew? That's what I'm going to be—a hydra. Every time I get turned down I'm going to bob up twice again, and, the first thing you know, somebody will give me a job just to get rid of me."

VII

After the theatre Mr. Gorham devoted himself to some late despatches which required immediate attention, so Alice and Eleanor found themselves in the apartment alone. The latter wore a more serious expression than her face had shown earlier in the evening, and the girl was quick to notice it.

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“You are not feeling well,” she said, more in the form of a statement than as a question, looking at her anxiously. “What can I do for you?”

Mrs. Gorham smiled quietly as she impulsively drew Alice to her and kissed her.

“There’s nothing the matter, dear,” she answered, pleased with the intuition which prompted the anxiety; “there was something about the play which brought back old memories and they hurt me—that is all.”

“Dear heart,” was all the girl replied, yet the words brought grateful tears to Eleanor’s eyes.

“Are you tired?” she asked, suddenly, with an appeal which caused Alice to look at her inquiringly, but she did not wait for the unnecessary negative. “Then come into my room and let us have a little talk before we go to bed.”

As Eleanor sat down Alice threw herself on the floor at her feet, and resting her elbows upon the convenient knees, with her face upon her hands, she looked up expectantly.

“I love these cozy talks,” she said. “There is something about this particular hour of the night which makes anything which happens in it of the greatest importance. How beautiful you are! I love just to look at you—no wonder father worships you!”

“You are a sweet child, Alice,” Eleanor said, stroking the soft hair affectionately, while unfastening the loose coils until they fell over her shoulders in masses of rippling gold. “You have no idea how much you have done to make my life as happy as it is now. What has your father ever told you about me?”

“Nothing, dear, except that you had suffered much before he met you, and that it was our privilege to try to make you forget the past.”

“Was that all?”

“All about you. He told me how happy you had made him, so of course I loved you at once.”

“And you never asked any questions?”

Alice looked surprised. “Why, no; if father had wished to tell me any more he would have done so without my asking.”

“I am glad,” Eleanor said, simply. “It is better for me to tell you myself.”

Mrs. Gorham paused, and Alice realized that this was not the time to interrupt. Eleanor seemed to be bracing herself as for an ordeal, yet when she spoke the words came with perfect calmness.

“You were ten years old when your mother died,” she said.

The girl’s face saddened. “Yes, just Pat’s age now; and the next four years were so lonely until you came. I try never to think of them. Pat was too young to give me any companionship, so I was virtually alone with my governess. Father never realized my unhappiness. He was so busy with his own matters that, young as I was, I knew that he must not have mine to worry about.”

“Those were the years in which I suffered, too,” Eleanor replied, quietly. “Perhaps that is what drew us so closely together from the first. Four years of torture!” she continued, more to herself than to the girl before her.

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“Why do you speak of them?” Alice begged. “Why not forget them, as I have tried to do?”

“I do try, dear, but the play to-night brought everything back to me. How strange that we should happen on that particular one so soon after your father and I had spoken of those years! The ’Great Divide’—God only knows the human agony and truth those words contain!”

Eleanor controlled herself before she continued.

“It is a story which I have told only once before, and I had not thought to take any one except your father into its sad confidences; but you should know it, dear. My father’s health broke down after mother died, and he was ordered West in the hope of prolonging his life. I was sixteen then, two years younger than you are now. We went to Colorado, on a ranch which father had bought upon the recommendation of a friend. How well I remember the first impressions I received of that glorious country: the exhilaration of that wonderful air, the inspiration of those towering mountains, the novelty of the strange new conditions! I rejoiced in the largeness of everything, and it seemed to me, those first few days, as though life amid these surroundings could but reflect the richness with which nature itself overflowed.”

Alice’s eyes were fixed upon Eleanor’s face with intense interest. The girl sensed even in these preliminary words the importance of what was to follow, and was unwilling to lose a single syllable. Eleanor caught the interest and sympathy of the girl’s face as she paused for a moment, and it gave her strength.

“Were you quite alone there?” Alice asked.

“Practically alone—the nearest ranch was four miles from ours. Naturally, we saw few people, the most constant visitor at this time being a young man who owned the ranch next to ours, who, during the year, had ridden over to see us with increasing frequency. His name was Ralph Buckner, and he seemed to us to be a characteristic product of the West—with his large frame, bluff manners, and frank, open countenance. We all liked him, and the fact that he differed so much from the Eastern men I had known perhaps caused me to show a greater interest in him than I really felt. At all events, no girl was ever more genuinely surprised by an offer of marriage than I was, when it came unexpectedly one day, with that determination back of it to secure what he desired which was a part of the man himself. I did manage to collect my senses long enough to insist that I have time to think the matter over—for I had no idea of marrying him; but, much to my surprise, father approved the idea from the moment I told him of the proposal. Then it developed that Ralph had already approached him on the subject. Father, poor dear, thought only of my future and what he believed would be my happiness. It was so evident that I held in my hands the solution of his most serious problem that he never knew the misgivings I felt from the first. He could live on at the

ranch for the present, busying himself with the work which kept him out-of-doors; then later, if he preferred, he could come and live with us."

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“Couldn’t he see what a sacrifice it meant to you?” Alice asked.

“No, dear; you must remember that, in his way, Ralph was an attractive fellow. He had been successful with his ranch; he was agreeable and intelligent; his Western boldness, as it seemed to me, was at times tempered with a certain gentleness hardly to be expected in a man of his nature; and, all in all, he was a man to whom any girl could at least give respect, and affection might come later. It meant settling down in the West for the rest of my life, but this was inevitable, anyway. I must forget the old friends and the old associations, and could I not do this better with a husband’s help than alone? I asked myself a thousand questions and ended by deciding that I would marry him.

“It was a short courtship—delay was a word not found in Ralph Buckner’s vocabulary. We were married and began our life at his ranch, which, as I say, was near enough to my father so that we could be in frequent communication. He had been much concerned about me, having discovered more of my homesickness for the East than I had realized, so to see me well settled and apparently happy relieved him of a heavy load.”

“But you weren’t happy even at first,” Alice insisted. “How could you be?”

“I say ‘apparently happy,’ dear, for that was all it was. Ralph did what he could for me in his own way, so at first it was perhaps my fault that we were not more congenial; but his ways were not my ways, and I kept looking for what was not there. He was well-born, but his life on the ranch for so many years had dulled his appreciation of those finer, innate qualities which every wife craves—he had forgotten how to be the gentleman. Don’t think that I expected the impossible, or anything incongruous to the life we were leading; but there are little attentions, thoughtful considerations and other things in a husband’s relation to his wife, trivial perhaps in themselves, which the wife expects and misses if she does not receive—the more so, if she has deluded herself into believing that the instincts for them are inborn, and only require her suggestion to develop and bring them to fruition. These qualities he had seemed to show before we were married, but they proved to be only a veneer which soon wore off.”

“Why do you bring this all back now ?” Alice asked, sympathetically, seeing the lines deepen in Eleanor’s face.

“I must tell it to you, dear—we have grown so close that I feel this is all that remains between us. When you know this, we shall be sisters indeed.”

“We are that already and more,” Alice urged. “Only think how near of an age we really are.”

“In years, yes; but sometimes I feel as if I had already lived centuries.”

“Will the telling of this take a few of those centuries from you?” the girl inquired, smiling.

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“I hope so; and that is one reason why I am asking you to share the burden with me. All that I have told you so far has been unimportant compared with what followed. Had it simply been a difference in temperament, I have no doubt that I should have become accustomed to the absence of these things I craved, and have adjusted my life to meet the new conditions. But other and more serious difficulties soon arose. With Ralph Buckner possession seemed to be enough. I have seen him scheme for months to secure some high-bred horse or a fancy breed of cattle, and after they became his property hardly care whether he ever saw them again. So it was with his wife. Within six months he resumed his fortnightly visits to Colorado Springs on alleged business, from which he always returned worn out and ill-tempered. Until we were married, I had no idea that his life on the ranch and his life in Colorado Springs were so distinctly apart, but I was soon to learn it with bitter clearness.”

As the story progressed Alice could feel the increasing tenseness. Eleanor had herself well in hand, but the occasional break in her voice evidenced the strain.

“There was a so-called club in Colorado Springs whose members included the wildest young men of the town and several of the younger ranchmen who were able to stand the pace. In this Ralph was a leading spirit, drinking and gambling with that abandon which was his dominant characteristic. ‘Buckner is a poor gambler but a good loser,’ one of them is reported to have said, but that only meant that Ralph succeeded in concealing his real feelings until he reached home; for it was his wife who received the full force of the reaction as his brain cleared from the fumes of the liquor and he came to a realization of his losses.”

She paused and looked at her companion, and encouraged by Alice’s rapt attention continued:

“Our baby was born a year after we were married—”

“I never knew of that,” the girl said, quietly.

“Don’t,” was the reply; “I can’t go on if you weaken me by your sympathy.”

“Forgive me, dear Eleanor,” Alice murmured.

“By that time every remnant of a tie which held us together had disappeared. The child, however, was a real link, and for a little while gave us something to think of besides ourselves. For a year, perhaps, Ralph went less frequently to Colorado Springs, and I came to think that we might possibly be able to continue our lives together for the child’s sake. But the novelty wore off from this new plaything, as it had from the others, though it lasted longer than anything else ever had, and then Ralph’s absences from the ranch became more and more frequent and of longer duration. I cared little for this, as it

enabled me to take Carina to my father's ranch, where I forgot for the time being the emptiness of the home to which we must sooner or later return."

Alice glanced up tenderly. "Poor dear Eleanor," she said, softly; but Mrs. Gorham went on without heeding:

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“One day, when little Carina was three years old, we were visiting at my father’s. It was late in the afternoon, and we were playing some child’s game together when the door was suddenly thrown open and Ralph glowered in at us, his face purple with drunken anger. Even the four-mile ride had failed to sober him, and he leaned against the framework of the door to steady himself. The child, startled by the sudden interruption and terrified by the expression on her father’s face, ran to me for protection, burying her little face in my lap.

“‘That’s right,’ he leered at her; ’that’s what they teach you to do here—make you hate your father, don’t they? I’ll give you a chance to get acquainted with me.’

“Then he crossed the room and tore the child from my arms, in spite of her shrieks of fear and our joint efforts to stop him. Even my father, who did all he could, was helpless against the man’s almost superhuman strength. In a moment he had mounted his horse with Carina in front of him, and was galloping at breakneck speed down the long trail which led to our ranch. Father rushed to the barn, but I was there before him. Between us we saddled the mare I had ridden so many times before I was married, and I urged her forward to make up as much as possible for the lost time. But I had not far to go—”

The recital proved too much for Eleanor, in spite of her efforts to control herself. Her eyes filled with tears, and her body was convulsed with emotion as she bent her head until it rested against her companion’s face.

“Don’t, dear,” urged Alice; “tell me the rest some other time.”

“No, no!” Mrs. Gorham cried; “you must know it all, and then we need not speak of it again. I had gone over less than half the distance when I came upon them both lying in the trail. I never knew how it happened. He told some one afterward that the horse stumbled. It may have been that; it may have been anything with him in that condition. He had fallen at the side of the trail and was conscious before I left him, but Carina was —dead.”

“Don’t, don’t go on—I can’t stand it!” cried Alice.

Eleanor paused as if in response to Alice’s appeal, but a glance at her face showed that an emotion stronger than even the words had expressed was holding her in its grip.

“Father was dead, too, when I returned,” she said at last, her eyes still gazing into space.

“The excitement killed him?” Alice asked, breathlessly, still further shocked by the double tragedy.

“That and his anxiety over my unexplained absence.”

“Your absence?” queried the girl, mystified by Eleanor’s apparent incoherency. “Didn’t you just say that he was dead when you returned?”

Mrs. Gorham started violently. “What am I saying!” she cried, involuntarily. In a moment she was herself again. “Yes, dear, of course I returned; but not as soon as he expected, and the shock of it all killed him. You understand, don’t you? I was very ill, and a friend helped me to a hospital in Denver.”

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“But you said you had no friends except the man you married,” Alice urged, trying to follow the narrative.

“Yes, dear, you are right,” Eleanor replied somewhat confused; “but one always finds friends when in trouble, you know. It was so with me, and after I recovered my strength I lived on there in Denver with the small legacy my father left me, supplemented later by a little more from the sale of the ranch. A year after Carina’s death I applied for a divorce, on the ground of desertion. My lawyer found Ralph somewhere to serve the summons on him, and reported him as having already become a professional gambler and a confirmed drunkard. He made no defence at the trial, and I have never seen him since.”

“But it’s all over now, Eleanor dear,” Alice said, soothingly. “Daddy and I will try to make up to you for what you have been through. You must let us do that.”

“You have done it already,” Eleanor replied, feelingly, her temporary obsession having passed. “You and darling little Patricia have become a real part of my life, and my one prayer has been that I could do as much for you. Your father restored my lost faith in men almost the first time I met him in my lawyer’s office in Denver.”

“Yes.” Alice accepted the tribute to her father as a matter of fact. “He nearly killed himself in Pittsburgh before he gave up his business there, and he went out West two or three times to get back his health. And the last time he brought you back, too. I have always loved the West for that.”

Mrs. Gorham smiled as she continued: “I learned of his work from others and from himself, and rejoiced to find a man with real ideals, in business and in his every-day life, actually lived up to. I had no notion of what that first chance meeting would lead to, of the home that it would give me among my girlhood friends, filled with the love and sympathy which my heart had always craved. Now you know the whole story, Alice dear—now you know why the tears come sometimes to my eyes as I press to my heart that quaint, precious little sister of yours, so near the age Carina would have been, who softens the memory of the sweet dead face by giving to it a living reality.”

“I understand,” the girl cried, throwing her arms about Eleanor’s neck and embracing her warmly. “I can’t say the right thing now I am so unstrung, but I love you even more than ever because you’ve let me share it with you.”

So they separated for the night—the woman’s heart bleeding from the reopening of the former wound, yet happier that her accepted confidante had become acquainted with that part of her life which was consecrated to a memory; the girl made older by the sudden drawing of the curtain from one of life’s daily yet unheralded tragedies.

VIII

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Stephen Sanford arrived in Washington two days later. Little as the boy realized it, his father's pride in his son was unbounded, and stood out in marked contrast to the sterner elements in his character which had combined in such fashion as to enable him to carve out a success among and in competition with the sturdy, persistent business luminaries who developed Pittsburgh from an uncouth bed of iron and coal into a great manufacturing centre. His friends rallied him on his many indulgences to his son, all of which he accepted in good part, with a uniform rejoinder that, say what they liked, his son was going to be brought up a gentleman.

Allen's boyhood was guided by private tutors, and so hemmed in with conventions which even to his youthful mind were obviously veneers, that it was with a positive relief that he welcomed the change from the restraint of home to the freedom of college life. Yet the boy naturally possessed inherent qualities which, while not leading him to drink too deeply from the fount of wisdom, still kept him within lines which won for him the affection of his fellows and the respect of his instructors, even though his standing as a student was far below what the professors thought it might have been.

During all this period his father followed his career with that same care and insight which had characterized his own business success. He was proud of the position which the boy took—proud of his ability to mix well with his fellows; proud of his splendid run against Yale at New Haven which placed the ball within striking-distance of the blue goal; proud of his seat in the victorious eight at New London, and equally certain that the other seven had not done their full duty when the shell was nosed out by Yale at the finish on the succeeding year. If the boy had missed getting his degree Stephen Sanford would have considered his son a failure, but with the prized parchment actually secured—the first in the history of the Sanford family—he cared little how narrow the margin.

Yet Allen had passed through all these years without a suspicion of his father's real feelings toward him. He was rebuked for his extravagances each time he asked for money, yet a substantial check always accompanied each rebuke. He was criticised for not making a better record in his studies, and his success in other lines, it seemed to him, was always accepted as a matter of course. He felt convinced that his father looked upon him as a colossal failure, and he was too good-natured to quarrel with this estimate of his abilities; yet with characteristic optimism, he saw no reason to let this fact interfere with his every-day life and the pleasures it offered him.

So Allen went to Europe soon after graduation and acquired further experience in running a motor-car in England and on the Continent, together with an increased familiarity with foreign scenery and the most expensive hotels. On his return, he announced his desire to begin his business career, more because that was what his classmates were doing than because he was anxious to exchange the freedom of his present life for the confinement of an office.

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“You leave that to me,” his father had answered, brusquely. “What you don’t know about business won’t help you any in giving advice. You’re going into the diplomatic service.”

Unfortunately for the smooth execution of Stephen Sanford’s idea, the whole country at this moment happened to be agitated over the discovery that a member of the diplomatic corps at Washington had taken advantage of his official position to secure plans and information, which he had transmitted to a power unfriendly to America, but allied to the government which he represented. The diplomat fled, ignominiously disgraced; but as far as Allen could judge from the comment he heard, his greatest sin was considered to be the breaking of the thirteenth commandment, “Thou shalt not be found out.”

All this prejudiced the boy unduly against diplomacy as a profession. In his eyes the acts of this man were unsportsmanlike; and to Allen Sanford, who looked upon a “good sport” as the noblest work of God, this charge was the most serious in the category of crime. But his expostulations and protests to his father were of no avail. Stephen Sanford had made up his mind, and that was the end of it. Until he met Alice, Allen had been more upset because his father still treated him as a child than on account of any serious opposition to plans which he himself had formed. He had never yet focussed himself upon any one particular determination with sufficient strength to make his father’s objections other than an annoyance. But now, assimilating a part of the girl’s enthusiasm, and strengthened by the instant admiration which Mr. Gorham commanded, he was determined to make a stand at this point, taking the head of the great Consolidated Companies as his model, and with lance in hand to charge the world just as he would have “bucked” the Yale line. Even the undesired diplomatic position was apparently not forthcoming; now he would not only make an effort on his own account, but he would insist upon his right to do so. He did not know that the real reason he had heard nothing from his father during these weeks was because the positions which had been offered thus far appeared to the older man too insignificant for his son to be able to accept with dignity. As one of the Pennsylvania senators remarked, “Stephen Sanford evidently expects his son to go to the Court of St. James.”

With Allen in this mood, it was not surprising that the meeting between father and son, immediately after Stephen Sanford arrived in Washington, should have ended in a declaration of war. During the interview Allen gave abundant evidence of his unfitness for anything which required diplomacy; and his father, surprised to find in the boy a will as unyielding as his own, and angered beyond expression by Allen’s opposition, lost all control over himself and stamped out of the house, leaving his son behind, cast out forever from his affection, protection, and support.

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“Let the young cub starve for a while and he’ll realize what his father has done for him,” he fumed. “Let him shift for himself and we’ll see how soon he’ll come home to roost.”

On he stamped along the street, his cane expressing upon the pavement the anger which consumed him, but becoming less violent as he approached the hotel where he had his appointment with Gorham. He must calm himself, he urged, inwardly. He had acted in the only way he could, and his old friend must not think he had been hasty or in judicial in the position he had taken. He must be deliberate and self-possessed, as Gorham himself would have been under the same circumstances. Then the cane came down again on the hard pavement with a resounding blow. “Damn Gorham!” he muttered; “damn all these smooth-mannered men who never lose their tempers; damn everybody!”

“Come in, Stephen, come in; I’m glad to see you,” Gorham greeted him as he puffed into the apartment, almost exhausted by the double strain of losing his self-control and his strenuous efforts to regain it. “I didn’t realize it was so warm outside. This is the most summer-like October I have ever seen. Sit down and I’ll have Riley mix you up something cooling.”

“No,” commanded Sanford, “not a drop; I’m cool enough. I’ve been hurrying, that’s all. Haven’t forgotten how fussy you are about keeping appointments on the minute, you see.”

Gorham laughed. “I must have learned the trait from you; but it doesn’t apply to an old friend like Stephen Sanford,” he said. “Business is business, of course; but you wrote me that you wanted my advice. There are no minute appointments in friendship, Stephen. My time is yours.”

“Thank you.” Sanford was sparring for breath. “I haven’t pestered you much with my personal affairs, have I?”

“You couldn’t ‘pester’ me with them, Stephen. If I can serve you I’ll be as glad to as you would be to reciprocate.”

“Yes, yes.” The visitor still employed monosyllables as far as possible as his vehicle of expression, but he was mastering his emotion.

“Have you seen Allen?” Gorham asked, naturally but unfortunately.

Sanford sprang out of his chair and waved his arms wildly. “Why do you try to stir me all up again ?” he cried. “Can’t you let me get my breath?”

Gorham looked at him amazed. “Has anything happened?” he asked.

“The young reprobate! I’ll show him. I’ve cut him off without a penny, Robert; do you understand—without a penny!”

“You’ve done what?” Gorham demanded, his face sobering.

“I’ll show him that he can’t make a monkey out of his father. You’ve seen him, Robert. You know what an obstinate, headstrong cub he is. Wants to go into business, does he? Thinks he knows what’s good for him better than his father does, does he? I’ll show him. He can go to the devil now—that’s where he can go.”

Gorham knew better than to interrupt Sanford until his tirade was spent. He watched him pacing up and down the room; he noted the twitching of his features, the clenched hands, and the violent color in his face.

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“You’re taking chances to let yourself get worked up like this, Stephen,” he said, quietly, at length. “You and I are growing older, and our systems won’t stand what they used to.”

Sanford stopped abruptly. “That’s what he’s counting on, the ingrate. I’ve spent my whole life building up those furnaces and making money so that he might be a gentleman. Now he throws it all over, and he thinks I’ll shuffle off in one of these spells; but I’ll fix him. Not a penny of my money shall he get—not one penny.”

“How has Allen disgraced himself? Has he been stealing, or is it forgery or murder?”

“You—you,” Sanford sputtered, “you dare to suggest that my boy would disgrace himself! You—you—”

“Sit down, Stephen, and calm yourself,” Gorham laughed. “No one could think of a less heinous crime than I have suggested, judging by your own arraignment of the boy. How can I help you unless you tell me what has happened?”

“I’m an old fool to let you string me so, but I’m all used up.”

“And the boy has been a young fool and proved himself a chip of the old block—how is that for a guess?”

“So you’re going to take sides with him, are you?”

“How can I tell until I know the circumstances ?”

“He won’t do what his father tells him,” Sanford explained. “That’s the situation in a nutshell.”

“Good! Now you are becoming communicative. So you’ve cut him off because he won’t do what you tell him?”

“Yes—the young reprobate. How he ever broke into my family is more than I can understand.”

“You’re sure your way is better than his, are you, Stephen?”

“Of course I am. Aren’t you?”

“I don’t know what your way is any more than I know Allen’s, so I can speak without prejudice. I just wanted to be sure that you had given both sides of the question sufficient consideration to be certain of your position. It’s a serious thing to send your own son adrift, Stephen.”

“He’s my son, isn’t he?”

“I judge that he has proved that.”

“Would you let a son of yours lead you around by the nose?”

“No; nor would I condemn a high-strung colt to the bone-yard because I couldn’t put a bridle on him the first time I tried.”

“H’m!” Sanford ejaculated. “It’s the women who don’t have children who always attend ‘mothers’ meetings.’ Of course you know just how to handle a son.”

“If you hadn’t thought I had some ideas, I don’t suppose I should have had the pleasure of this interview.”

“Then you think he ought to be allowed to go into business?”

“This proposition seems now to have become of secondary importance. The main issue is whether or not a boy twenty-three years old is to be allowed to express his ideas when they differ from his father’s. Allen, apparently, has settled the matter without any advice from either of us.”

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“You don’t know what that boy is to me.” Sanford’s voice broke a little in spite of him.

“I can imagine,” Gorham replied, feelingly. “I know what he would be to me if he were mine.”

“He’s all I have in the world, Robert. I’ve had to be father and mother to him. I’ve given him the best education money could buy, I’ve sent him to Europe to get that foreign finish every one talks about; and now he won’t do what my heart is set on.”

“If the boy wants to go into business, why don’t you make a place for him in your own concern? That’s where he ought to be—to take the responsibilities off your shoulders, one by one, and to continue your name.”

“Put Allen in my furnaces?” Sanford demanded, his choleric attitude beginning to return. “How can you make a gentleman in my furnaces? Do you suppose I’d buy a twenty-thousand-dollar painting and hang it up in the cellar? No, sir; I mean to make something out of that boy better than his father is, and that isn’t the place to do it. But in the diplomatic service they’re all gentlemen—that’s why I want to put him there.”

“And if you can’t have your own way you prefer to lose the boy altogether?”

“Oh, he’ll come back, the young cub. He’ll see which side his bread is buttered on. It’ll be a long time before he can earn the five hundred a month I give him for an allowance, and he knows it. He’ll be back.”

“I’m not so sure,” Gorham said, seriously.

“You don’t think—” Sanford began, showing signs of alarm.

“Would you in his place?”

“That’s nothing to do with it; he’s only a boy.”

“Did you—in his place?”

Sanford looked up quickly. “I had more cause,” he replied. “My father was unreasonable; his isn’t.”

“Allen’s ideas on that subject may differ from yours. Now, if you want my advice, here it is: Go back to that boy. Tell him you’re ashamed to have lost your temper, and advise him to guard against that greatest weakness which his father possesses. Tell him you want him to go into the diplomatic service for a time to gratify your ambition for him, but that if, after the trial, he prefers business you will stand right back of him and get him started. Tell him, as you have just told me, that he is all you have, and that he must make certain sacrifices for your sake, that he must bear with your weaknesses and

profit by your points of strength. But, above all, make him feel that you believe in him, that you're proud of him, and that you've been a fool to make such a humiliating exhibition before him as you did this afternoon."

The gathering storm in Stephen Sanford's face did not deter Gorham from finishing his remarks. He knew that his old friend had seldom, if ever, had the truth spoken to him as unreservedly as now; but he had been asked for his advice, and he proposed to give it.

"You—you—" Sanford choked in his rage. "So that's what you think of me, is it? It's worth something to know that. Knuckle down to that young cub and have him putting it over me for the rest of my life? What do you take me for? I'll see him starve first. Why should you undertake to advise me about my boy—"

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“Chiefly because you asked it, Stephen.”

“Well, I don’t ask for it any more. With all your experience you’re not competent—”

“Should I have shown greater competency if my advice had agreed with your own ideas?”

“Don’t try to juggle with words, Robert. It’s all off between the boy and me, understand. I’ll paddle my canoe and he can paddle his. When he’s ready to use my stroke he knows where my landing is. And now good-day to you. ‘Bear with my weaknesses, eh?’ ’Humiliating exhibition.’ Good-day, I say.” And without giving Gorham the opportunity to do so he flung open the door and stamped out into the corridor to the elevator, his cane keeping time with the tumult of thoughts which surged through his brain.

Gorham watched the unyielding back of his friend until he turned the corner, then he closed the door.

“Poor old Stephen,” he sighed to himself. “If I had only been blessed with that boy.”

IX

Allen had ample opportunity to act the part of the hydra. When his father left him after their stormy interview the boy utterly failed to realize the seriousness of the situation. The “pater” had been angry with him before,—if the truth be told, he was usually angry with him,—so the fact that the altercation this time had been more severe than usual was a matter simply of degree. The cutting off of his allowance was a tangible evidence that his father was more than ordinarily angry; but, on the other hand, Allen felt himself to be the aggrieved party, and in a virtuous burst of righteousness he declared to himself that he “didn’t want the pater’s money, anyway.” He considered it fortunate that it was still early in the month, and it did not occur to him to consider the rather handsome balance he still possessed as too tainted to retain; but as he looked at it the upshot of the whole matter was that now he would be forced to go into business at once—and this was his strongest desire since he had met Alice. So Allen “hiked it” to New York, and spent a fortnight seeking out the opening which should best offer him the opportunity to become a captain of industry with the least possible delay.

In the mean time, Covington had returned to Washington to assist Gorham in putting through a government contract for the building of the new battleships just authorized by Congress. He found his chief gratified by the continued advance of the Companies’ interests, but still more impressed by the personal responsibility which this success entailed.

“I repeated the cable from Brazil to you by wire,” Covington remarked.

“Yes; the Consolidated Companies now controls the coffee output of the world. With the economies which we can introduce in production and handling there will be a saving of about twelve millions a year.”

“That will be a handsome addition to the dividends already assured the stockholders,” Covington observed.

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“Only a drop in the bucket compared with what is to come,” Gorham assured him. “The people can now save six millions a year on their breakfast cup of coffee, while the Consolidated Companies may conscientiously drop the other six into its own cup by way of sweetening.”

“You don’t really mean that you are going to throw away all that profit?” was the incredulous inquiry.

“I’m not going to ‘throw away’ any of it.”

“I know,” Covington said, quickly; “but six millions is a large sum of money, and one million given to the public by way of lower prices, if properly advertised, would accomplish the purpose just as well.”

Gorham looked at him critically. “You’re not serious, are you?”

“As serious as you are.” Covington smiled understandingly. “This is man to man now, you know; that other talk is a great card for the Companies, as you give it. Of course it isn’t necessary to give away so large a share of the savings.”

“Not necessary, but just and—good business,” replied Gorham. “This is where you and I and the others in the Companies can reap our richest dividends: we can take the tremendous profits which we are receiving with the gratifying knowledge that every dollar we get is clean, and represents an equal sum saved to the people. No one of us has made an unfair penny out of the promotion; no one of us has improperly used the information which has come to him while negotiating our consolidations; there is no act of ours, individually or officially, which will not stand the fullest publicity. What other corporation can make that boast, Covington? The most baneful influence which corporate power conveys is that it blinds the eyes of those possessing it to all except their own single, selfish purpose; that it dulls their hearts so that every beat takes them farther away from humanity, and that it hardens their hands until they can feel nothing but the gold which they clasp to their breasts. They have thrived upon special privilege just as we are thriving, but see the difference. In our hands this weapon, which has previously been turned against the masses, is being made an advantage to them and not a menace, and yet a profitable enterprise for those who wield it. I tell you, Covington, when this double purpose can no longer be served, the Consolidated Companies must cease to exist.”

“Splendid!” exclaimed his listener, with undisguised admiration. “This is the first time I have personally had the opportunity of listening to that irresistible appeal which has given the Companies the most remarkable list of stockholders in the world. But tell me —how much of that saving are you really going to give back to the public?”

“Your jest is ill timed,” Gorham replied, sternly. “I do not choose to have even you make light of so serious a subject. Let us have no more of it.”

Covington retreated behind the inexpressive barrier of his superbly controlled features, but the coldness of his eyes showed his resentment.

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“As you wish, Mr. Gorham,” he replied, as they separated, and he directed his steps toward the hotel.

“Does he think me a fool?” he said, petulantly, to himself. “Why should he always hold himself above the rest of us? I’m working for the Companies just as he is, and there is no reason why he should try that bluff with me. ’When this double purpose can no longer be served the Consolidated Companies must cease to exist.’ Bah! I can see the shearing ahead of us as well as he can, and he won’t gain anything by trying to assume the role of the Almighty, leaving us to be the wicked partners.”

He showed no evidences of his ruffled feelings when he reached the hotel. Alice was expecting him, but she was in ignorance as to the nature of his errand.

“We are to have our first lesson this morning,” he announced.

“First lesson in what?” was the surprised inquiry.

“In business and finance,” Covington enlightened her, smiling. “Your father has given me the privilege of helping you manage your first business enterprise. A part of one of the concerns recently assimilated by the Consolidated Companies is a prosperous mail-order department which we intend to continue, for a time at least. Your father’s instructions are that all the mail shall be brought to you each morning by a stenographer, who will receive your dictation and bring the letters back to you in the afternoon for your approval and signature. For a time I will give you such advice as you need, and later you will have matters entirely in your own hands as long as you wish to remain manager of the department. How do you like the idea?”

“It is perfectly splendid,” Alice cried, her eyes sparkling. “When am I to begin ?”

“I will explain some of the details to you now,” Covington answered, drawing a package of papers from his pocket. “You must make yourself perfectly familiar with these, and we will take the business up seriously when you return to New York.”

“Why did father do this?” the girl demanded, suddenly.

Covington was surprised. “Isn’t it something you wanted?” he asked.

“More than anything else in the world, but father never seemed to realize it. If I can only do something to help, and feel myself accomplishing no matter how little, I shall be the happiest girl in the world.”

“Others who are not so wholly engrossed have seen what you wanted, Miss Alice. Perhaps you have them to thank in part.”

“I do thank you, Mr. Covington, and it is good of you to take all this trouble to teach me how to do it,” she said, gratefully. “I know how valuable your time is, and how much it must interfere with your work to gratify this desire of mine which probably seems foolish to you all.”

“Such an experience is of value to any girl, but especially to you who are in the dangerous position of being threatened with large interests to look after; and as for me, I shall consider this as one of the pleasantest of my daily duties.”

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“You and father are so good to me.” Alice held out her hand impulsively, after grasping which Covington spread out the papers on the table preparatory to the first lesson. The girl watched him, all eagerness, then suddenly she laughed aloud and clapped her hands.

“Won’t Allen be surprised when he hears that I’ve gotten my position before he has his?”

“Allen?” queried Covington, looking up from his papers.

“Yes, Allen Sanford. Do you know him, Mr. Covington? He’s a friend of mine and I’m very much interested in him.” Then she paused and her face sobered. “Perhaps I ought to let him have this chance,” she mused. “He offered to share his chances with me.”

“Do you mean Stephen Sanford’s son?”

“Yes. Do you know him?”

Covington smiled, and for some unexplainable reason the girl did not like his smile.

“We could hardly accept the substitution, Miss Alice. I understand that the boy is erratic and irresponsible. His father has just disinherited him.”

“You don’t mean it!” Alice cried, really concerned over this first news of the result of Allen’s interview with his father. “That must have been yesterday. I wonder why daddy didn’t tell me.”

“Your father’s mind is pretty full with his own affairs, Miss Alice, without taking up Mr. Sanford’s.”

“But I must see Allen and help him—he will need my inspiration now more than ever.”

“Shall we begin on our first lesson?” Covington asked, watching the girl carefully.

“Please do,” she said. “I wonder if woman’s part is to give inspiration even after she is the manager of a business,” she said aloud, but to herself rather than to her companion.

“It is always woman’s part to give inspiration,” assented Covington.

“I must ask Eleanor,” the girl said. “Please show me the papers, Mr. Covington,” she continued, turning to him with her mind at last centred on the new proposition. “Your pupil is all attention.”

* * * * *

Alice saw Allen just before he left for New York and also immediately after his return, and the two interviews were interesting in their diversity. In the first, Allen made light of the trouble between his father and himself, and was so filled with confidence as to the results of his approaching visit to the metropolis that the girl's anxiety was much relieved.

"The pater is all right, Alice," he said; "he just doesn't understand me, that's all. He's done everything in the world for me and I'm more grateful than he realizes; but I can't let him keep tying on my bib, can I? Now I've got to show him that I'm a man too, and then he'll come around all right. I'm going over to New York to-night and I'll tell you all about it when I come back. I'm not afraid of being turned down. You're a girl and you'd be mortified to death if any one turned you down, but with us men it's different. You remember what I told your father—and I meant it. Watch me do the hydra act until I get located, and then—well, then I'll start a branch mail-order department and push you off the map, Miss—Manager."

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When he returned Alice welcomed him full of anticipation.

“What have you gone into?” she demanded.

The boy’s eyes fell as they met hers. “Well”—he hesitated—“I haven’t gone into anything. I guess Mrs. Gorham is right about New York being a hard place to get started in, and I can’t exactly claim to be a ‘finished product’ yet, can I? You see, they all knew I was Stephen Sanford’s son, and they were as nice to me as could be. They asked me up to dinner, and then I knew it was all off for getting a job. The heads of big concerns don’t ask their office-boys to their homes to meet their families, you know. But I’m not a bit discouraged. I’m going to find something if I have to tear a hole in the road chasing it.”

A few evenings later Allen called again upon the Gorhams. It would have been apparent even to those less observant than Alice and Eleanor that something had happened, for the boy’s face glowed with suppressed excitement.

“I think I’ve found a job,” he announced, scarcely waiting for the formality of greetings. “I’m not sure, but I want to talk it over with you.”

“What is it, Allen?” cried Alice, expectantly.

“It’s a whole lot better than it sounds, I’m sure. I’m afraid you’ll laugh when I tell you. It’s selling books.”

“A book agent!” Mrs. Gorham exclaimed.

“There! that’s just what I was afraid of.” Allen’s expression showed mingled distress and despair. “It really looks like a corking good chance, yet it’s a ten to one shot that I’ll be laughed out of taking it before I begin.”

“Don’t mind what I said.” Mrs. Gorham hastened to atone for her involuntary exclamation. “I suppose it can be a perfectly honorable occupation, but I can’t help thinking of some of the experiences my friends have had. Tell us all about it.”

“Eleanor and I would be the last ones to discourage you,” Alice added. “I think it’s fine that you have gotten as far as this.”

Allen’s drooping spirits revived at once, and he beamed at Alice gratefully.

“I’ve simply got to get more experience,” he said, emphatically. “Mr. Gorham told me that most of the best companies have no time to develop their own material, and I’ve made up my mind definitely that I’m going to do my own developing right now; and when I’ve polished up the material until I can see my face in it, I’ll apply again to Mr. President, and say, ’Here I am, all developed—now will you give me a job?’”

“Splendid !” cried Alice, clapping her hands. “Now tell us what you’ve found. Where is the book-shop?”

“It isn’t in a book-shop at all,” Allen replied, his assurance again beginning to wane. “It’s just what Mrs. Gorham called it.”

“Oh,” the girl remarked—“going around from house to house?”

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Allen nodded his head. “But think of the experience I’ll get, Alice,” he insisted. “The directions say, ’If the man of the house is at home make some excuse and call again’; but with my usual luck he’s sure to see me first, and then I’ll go out on three legs. I suspect the material will get polished all right. But the talk that man gave me to learn is certainly straight from Persuasionville. Honestly, I’m tempted to buy a set of the books myself—only tempted, mind you; and so far I’ve resisted. I’d like mighty well to try it on you before I take any chances.”

Alice and Mrs. Gorham exchanged glances as Allen busied himself untying a small package he had brought with him. In the girl’s face there was deep concern, but Eleanor found it difficult to conceal her amusement.

“There!” said Allen, triumphantly producing a thin booklet. “Here is the brochure, as they call it, and here are the rules of the game. You take the instructions, Mrs. Gorham, and correct me if I go wrong, and I’ll try to sell a set to Alice.”

The boy endeavored to cover his consciousness with a broad grin.

“Isn’t this great!” he asked.

“How did you find this chance?” Alice queried, still a little doubtful as she seated herself in preparation for the experiment.

“Saw an advertisement in the *Star*—’ Agents make one hundred to five hundred dollars a week,’ it said, and from what the man at the office tells me there isn’t any chance to lose—except, perhaps, for the fellow who buys.”

“What are the books?” inquired Mrs. Gorham.

“Travel books,” Allen answered, promptly; “the *Home Travellers’ Volumes*. Great title, isn’t it? Of course they’re not meant for people who really travel as you do, but for those who stay at home. You’ll see in a minute. Are you ready, Mrs. Gorham?”

“All ready,” was the reply, as she held the leaflet of instructions where she could follow.

Allen squared himself for his maiden effort.

“I have been requested, Miss Gorham, to give you this beautiful brochure which describes the *Home Travellers’ Volumes*. This is one of the many color-plates which adorn the work.” Allen skilfully held the pamphlet so that the pictures could be seen. “These wonderful volumes supply to those who cannot leave their homes all the pleasures, benefits, and entertainment of travel in foreign lands. Do I turn a page yet?” Allen appealed to Mrs. Gorham.

“Not yet,” she replied. “It says, ’Here open your prospectus and turn to the first color-plate.’”

“But I did that. You saw it, didn’t you, Alice? Oh, yes, I remember. You learn how the people get about in different countries and cities; as, for instance, the jinrikisha in Japan.” Allen turned the page.

“Did you do that hurriedly?” asked his coach.

“Do what hurriedly?”

“The directions say, ‘Turn page hurriedly.’”

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“I’ll remember that. Now I will show you how Morocco is treated. Great Scott! I’ve forgotten how many pages to turn! Here it is! Look at it quick, Alice, before I forget the next! The author tells us that the natives have such a hatred for Christians that they refuse to use these splendid bridges. The Moors—”

“Wait,” interrupted Mrs. Gorham. “It says here, ’Emphasize the pictures by pointing to the bridges.’”

“All right—consider those bridges pointed to, Alice. The Moors are intellectual mummies.” Allen carefully turned two pages, and encouraged by a nod of approval from Mrs. Gorham proceeded. “Why, Miss Gorham, if a Moor happens to sit down upon a tack he doesn’t curse or swear or rail at fate; he simply murmurs, ‘It is written,’ and carefully replaces the tack for some other Moor to sit on.”

“It doesn’t say that,” Alice protested, laughing.

“Well, if it doesn’t it ought to,” insisted Allen, taking the instruction sheet from Mrs. Gorham’s hands to prevent Alice from satisfying her curiosity. “You’re not supposed to read the instructions, you know. You are just to sit there entranced while I do this monologue act—you’re not even expected to ask questions, as any indiscretion such as that is apt to make the agent lose his cue. Your part comes at the end when I give you a perfectly good little piece of patient paper, which you may spoil any old way you like so long as you sign your name or make your mark—all of which you will discover in due time if you follow the professor closely and learn his habits.”

Alice and Eleanor were convulsed with laughter over Allen’s antics, but the boy soon sobered down and again assumed his dignified demeanor.

“Please observe, Miss Gorham, these endless aisles of arches which form part of three miles of stables built by Mulai Ismail, the tyrant sultan. He was a superb horseman. It is said that he was able in one graceful movement to mount his steed, draw his sword, and neatly decapitate the slave who held his stirrup—”

“You are reciting that, Allen,” Mrs. Gorham broke in.

“I know I am. Isn’t that right?”

“No; it says, ’Commit the following to memory absolutely, but appear to read it.’”

“Oh, sorrow! After spending all that time to learn this, I have to spend some more time learning to remember that I have remembered. Isn’t it the awful stunt!”

“You’re doing beautifully,” Alice encouraged, laughing; “but it’s a shame to waste it all on an audience of two. Why don’t you make a vaudeville turn out of it?”

“There you go asking questions again,” protested Allen, “which is strictly forbidden by the rules.” The boy wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead. “Honestly, you’ve gotten me so rattled that I don’t know whether what comes now is ‘low tone’ or ’pass the next picture and come back to it.’”

“It is ‘low tone,’ Allen,” Mrs. Gorham prompted.

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“Thank you; now watch me make a noise like an innocent cooing dove. The idea is just this, Miss Gorham: the *Home Travellers’ Volumes* not only enable you to see and to enjoy the familiar sights and scenes which the average tourist meets, but hundreds—-nay, thousands—of curious and wonderful customs and things which the average tourist never gets the chance to see. The real illusion of travel is spread about you, the thousands of photographic reproductions carry you along comfortably and irresistibly, and the whole wide world is at your feet. It is absolutely essential that you should know something beyond the narrow confines of the city or town in which you live. Successful people acknowledge this to be a fact—and who wouldn’t be a successful people? Would it not be pleasant, my dear Miss Gorham—surely by this time I may say ’my dear Miss Gorham’—to be able to talk with confidence and almost human intelligence about the curious manners, customs, and costumes of foreign lands? Why, of course it would—and how else can you obtain this ability in so inexpensive, easy, and agreeable a way as by subscribing for a set of the *Home Travellers’ Volumes*?”

Mrs. Gorham and Alice greeted this climax with applause, but Allen sternly checked them with upraised hand.

“No flowers, please, until after the contract is signed. I have already learned, during my brief career as an agent, that no widows or orphan children are fed or clothed by the empty, though well-meant, plaudits of an enthusiastic populace. And now, my dear Miss Gorham—for you are still very dear to me—this is the beautiful full Persian Levant binding, hand-tooled in French gold, which I am permitted to offer you at three times what it is worth. If you have more money than I think you have, we will bind up a set specially for you for just that amount. If, on the other hand, your financial resources have been overestimated here is another binding at half the price which is exactly as good, but which is prepared for just such an emergency. I leave it entirely to you to say which of the three it shall be. Could any proposition be fairer or more generous?”

“But suppose—” Alice began.

“I beg your pardon,” Allen stopped her; “the patient in the operating-chair is not allowed to suppose. Here is a little piece of paper and an easy-flowing fountain-pen. This is where you place your name and address for the delivery of the volumes.”

“But that is a contract blank, Allen,” remarked Mrs. Gorham.

“I know it is, but you have no right even to think such a thing. Alice mustn’t sign it right off or it won’t be any practice. What do the directions say?”

Mrs. Gorham turned again to the paper in her hand. “’If the prospective customer should hesitate, withdraw the order form for a moment and proceed.’”

“Please go on—that’s as far as I’ve learned.”

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"'In the *Home Travellers' Volumes* you have the opportunity to gain that broader view of things which a knowledge of the world alone can give you. Here you have all the pleasures and benefits of travel with the trouble left out. Now I am sure you agree with me upon the great value of travel—and agreeing on this point, you must agree with me on the value of this great work.' Here offer the order form again and say, 'Just put your name and address down here, and in a few days you will be off on one of these delightful journeys, and every member of your family can enjoy it with you.'"

"There!" exclaimed Allen, proudly. "Did you ever see a surer thing than that?"

"Are the books really valuable?" Mrs. Gorham asked.

"That really hasn't a thing to do with the proposition," replied Allen; "it's the talk you buy, and the books are thrown in."

"But you're not going to take this up, are you, Allen?" Alice inquired, anxiously.

"Don't you want me to? You know they say Fortune is bald on the back of her head, and if you let her once slip past you there's nothing left to grab hold of."

"It isn't what I want, Allen; but what could it lead to?"

"To the Consolidated Companies," he whispered, furtively. "I am bound and determined to show your father that I am good enough to be annexed, and to do that I've got to have some experience. Can you think of anything which would be apt to give a fellow more experience?"

"May I make a suggestion?" Mrs. Gorham asked. "I think it is a very good idea for Allen to undertake this, now that he has considered it seriously. He wants to follow your advice, Alice, and do something. Here is the first opportunity which offers, and I think he ought to embrace it. I should be glad, however, if he would promise us to try his first experiment on Mr. Gorham."

"Gee!" ejaculated Allen.

Alice divined Eleanor's real thought instantly. "Splendid!" she cried. "That shall be the condition. If father falls a victim, your later success is certain."

"And what if he doesn't?" Allen asked.

"Perhaps you'll go out on three legs," she suggested, mischievously.

X

Covington returned to New York several days before the Gorhams left Washington. To the casual observer, who might meet him even daily, no change would have been apparent in the smoothly working accurate human machine which found its exercise through his personality. His face never showed an emotion other than that which he wished to have seen there; the mouth, that most treacherous feature, was protected by his heavy mustache, which in turn merged its identity in the dark Vandyke beard, into which all expression retreated at the command of its owner; his gray eyes, cold in the metallic steelness of their shade, penetrated the object upon which they fixed themselves, reading the characteristics of others, but yielding nothing in return. His forehead was high, accentuated by the thinness of his face, but suggestive of strong mental capacity; and the straightness of his nose evidenced the strength of will which had done much to give him his present reputation as a business man.

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But behind this impassive exterior much was happening. It was not so great a change as it was an expansion of something which had always existed. Covington had made his mark before Gorham discovered him. The older man's attention had been attracted to him by the chain he had developed of over six hundred separate retail stores, all dealing in the same commodities and each one an individual business success. Gorham watched him post his sentries at different street corners in the city he was testing to determine the density of the traffic, finally selecting the location where the crowd passed most steadily all day.

"I am never fooled by the noon-hour crowd," Covington confided to him; "they spend all their time eating lunch. I always keep away from streets where there are banks—after three o'clock in the afternoon you'll find as much retail business in the morgue."

Gorham saw him rent whole buildings in order to get the particular corner store he wanted, and then organize a real-estate business to handle the rental of stores and offices which he could not use. He saw him arrange his show-cases and goods in such a manner that customers easily found what they wanted, were served promptly, and departed satisfied, to return again. He studied Covington's system of turning over each new store to a chief clerk to be operated on a percentage, thus giving him all the dignity of a proprietor and stimulating him to his maximum activity. Promotions were accomplished by transferring the clerks from smaller to larger stores, which automatically raised their salaries by the increased volume of business on which to draw their percentage. Gorham listened to the instructions Covington gave them in governing their relations with customers—original, forceful, and sane—and then he witnessed in various stores the practical demonstration and the results. This same genius, he reasoned naturally, applied to a similar chain of large concerns, would enable Covington to exercise his ability almost to an unlimited extent, and Gorham succeeded in convincing him that it was worth while for him to join in the development of the Consolidated Companies, turning over the retail amalgamation to his chief subordinate. One by one the master mind brought the varied corporations into line; one by one, with equal though different skill, Covington completed the work which his chief had begun. Between them they succeeded in filling the positions made necessary by the growth of the Companies with efficient and enthusiastic subordinates, so that each time the chain was let out to admit another link the welding was accomplished without weakening the strength of the whole.

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Covington had never from the first sympathized with Gorham's altruistic policies except as a means to an end, nor did he for a moment imagine that Gorham himself had adopted them for any other reason than their intrinsic business value. The whole scheme of the Consolidated Companies, when first unfolded before him, appealed to his appreciation of business cleverness, and he instinctively recognized Gorham as his master. During the few years they had been associated in the same corporation, Covington had seen his chief's genius demonstrated in organization and administration as well as in conception, and he had not been slow to take advantage of the lessons he was given such ample opportunity to learn. He had expected this demonstration, but, with a consummate confidence in his own ability to assimilate, he had also counted on gradually lessening the gap between Gorham and himself. Here it was that he had made a mistake, for during this same period the development of the older man had been far greater than his own. Covington to-day was, perhaps, as able a business man as Gorham had been when the Consolidated Companies was born, but Gorham in the mean time, by sheer display of extraordinary genius, had become an international figure. The business relations between the two men were closer than ever, but never once was there any question as to which was the master. Covington would not have been Covington had he not resented this; Covington would not have been Covington had he not succeeded in concealing this resentment from all the world.

With the knowledge that he could not hope to share with Gorham upon equal terms in the control of the Consolidated Companies, there came to him a realization of the necessity of strengthening himself on every possible side in order to be prepared to take advantage of the first opportunity, whatever that might be or whenever it might come, to alter the present relations. His marriage to Alice would be a step of prime importance, but this alone was not enough. As Gorham's son-in-law he would still be his subordinate, and Covington's nature demanded an opportunity to stand at least on a basis of equality with his present chief, sharing with him the arrogance of the prerogatives and the absolute autocracy now assumed alone by Gorham in dominating the policy of the business.

In Covington's opinion, Gorham was carrying the principles upon which the Consolidated Companies was based beyond all reason. The corporation had passed the experimental stage, and now possessed ample strength to take advantage with safety of its unique position. Gorham was right, he admitted, in his idea that public necessities ought to be reduced in price when once controlled by the Companies. The public approval and general confidence which this established were of distinct value, but there was absolutely no reason for continuing to give the public so large a share of the saving. It was not so much the amount that was saved as the fact that a saving was actually accomplished which served to advertise the Consolidated Companies. Gorham's real motive could be only to strengthen his personal prestige. Several of the other directors shared this conviction with Covington, and he made it his business to discover just where each one stood against the time when this information should serve him in good stead.

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The executive offices of the Consolidated Companies occupied an entire floor in one of the most spacious buildings on Broadway, yet to a casual visitor they gave little indication of the vast power which centred there. The rooms were substantially furnished, but everything evidenced a restraint equal almost to the conservatism which is so distinguishing a mark of the old-established English houses. This was an expression of Robert Gorham's individuality, and the Companies itself reflected it in its modest exterior appearance as in all other features, emphasizing the one influence which held together and amalgamated into a composite unit the many factors which necessarily formed the integral parts.

Gorham's ideas of business management were scientific, and his first step, after absorbing a new concern, was to have the principles of science introduced. He insisted that the workman should be supplemented by close co-operation on the part of the management in laying out his work for him in advance; by showing him how to eliminate unnecessary motions; by teaching him to make every portion of his work, however simple, a scientific performance; by studying his own individuality to the extent of assisting him to correct methods which militated equally against his own highest efficiency and the obtaining of the highest efficiency of the machine he operated; by bringing him to a realization that traditional knowledge of his specialty was a lower grade of skill than that knowledge gained by modern scientific study.

On the other hand, he undertook to correct faults of administration as well as inefficient methods of execution, demonstrating to each manager the cash value to the Consolidated Companies of this close co-operation with his workmen. It was shown that greater product was to be obtained from workmen who performed their tasks under conditions which tended to make them happy and contented, which gave them opportunities to advance themselves to points marked only by their personal limitations; where they could maintain their self-respect and with his help increase it, in that they could hope to become the most skilful operatives in their particular specialties, and to earn higher wages than any employer could afford to pay under other conditions. With every machine, human or mechanical, running each day at its maximum degree of productivity, Gorham knew that the corporation could well afford to share its largely increased income with those who had co-operated to secure it; and the workmen could not begrudge their employer the augmented profits, since they not only had received their share, but because they knew that the increase was the result of the efforts of the management quite as much as their own.

Throughout the offices themselves was to be found every equipment which modern ingenuity had devised for shortening the processes of daily routine, and of eliminating or reducing to a minimum the details which so clog the wheels of any large enterprise unless properly systematized. Every man exactly fitted the position in which he was placed, and the machine moved forward with an accuracy and a force which was irresistible. The same casual visitor would have noticed this had he been at all

observant, and could not have failed to admire the precision which marked every business incident, however trivial.

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Shortly after Covington's return to New York the Companies' offices were honored by a visit from Mr. Andrew Harris. The caller asked that his card be taken to Mr. Covington, and as it bore a pencilled memorandum that his business was important and confidential, he was ushered into the private office of the acting head of the Companies. Mr. Harris seemed deeply interested in studying the appearance of the man he had come to see—so much interest, in fact, that Covington resented his scrutiny and inquired the nature of his business.

"Excuse me," Harris said, quickly; "I came to talk over the proposed merger of the New York street railways."

"Then you doubtless wish to see Mr. Gorham," Covington replied. "That is a matter which is wholly in his hands. He is at present in Washington, but will be here within a week."

"Are you not at least partially familiar with the details?" Harris inquired, apparently unmoved by the news of Mr. Gorham's absence.

"I could scarcely say that I am unfamiliar with them," Covington admitted; "but the idea of the merger was Mr. Gorham's, and he is naturally in closer touch."

"Do you object to talking things over with me a little?" Harris asked. "There may be some points that I know more about than Mr. Gorham."

Covington nodded acquiescence, though somewhat in the dark as to the object his visitor had in mind.

"In the first place," Harris began, adjusting himself in his chair, "let me say that I am a director in the New York Street Railways Company, which is the largest of the present organizations which are eventually to be consolidated into the Manhattan Traction Company. The franchise, as you doubtless know, has already been put through the Board of Aldermen, and the only question now remaining is whether it is to be turned over to certain gentlemen in New York who originally planned to complete the deal, or to the Consolidated Companies."

"Mr. Gorham has, I believe, advanced to those interested very logical arguments to show that the Consolidated Companies could engineer the amalgamation to the distinct advantage of the various roads," Covington suggested, as his visitor paused for a moment.

"He has," Harris admitted. "There is no doubt in anybody's mind that what he says is right; the roads and the stockholders would be distinctly benefited—but how about the directors? That is the question I came here to have answered."

"It is a question which Mr. Gorham must answer."

Harris subjected him to another careful scrutiny. “Perhaps so,” he said, at length, “but I should like to get your opinion on the matter. You are one of the directors, I understand.”

“I had an idea that Mr. Gorham had already answered that question to Mr. Brady, and that there was enough in the deal to satisfy every one.”

“There is enough for every one,” assented Harris, with decision; “the only question is how it is to be divided. We all supposed that we were to become stockholders in the Consolidated Companies, in which case we should have gained something at both ends; but Gorham evidently changed his mind about that, which leaves us nothing but the original rake-off.”

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There was something in Harris's manner which annoyed Covington, yet he did not suggest cutting short the interview.

"Who are the parties involved?" he asked, more to say something than because of any real interest.

"Well"—Harris became reflective—"there's Collins, who put the deal through the Aldermen; he can't expect any more than we've already agreed to give him. It cost him a pretty penny, but he'll double his investment—we can leave him out. Then there's Brady at Tammany Hall; nothing can be done without him. Gorham's idea seems to be to pay him his price on this job, take a receipt, and cut loose from him; but if Brady was a stockholder in the Consolidated Companies he would prove a mighty useful one. Then there are two other directors in the New York Street Railways Company who feel as I do—that we ought to see something more coming to us out of this deal than just the profit on our stock."

"Is the opportunity to become stockholders in our corporation the 'something more' you have in mind?"

"Yes," Harris assented; "but it doesn't end just there. We have a little scheme of our own in connection with this transaction which is worth money, and we could put it through easier if we were on the inside. More than this, it would save the Consolidated Companies something in the long run."

"You have secured an option on some link in the chain and you're going to hold up whoever tries to put the deal through until you get your price," Covington stated, flatly.

"We have options on three links," Harris replied, frankly, showing no surprise at the accuracy of the other's intuition.

"Can you make more out of it if we get the franchise?"

"Naturally, since the Consolidated Companies will have unlimited capital. If we were stockholders in the Companies, we could afford to make the terms easier, because there would be less trouble and expense in putting it through."

"Does Mr. Gorham know all this ?"

Harris laughed. "Well—hardly. I haven't met Gorham, but from what Brady tells me this isn't in his line."

"Then why do you give me the information? Frankly, I don't think it will help you with Mr. Gorham."

"He isn't going to know anything about it."

Covington smiled at the assurance Harris displayed. “I have not committed myself to protect you,” he said.

“Quite right, quite right,” assented Harris; “but I’ll take my chances. Now I’m going to tell you the rest of it. As I said, Collins got the franchise from the Board of Aldermen. Brady is a director in the New York Street Railways Company, so he keeps Tammany all straight for us. Our company, being the largest, was to be used as the basis of the consolidation, and the original small roads were to turn themselves over to us for nine hundred and ninety-nine years, we to assume their bonded indebtedness, and, besides this, agreeing to pay from eight to eighteen per cent. dividends on their stock issues. After these payments our company was to keep the surplus earnings.”

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“And these surplus earnings would be enough to make it worth while?”

Harris laughed. “Sure,” he replied; “the bond total of the smaller companies is about one hundred million dollars and the stock total only four million dollars. What’s eight or even eighteen per cent. on four million dollars! In fact, the weak point is that even with the watering we intended to give the stock after we got it, the profits would still be so big that the public would notice.”

“There should be no difficulty in fixing that,” remarked Covington, sagely, amused by the frank confidence extended to him in spite of his warning.

“The only difficulty is in selecting the means,” Harris continued. “Now, Brady and two other directors and I have secured options on three short lines which are essential integral parts of the system, and it was understood, before the Consolidated Companies came into the field, that the new company would purchase these from us at a handsome profit. In fact, we four are a majority in the Board of Directors. When Gorham first talked about it Brady laughed at him, for the thing seemed to be as good as pulled off; but the more Brady thought it over, the better he liked the idea. Our plan was to unload the stock on the dear public, letting the new company last as long as it would, and be satisfied with our profits; but Brady thinks that Gorham’s scheme means success for the company as well, and naturally we would prefer to have a continuing profit rather than one which ceases when we deliver the goods. Lately Gorham has been talking more with the other directors and with some of the big stockholders, ignoring Brady; so I just called to make sure that we stood in on the profit on the short lines, as originally intended.”

“How much profit would there be in the short lines for you four directors?” asked Covington, interested to see how far he could get the man to commit himself.

“A half-million apiece.”

“H’m!” Covington soliloquized. “It doesn’t look quite so certain to you since Gorham began to get next to the other directors and the big stockholders, does it?”

“They’ve got to have the short lines, and whoever gets them must pay our price.”

“Yes; but in one case it goes through without any public demonstration, and in the other it leaves a smudge on each one of the four which you would be glad to avoid.”

“Exactly,” assented Harris.

“Well,” Covington said, deliberately, “I don’t think you can pull it off. As a matter of fact, since you have been so confidential, I may say that Mr. Gorham is convinced that there’s something crooked, and that is why he dropped the idea of having Brady and

some of the others become stockholders. We have to maintain a high standard in the Consolidated Companies, as you can easily understand."

Harris looked at him sharply. "Perhaps the standard is higher among the stockholders than on the Board of Directors," he suggested.

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“I don’t quite understand you,” was the cold reply.

“We want some one of the directors to steer this thing through for us,” Harris said. “That’s the real milk in the cocoanut.”

Covington rose from his chair. “I think it is time to terminate our interview.”

“Sit down, sit down,” Harris insisted. “You and I have a mutual interest in this matter, and we’ve only just touched on it.”

The man’s effrontery amazed Covington, but before he could answer Harris continued:

“I understand that Mr. Gorham is somewhat particular about the men he has around him, and you stand in pretty close. Now he probably doesn’t know yet that you have been picking up blocks of New York Street Railways stock, and that you plan to clean up a big slice for yourself when this merger is put through.”

Covington’s face preserved its calm expression, though his smile seemed forced.

“So the object of your visit is blackmail?” he said. “You will fail in this, as you will also fail in your effort to force Mr. Gorham’s hand. You have been misinformed—I have bought no stock.”

Harris took a package of papers from his pocket and selected a single sheet on which were written certain figures.

“I was afraid it might be a little hard to convince you that we had the goods on you,” he remarked. “Those are the numbers of the certificates you hold, and here is the total number of shares. Pretty good-looking list, isn’t it?—and it’s worth a lot of money.”

“These mean nothing to me,” Covington insisted. “I repeat, I do not own a share of stock in the New York Street Railways Company.”

“No, but your stool-pigeon does. Why, bless your heart, not one share of that stock has changed hands these last twelve months without being run down by Brady. Had to do it, you know, to make sure our deal would go through. Brady owns that man who bought the stock for you body and soul. Now, how does it look to you, son? Will you come with me and talk with Brady, or shall I see the virtuous Mr. Gorham and show him what you’ve been doing on the side?”

Covington’s face was as impassive as ever when he turned again, looking his companion straight in the eye.

“You won’t do it?” Harris asked, surprised. “Better think—”

“I shall be very glad to see Mr. Brady with you,” was the unexpected answer.

XI

The Gorham residence was located on Riverside Drive near Grant’s Tomb, commanding a superb view of the Hudson River in both directions. The massive stone house stood well back from the street in the midst of an extravagant amount of land for a New York city home, and the high wall protected a beautiful garden, in the use of which the whole family took much pleasure during the spring and fall. Thither the Gorhams returned after their sojourn in Washington, glad to exchange their cramped quarters at the hotel

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for the home comforts which they found there. Alice was full of her new business responsibilities and eager to assume charge of her “department”; Mrs. Gorham, restored to her home city and her early friends by her present marriage, looked forward to an enjoyable “season”; Patricia and her beloved pony were reunited; and Gorham himself, flushed with the continuing success of his gigantic enterprise, plunged more deeply than ever into its manifold transactions.

The remaining member of the family—for such he always considered himself—was old Riley. Servants might come and servants might go, but Riley the faithful was always to be found in his appointed place, occupied by his appointed task. New York was the only home he recognized, since, in addition to being “Misther Robert’s” place of residence, it also connected him with the one tie in life beyond his devotion to his master and his master’s family. This was an only son who had risen by degrees to be a pressman in a local printing-office and, which was more to the point, had become a political power in his particular ward. Riley’s interest in his son was far greater than any reciprocal sentiment manifested by the younger man. Occasionally the father ventured to look up his famous offspring, but was always received with a patronizing indulgence; and when he returned to his own insignificant duties, it was with a sense of gratitude for the reflected greatness.

After one of these rare treats, every member of the family could read in Riley’s face the degree of cordiality with which the old man had been received; so when, one afternoon a few weeks after their return to New York, he lingered after giving Mrs. Gorham the evening paper in the garden, she noted the expression of expectancy and turned from her conversation with Alice to gratify his unspoken desire to be questioned. As a matter of fact, Eleanor had reproached herself for complaining of Riley to Mr. Gorham, and this was an opportunity to make amends.

“You haven’t told us about your call on James last night, Riley. How did you find him?”

“Fine, ma’m, fine,” he replied, straightening up as he realized that his opportunity had arrived. “Jimmie is th’ great man, ma’m, if I do say it as hadn’t orter.”

“Splendid, Riley!” exclaimed Eleanor, glancing at Alice with amusement. “It is a fine thing to have our children do us credit. What new honor has come to James ?”

“I don’t know where he gits it, ma’m, tho’ his mother was a smart woman, but he’s th’ clever la-ad, ma’m; indade he is.”

“Do tell us about it, Riley,” Alice added, entering into Eleanor’s spirit; “we are all impatience.”

“He’s th’ clever la-ad,” Riley repeated, still rolling the sweet morsel under his tongue. “He’s th’ comin’ man in New York politics, I’m thinkin’,” he mused. “Mebbe he’ll be an aldherman yit. Wan iv his ancistors in th’ ol’ counthry was a game warden wanst—-mebbe Jimmie will be an aldherman yit.”

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There was no use trying to hasten the old man, and his auditors were too familiar with his peculiarities not to give him his own time. This was food and drink to his present craving, which during all these years he had found so little opportunity to indulge. The successes which he had enjoyed were won by those for whom and with whom he labored. Here was the hope of a triumph, on the part of one of his own flesh and blood, which must reflect its brilliancy upon himself. Suppose Jimmie should some day become an alderman! No wonder that the old man lingered in his narrative!

"Ye see, ma'm," Riley continued, "Jimmie is th' man th' big fellers give th' money at 'lection time, an' it's all lift ter him where he puts it. All that responsibility is his, ma'm, an' that makes him quite a feller hisself. Th' other men in th' ward sorter looks up ter him, ma'm. An' thin agin, Jimmie is th' fine speaker an' quick wid his thinkers, ma'm. That's why I think he'll be th' great man soon."

"It's a fine thing to be given responsibility, Riley, and it's a great thing to be trusted," Eleanor humored him; "but it is even more valuable to be a fine speaker and quick with one's 'thinkers.' Has James had much opportunity to show his ability as an orator?"

"He has, ma'm, as I was just a-goin' ter tell ye. Jimmie come near makin' a mistake two years ago. Th' Republicans offered him more money ter come over ter their side an' Jimmie done it. Thin, later, he seen his mistake an' th' Dimocrats seen theirs, an' Jimmie come back ter his old roost. Some iv thim who didn't know the true innards iv th' situation blamed Jimmie, an' at a meetin' th' Dimocrats held—crocus, I think he called it—some iv them started ter hiss Jimmie when he begun ter spake. Th' man at th' desk, whatever title he has, thried ter stop 'em, but Jimmie was quicker than any iv 'em. He jumps up on a chair, Jimmie does, an' waves his arms theatrical like, an' cries out good an' sthrong, 'Don't mind 'em, Misther Moderator (that's what they call that feller at th' desk), don't mind 'em, Misther Moderator—as another gintleman wance said, they know not what they do.'"

"Did James know who the 'other gentleman' was?" asked Mrs. Gorham, with difficulty suppressing a laugh.

"He may have, ma'm, but I'm not sure," Riley replied, honestly. "Me an' th' ol' woman allus thried ter bring Jimmie up wid a knowledge iv th' Scripters, an' I'm hopin' he did know; but I ain't shure, ma'm."

As Riley disappeared into the house Eleanor rose and, drawing Alice's arm through her own, the two resumed their leisurely stroll about the garden.

"I wonder if Riley has forgiven me for marrying your father," Eleanor queried, laughingly. "He looks upon 'Mr. Robert' as his personal property, and I really believe he has always resented my presence as an intrusion."

“Pat is the only one who can make him stand around,” Alice admitted; “but, seriously, I think he looks upon you as a real addition to the family. That’s a proud position for you to have attained in four years.”

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“I hope you are right,” Eleanor laughed again. “Without Riley’s approval, peace in the Gorham family would be impossible. Now tell me what you are thinking over so seriously. I’ve been on the point of asking you ever since luncheon.”

Alice looked up quickly and smiled brightly.

“Am I serious?” she asked. “I didn’t realize that I became thoughtful so seldom as to have it attract attention; but, since you ask, I am wondering how my business experiment is going to work out.”

“Mr. Covington is an able instructor, and I feel sure that his pupil is a proficient one.”

“Isn’t it good of him to give me so much time! He hasn’t missed a morning since we returned. Oh, it’s wonderful to listen to him, he knows so much about things; and it all seems simple enough after he explains it. He is very patient with me, even though I know he thinks I’m awfully stupid.”

“He doesn’t seem to find the task irksome,” suggested Eleanor.

“That’s because he thinks so much of father,” the girl explained. “He has told me a lot I never knew about dear daddy, and it makes me love him more than ever. Mr. Covington says there isn’t a man in the world to-day equal to father; and, of course, I know he’s right, but it’s pleasant to hear some one else say it.”

“How do you like Mr. Covington as you become better acquainted with him?” Eleanor asked.

“Very much,” Alice replied, sincerely; “no one could help it. Next to daddy, he’s the finest man I know.”

“Do you think you could become very close friends?”

The girl laughed merrily. “What a funny idea!” she exclaimed. “It takes two to become close friends, and a man in his position could never have a friendship with a girl my age—especially when he has this opportunity to learn all my shortcomings. I should be very proud of a friend like Mr. Covington.”

Eleanor feared to disturb matters by further questioning. All seemed to be progressing favorably in the direction which her husband desired, and, as he said, Covington was undoubtedly able to handle the situation himself. Mrs. Gorham had watched the “lessons” from the corner of her eye, and had seen much which had evidently escaped Alice.

“I’d like to ask you a question.” Mrs. Gorham looked up quickly at the abruptness of the girl’s sudden remark. “You are the only one I can go to when I don’t understand

anything; but Mr. Covington told me to think it over and keep what he said entirely to myself. He couldn't have meant me to keep it from you, could he?"

"You are the best judge of that, dear. Has it to do with yourself?"

"Not exactly—it has to do with my property: the money my mother left me, you know."

"Why should he interest himself in that?"

"As a surprise to daddy—to show him how rapidly I am becoming a business woman."

"I think you had better talk it over with your father," Eleanor said, decidedly. "He can advise you far better than Mr. Covington."

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“Oh, no; that is the very thing I mustn’t do. That would spoil the whole thing. Mr. Covington knows of a stock which I could buy which will double within two months, and father will be delighted when he sees how cleverly I have invested the money.”

“But you can’t do anything with that money without your father’s permission.”

“Yes, I can; Mr. Covington has looked it all up. I have full control over it now that I am eighteen. All I have to do is to sign a paper which he will bring me, and he will do the rest.”

Mrs. Gorham was thoughtful for some moments. “Mr. Covington would certainly take no chances with the girl’s money,” she mused. “I wonder what Robert would think of it.” Then aloud, “Did he tell you what the stock was?”

“Yes; but you mustn’t breathe it. You don’t think I’m betraying a confidence, do you? He was so emphatic about my thinking it over by myself; but he couldn’t have meant not to tell you, dear. It is some stock in a street railway here in New York which he thinks he can get hold of. Wouldn’t it be fine to double my money! But I must promise not to tell daddy how I did it—just surprise him with it.”

“I don’t know what to advise you, Alice,” Eleanor said, doubtfully.

“It must be all right, for Mr. Covington knows,” the girl insisted; “that’s why daddy has him come to teach me. But I shall think it over very carefully, as he asked me to.” Alice threw her arms impulsively around Eleanor’s neck and kissed her, laughing happily. “We business people have to consider these problems very deeply,” she said, dropping her voice. “I will tell you in the morning what I decide.”

A heavy step upon the gravel walk announced Gorham’s arrival. Greeting them affectionately, he placed one arm about the waist of each and turned from one to the other, looking silently into their faces. “My inspirations,” he exclaimed, smiling; and as Eleanor glanced triumphantly at Alice, the girl realized the force of the words the elder woman had spoken in an earlier conversation. Here—in them—rested that power which stimulated the execution of affairs of which the whole world talked!

“I have news for you,” Gorham said, turning to Alice. “Mr. Allen Sanford, late chauffeur, is now the right arm of the Consolidated Companies.”

“Do you really mean it!” she cried, transferring her caresses to her father. “Have you actually given him a chance? Oh, I’m so happy about it!”

“I really mean it,” Gorham replied, laughingly, amused by the girl’s enthusiasm; “and by doing so, I presume I have incurred the eternal enmity of one Stephen Sanford.”

“How did it happen, Robert?” Eleanor inquired, hardly less pleased than Alice.

"The boy has some promising stuff in him," was the reply. "He has more to get over than most youngsters have; but his very impulsiveness, properly controlled, may prove an asset. The young rascal almost sold me a set of the *Home Travellers' Volumes*, and with all his amateurishness he showed a good deal of skill, and an unlimited amount of imagination. I've wanted to give him a chance ever since Stephen threw him over, and now I'm going to do it."

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Alice became serious again after her first outburst. “Who is going to teach him?” she asked.

“Experience will be his best master,” Gorham replied, surprised by her question.

“Don’t you think I could help him by showing him some of the things Mr. Covington has taught me? He needs an inspiration more than any one I know.”

“No; I do not think so, young lady,” he said, shaking his finger at her playfully. “If I am any judge of human nature, he would teach you more along certain lines than I care to have you learn just yet.”

Alice flushed. “How absurd!” she pouted. “Allen could never interest me in that way. Why, he’s only a boy. When I marry, daddy, my husband must be a man lots older than I am, just as you are older than Eleanor. He will have to be older, to have had time to accomplish all he must have done, if I am to respect him; and there couldn’t be love without respect, could there? How perfectly absurd! Why, Allen is—just Allen!”

“Of course, my dear; I was only teasing you—and the man who wins you must have accomplished a whole lot more than you demand in order to satisfy me. So that problem is settled, and we’ll wait for the Knight Adventurous who dares attack our citadel.”

Alice stooped and picked a gorgeous dahlia, upon which she fixed her still averted gaze.

“I only wanted to do my part,” she said, apologetically. “Allen is dreadfully alone in the world, now that his father has gone back on him. I think I am the only one who understands him.”

“Your father is but joking, Alice,” Eleanor reassured her. “You and Allen are now business associates, and it will be your duty to help each other, all for the advancement of the great Consolidated Companies.”

The girl looked up brightly. “That’s right,” she said; “business associates always do that, don’t they? Now I’ll leave you to yourselves until dinner-time.”

With an understanding glance at Eleanor, Alice ran up the terrace steps and into the house. Mrs. Gorham repeated to her husband the girl’s conversation and added her own interpretation of the situation, carefully avoiding any mention of Covington’s proposition, which was the one subject upon which she would have preferred to talk.

“She is growing up too fast, Robert,” she concluded. “We must make her play more and forget the responsibilities which she insists upon assuming.”

“She’s in safe hands,” Gorham replied, smiling. “Keep her young as long as you can, dear, and when she has to grow up, even to your mature years, help her to be just such another woman as yourself. Covington gives me glowing accounts of her progress in the little scheme which you so cleverly suggested. He seems to think her interest is more than a mere whim, but I can’t believe it.”

“She is a strange girl in some ways,” Eleanor replied, “and we must watch her carefully just at this crisis.”

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“I don’t intend to have young Sanford step in and upset my plans,” Gorham insisted.

“You had better go slowly, dear, and let her work out her own future, guiding her quietly without her realizing it. Allen will have to win her respect before you need to consider him as a possible obstacle. Their interest in each other just now is so natural and unaffected that I should be sorry to disturb it. Each one can be a real help to the other without any danger of the complication which you fear.”

“They are both at the inflammable age,” persisted Gorham; “it is just as well to guard against uncertainties.”

Eleanor smiled. “We are all inconsistent, aren’t we, dear? We were so exasperated with Stephen Sanford because he would not allow Allen to express his own individuality, yet we are almost ready to interfere with the development of Alice’s. All seems to be progressing exactly as you wish it. The child’s admiration for Mr. Covington is supreme, and with Alice that is the first step. Then their daily intercourse ought to give ample opportunity for settling the question your way. But if it proved finally that her happiness was dependent upon her marrying Allen, or any other one of her admirers, you would be the first to urge it—wouldn’t you, dear?”

“Of course I should,” Gorham admitted; “but I can’t consider any alternative. Admiration and respect are all very well as far as they go, but they are no guarantee when a good-looking, impulsive youngster is concerned.”

“I know, dear,” Eleanor continued, quietly. “A man came into my life once whom I admired and respected with all my strength, yet I never loved him.”

Gorham paused abruptly and looked at his wife with the same strange expression which she occasionally noted upon his face.

“You never loved him?” he repeated.

“No, dear. He was a noble character, and he once did me a great service, but I never loved him. With Alice my one fear is that she may mistake respect for affection, and with her nature such an error would ruin her life.”

“Some time you must tell me about him,” Gorham insisted, still reverting to her chance remark.

Eleanor’s face sobered. “Some time I will, but not now. It is all a part of that memory I am ever trying to forget—a bright lining to that heavy cloud. Some time, dear, but not now.”

“Suppose I have a little chat with Alice before dinner,” Gorham said, changing the subject abruptly. “The child must not think that I am neglecting her. I must make her realize how proud I am of her.”

“Do,” Eleanor replied. “I will follow you in a few moments.” She sank upon a convenient seat as her husband disappeared indoors. Here, half an hour later, still communing with the early twilight as it deepened into dusk, Alice and her father found her, when they came out from the house, arm in arm. Who shall say what spring the words unconsciously released, conjuring up before her unwilling mental vision a picture of the years gone by? Who shall explain the apprehensiveness which came unbidden, causing known certainties to be forgotten because of the disquieting questionings which demanded an unanswerable reply.

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“I have dropped my flower!” Alice exclaimed, as she searched up and down the walk.

“There are plenty more right beside you,” suggested her father, surprised.

“I must find this very one,” she insisted, with an expression on her face which Eleanor understood. “Flowers have personalities just as we have—and perhaps their joy in life is in giving inspiration, too.”

XII

Whenever a full realization of the fact that he had actually embarked upon a business career came to him, Allen was completely overpowered by his sense of its importance. He blessed books and book agents, since they had been the indirect means to this much-desired end. His chance had come to him just when his optimism had begun to waver, with the hydra’s heads multiplying beyond belief; and he proposed to show Alice especially, and Mr. Gorham incidentally, that he was no mere callow youth idly waiting by the wayside. There could be no doubt whatever regarding his intentions, but a captious critic might have suggested that it would have been the part of wisdom to allow himself ample time for demonstration. Rome was not built in a day, nor does history record that youth ever acquired the experience of ripe middle age in a like space of time; but Allen’s instructors at college would have given testimony that he was not strong in history. So it was that he bruised his head frequently at first against the stone wall of precedent and practice, in this particular instance made less yielding by the fact that the vice-president of the Consolidated Companies distinctly resented his addition to the office force.

These first busy weeks were giving Allen ample opportunity to gain experience. The impetuosity of youth would require time before it became tempered to the degree which would make it wholly reliable; but his enthusiasm, his indefatigable energy, and, above all, his absolute belief in and loyalty to the head of the Companies and the corporation itself were elements of genuine promise. There were moments which tried the patience, but Allen’s mistakes were so much the result of over-eagerness and consequent over-reaching that Gorham’s annoyance was always short-lived. Even the errors gave evidence that underneath the boyish irresponsibility lay excellent material for the elder man to mould.

“Once upon a time”—Gorham put the words in the form of a parable—“there was a boy who was ambitious to jump a very long distance. On the day of the contest, in order to make sure of accomplishing his purpose, he took an extra long start, and ran so hard that when he reached the mark from which he was to jump he had spent his strength.”

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Stephen Sanford had not disappointed Gorham in the attitude he took when he first learned that Allen had been given a position with the Consolidated Companies. The letter which he wrote to his old friend contained accusations of the basest treachery which one man could show toward another: Gorham had deliberately planned to separate father and son; he had discovered the boy's rare business qualifications and taken advantage of them for his own personal ends. The act was in keeping with the basis upon which his whole company was founded. Gorham's good-nature was taxed to its utmost, but he fully realized how deeply his old friend was wounded; and the knowledge that his own interest in Allen was in reality a genuine service to Sanford himself served to blunt the force of the attack.

Allen, oblivious to everything except the present opportunity to prove himself to Alice and to be near Alice, plunged ahead until Gorham was forced to change his words of caution into actual commands.

"You are trying to put the head of the wedge in first, my boy," the older man told him. "You are using twenty pounds of steam to do the work of two, and that does no credit to your judgment."

Covington was negatively antagonistic from the start in that quiet, skilful way which kept his animosity from any specific expression. Allen felt it, and reciprocated the feeling with an intensity not lessened by the knowledge that Covington and Alice were thrown together almost daily by this business arrangement which seemed to him the height of absurdity. He did not approve of the business manners which the girl delighted to assume with him when they chanced to meet, and he watched for an opportunity to tell her so.

As the opportunity seemed slow in coming, with characteristic energy he made one to order. Gorham required some important papers which he had left at his house the night before, and the boy so arranged his arrival that he had the pleasure of seeing Covington depart, although he himself was unobserved. He found Alice deep in the mysterious detail of her growing responsibility, but not at all disturbed to be discovered at her work. The desk which had been placed in her father's library was as near a duplicate of his in reduced size as could be found. A bunch of letters covered one end of it, while a neatly arranged pile of checks directly in front of her showed that the contents of her mail had proved profitable. She told Riley to bring Allen here, and the boy stood regarding her for a moment before she looked up.

"Don't let me disturb you, Miss—Manager," he said, loftily, as he caught her eye. "We magnates become peeved by interruptions—I always do myself."

Alice laughed as Allen unlocked the drawer in Gorham's desk and placed the desired papers in his pocket.

“Isn’t it fun?” she asked, merrily.

“Isn’t what fun?” was the unresponsive reply. “I haven’t burst any buttons off my waistcoat watching you and Mr. Covington do the turtle-dove act while I drag out a tabloid existence in a two by twice hall bedroom, and stay tied down to my desk all day. Where does the fun come in?”

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The girl looked at him in complete surprise. “What in the world—” she began.

“Oh, I mean it—every word!” he insisted. Now that he had plunged in there was no retreating. “I say, are you going to marry him?”

“I’d be angry with you if you weren’t so terribly amusing, Allen,” she replied, smiling again after the first shock of his outburst. “Truly, you don’t know how funny you are when you try to be serious. It doesn’t fit.”

Allen bit his lip. “I’m a joke still, am I?” he asked, without looking at her. “I thought it was the pater’s prerogative to consider me that, but I see he didn’t get it patented.”

“Is it being a ‘joke’ when you ask questions which you have no right to ask?”

“If you knew how I feel inside you’d think I had a right.”

The girl relented a little. “You know as well as I do that Mr. Covington comes here simply to help me in my business education.”

“Business fiddlesticks!” he interrupted, crossly. “You’re not engaged to him yet, are you?”

There was so pathetic a tone of entreaty in Allen’s voice that Alice could not deny herself the pleasure of being mischievous.

“Not to him alone,” she answered, demurely.

“What do you mean?” Allen demanded, now thoroughly alarmed.

“Don’t you think it is better for a girl to make a number of men comparatively happy by being engaged to them than one man supremely miserable by marrying him?”

He looked at her aghast. “Who are some of the others?” he asked, with despair written on every feature. “Is Joe Whitney one of them?”

“Joe Whitney!” Alice laughed merrily. “Mercy, no! Joe is entirely without resources. If it wasn’t for his family troubles, I shouldn’t know what in the world to talk to him about.”

Allen began to be suspicious. The girl’s manner was far too flippant to be genuine, but he would not for the world give her the satisfaction of knowing that she had worried him.

“If you have so many, why can’t you add me to the list?”

“You? Oh, that would never do! You would be sure to think I meant it, and the first thing I knew you would try to make me marry you.”

“Of course I should. Don’t you want to be married?”

“Marriage is an institution for the blind,” she laughed back at him.

“Then that’s where I want to be confined.”

Alice sat up very straight. “Then you had better run right along and find your guardian,” she urged. “We business women have no time for such trifles.”

“So you shirk your responsibility, do you?” Allen looked at her so reproachfully, and spoke with such quiet firmness that she ceased her bantering.

“What responsibility am I shirking?” she demanded.

“Me; I am the greatest responsibility you have, and you are neglecting me shamefully.”

Alice gave evidence of becoming amused again, but he gravely checked her.

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“For once I am serious, if you can be made to believe it. When we met so accidentally in Washington—well, I was a joke then, I admit; but it’s different now. You gave me some new ideas to think about, and the more I’ve thought about them the more I’ve seen things your way. And ever since then I’ve tried hard to do what I thought would please you. But now I’m sick of the whole thing. It may be all my fault; but, anyhow, I wish I were well out of it.”

“Why, Allen Sanford!” Her voice showed astonishment and reproach.

“I do,” he insisted. “I’d give a whole lot right now if I knew that I never had to go back to the office again.”

Alice was genuinely shocked. “I can’t understand you,” she said, soberly. “If you had felt this way at the beginning, I shouldn’t have been so much surprised; but now, just when you are getting to a point where you could be useful to father and to yourself, you begin to show the white feather.”

“You mustn’t say that, Alice,” the boy replied, quickly, his tone showing that she hurt him. “It isn’t quitting; it’s a question of whether or not I am fitted for business—but you mustn’t say that I am showing the white feather. I shan’t let even you say that.”

“Father says you are making a splendid start.” She tried to atone in part for her severity. “That ought to mean a lot to you, for he is a hard man to satisfy.”

“Did he say that?” Allen replied, temporarily mollified. “That does mean a whole lot to me; but it’s all your doing, and you must take the responsibility. Good or bad, I’m your business creation, and you must stand by it.”

“No, Allen; you mustn’t put it that way. You settled the matter for yourself when you took the stand you did with your father. Of course I’m more than interested to see you make good, but it isn’t for me to accept either the responsibility or the credit.”

“We never should have had that scrap if it hadn’t been for you. I shouldn’t have had the nerve.”

“Oh, don’t say that,” she begged.

“It was a good thing all right,” he hastened to reassure her. “Except for that, I should still be wearing pinafores, and it’s as much better for the pater as it is for me to have shed them. I’d probably like business all right if I understood the blamed thing; but it isn’t the whole show, you know.”

“Isn’t the business end enough?” she asked, quietly. “It is for me. I can’t tell you how much real pleasure I’m getting out of this little scheme father has turned over to me. It makes all the other things which I had tired of seem more interesting.”

“Business is all right, of course,” he admitted. “You don’t get much idea of it just going through those letters, but the real thing is the biggest kind of a game you ever saw. It’s a finesse here and a forcing of the opponent’s hand there, but it can never be the whole game with me.”

“It ought to be. You have your chance right before you now, and you ought not to need anything else to urge you on. Just think, you’ve got to make good to justify your own position and to keep daddy from having made a mistake.”

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The boy rose from the arm of the great chair on which he had been resting and advanced to the little desk behind which Alice sat. With his hands on the end, he leaned forward until his face was near hers, looking straight into her eyes.

“Perhaps I don’t need anything else,” he said in a low, firm tone, “but it wouldn’t be honest not to tell you that the same something which I had in mind before I started in business has been there ever since. The game is enough in itself, of course, if that’s all it can be. But don’t you see what a different proposition it is when a fellow sees a dear girl’s face ahead of him in the distance just beyond each obstacle which he has to meet? Don’t you know how much better you always play a game when there’s something up on it?”

Alice was plainly disappointed. “But you are playing for high stakes always, Allen; there’s success for the winner and failure for the loser.”

“With a big side wager in the dear girl’s face just ahead,” he added. “I’ve got to keep that hope in my heart, Alice, to help me to make good quickly; even though you tell me not to, I can’t help it. Why, I have done it so long that even if I knew this minute you were going to marry that Covington person, I believe I’d keep right on—hoping to get a chance to be your second husband.”

This was too much for the girl’s equilibrium, and she laughed in spite of herself. She failed to sense the personal side of Allen’s declaration. He was developing, and this to her was only a phase.

“You are simply impossible,” she replied; “but we might as well understand each other right now. I have no idea of marrying any one. Perhaps some day I shall change my mind if the man comes along who is enough stronger than I am to sweep away all the objections.”

“Does Mr. Covington seem likely to be that man?” Allen asked, pertinently.

“I have no more idea of marrying him than he has of marrying me,” Alice stated, flatly. “I admire him extravagantly. He is a self-made man—”

“The good Lord must be pleased to be relieved of that responsibility,” Allen interrupted, ill-naturedly.

“You mustn’t be so prejudiced against him,” she reproved him. “He is one of the ablest business men in New York—daddy has told me that—yet, out of respect to my father and kindness to me, he is giving me more of his time, I know, than he can spare. I am very grateful to him.”

“Well”—Allen started to take his departure—“we don’t seem to have made much progress; but, at any rate, you know where I stand. I shan’t buy any crepe until I receive

the wedding cards, and in the mean time”—he bowed very low—“please don’t overlook the fact that yours truly is your greatest responsibility, and one which you can’t shake off.”

Standing in the hall at the foot of the stairs, Allen discovered a figure militant awaiting his descent. Patricia was indignant and excited.

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“Hello, Lady Pat!” cried Allen. “What’s happened?”

Patricia stamped her foot. “Alice is a naughty, naughty girl,” she cried, with tears in her eyes. “I don’t love her any more.”

“Tut, tut.” Allen sat on the lowest step and soothed the child. “Alice is all right.”

“No, she isn’t,” Patricia insisted. Then she pulled away from him and again stood very straight, immaculate in her white frock. “I’ve been listening up-stairs.”

“Oh, ho!” Allen shook his finger reproachfully. “Was that a nice thing to do?”

“It was my duty,” the child responded, impressively. “I always do that, and I heard what she said; but I will make it up to you.”

“That’s awfully good of you, Lady Pat.”

“You may kiss me.” She held her face forward, with her hands still behind her.

Allen drew her into his lap. “There’s one for the lips, and one for each eye, and one for each cheek,” suiting the action to the word. Patricia worked herself free.

“Now we’re engaged,” she announced. “You may marry me as soon as you like.”

Allen concealed his amusement. “I can’t marry you because I’ve made a vow to marry Alice, and it would never do to break a vow, would it?”

“But if the lady won’t marry you, then you are released from your vow,” Patricia explained, showing perfect familiarity with the laws of chivalry.

“Not until she marries some one else,” he corrected.

“That’s all right,” the child assented, cheerfully; “until then you can be my Knight.” Then she majestically untied the ribbon in her hair and held it out to him.

“What’s this for?” he inquired.

“For you—to wear always. Every knight in my *Round Table* book has a token from his lady-love.”

“I shall wear it next my heart,” Allen told her. “And now, fair Lady Pat, good-bye.”

The child made a magnificent courtesy. “Good-bye, Sir Launcelot, ’til death asunder.”

XIII

John Covington's mind had been fully occupied during the few days which succeeded Harris's call. Inwardly he blamed himself as a bungler not to have covered his footsteps with greater skill; outwardly he was as unruffled and self-satisfied as ever. He called on Brady with Harris, as he promised. He allowed them both to explain their plans with even greater detail than Harris's previous disclosures. He listened, calmly and unprotestingly, to their confident statements as to what they proposed to make him, as a director in the Consolidated Companies, do for them. Then with equal serenity he flatly declined to yield to the pressure brought to bear upon him.

"I suppose you understand what this means to you," Brady snapped, angered by the unexpected refusal.

"Better than you do, I feel certain."

"What will the virtuous Mr. Gorham say when he finds out that you hold all that stock?"

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“He will give your statement no credence whatever.”

“But we can prove it to him.”

“On the contrary, you will find yourself unable to do this.”

“Didn’t Harris show you that list?”

“Yes; but that was some days ago.”

“You’ve unloaded, eh? That won’t help you any. We’ll find out who’s got it.”

“You need not take any trouble about the matter, as I am quite ready to give you the necessary information. Miss Gorham now holds the shares.”

“Gorham’s daughter?” queried Harris. “Does he know it?”

“I really don’t know whether Miss Gorham has advised her father or not; that is her affair.”

“Well, we’ll see that he does know it,” stormed Brady; “and will also see that he knows how you’ve unloaded it on her.”

“You may find some difficulty,” Covington replied, suavely. “The certificates, you know, never stood in my name. I simply acted as the young lady’s agent. If you can make any capital out of that, you are at perfect liberty to do so. Was there any other detail in connection with this matter which you wished to discuss with me? Mr. Harris and you have been most confidential, and I might possibly feel inclined to reciprocate.”

“You know too damned much already,” retorted Brady, savagely. “I was a fool not to put the deal through before Gorham got into the game. After that it was too late—the stockholders would never have stood for our extra rake-off after he put them wise.”

Harris’s face paled. “You don’t mean that there’s danger of our getting thrown down, do you?” he queried in a tense voice. “I’ve put every dollar I own and some I don’t own into this pool with you.”

Brady struck him familiarly on the back and laughed. “You are in hard when you show the white feather like that. Cheer up. There’s no question of being thrown down. What do you take me for? It’s only a question of whether or not we can get all there is in it—-that’s what I’m worrying about. Gorham’s been getting next to Littleton and Graham all summer. I’ve tried to find out just what he was up to, but he’s smarter in covering his tracks than I am to uncover ’em, even if he ain’t quite so smart in some other directions. He’s been in to see me several times, and there hasn’t been a word to make me think that things ain’t going through just as we planned ’em; but if they are, what’s he

monkeying round with those other fellows for? That's what I want to know. If our friend here feels like reciprocating, as he says he does, now's his chance."

Covington watched the two men closely. He may have enjoyed the fact that the course of the conversation had turned, but if so he gave no evidence of it.

"You have placed me in possession of certain information which obviously would not assist in carrying out your plans," he remarked, suggestively. "Now, this whole transaction, as I informed Mr. Harris, is in Mr. Gorham's hands. Under certain conditions, I might not feel it incumbent upon me to interfere."

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“And those are?” asked Harris.

“That you forget my insignificant part in the purchase of Miss Gorham’s stock,” he replied. “It is not of great concern to me, and you are perfectly free to communicate it to Mr. Gorham if you choose; but in view of certain things which have occurred since, I should be glad to have the matter dropped if agreeable to you.”

“That’s easy enough,” Brady remarked, showing signs of relief. “Is that all?”

“Yes,” Covington replied; “I am not as avaricious as you are in exacting my pound of flesh. Now, one other thing in order to give good measure: it may interest you to know that Mr. Gorham went over the contract with me yesterday in detail, and he is going to accept it as it stands, paying you the price you named.”

“You saw what it stipulated, Covington? It covers everything just as we turn it over. He can find out all in good time what three lines ain’t included, and also the price his precious Companies will have to pay for them.”

“He appeared to be perfectly satisfied,” Covington continued, calmly. “I should judge that everything was all right.”

“Then he’s been wastin’ time,” growled Brady, “and he can have all the pink teas he wants with Littleton and Graham. We directors have the authority, anyhow; nobody could stop us. Who the devil is Gorham to dictate to me? He thinks he’s the whole show, he does. It makes me sick to see him swellin’ around with that girl wife of his. She’s a stunner all right, and I don’t blame him; but who the devil is she? Somebody’s divorced wife, ain’t she, Covington? Does anybody know anything about her? He ain’t so much.” He took out his watch and looked at it mechanically. “I guess I’m gettin’ old to have these nervous spells—it ain’t like me.”

Covington bade them good-morning and returned to his office fairly well satisfied. The danger of the present situation had been minimized. He felt sure that Alice would not go out of her way to acquaint her father with the name of the stock by which her property would be handsomely increased, and he knew that Gorham’s mind was too full of other matters to press her for the details unless she volunteered them. But he must be more discreet, this he realized. If the matter could be dropped here, he would have learned a useful lesson; and then, too, the interview had not been without a suggestion which was well worth following up. It occurred to Covington, in view of Brady’s remark, that he had been unpardonably obtuse in neglecting to acquaint himself with the details of Mrs. Gorham’s early life. He knew vaguely that she had been the victim of unpleasant experiences before her present marriage, but what they were he had never learned. There might be something in them which it would be to his advantage to know, and it could surely do no harm to make a quiet investigation.

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On the following day, Covington found himself in front of an old-fashioned brick building standing almost significantly in the shadow of the Tombs. He paused for a moment to wonder at the enormous gaudy sign, “Levy & Whitcher’s Law Offices,” running across the front and side of the edifice, which impressed him with a sense of its vulgarity. The door creaked as Covington opened it and passed on into the dingy offices—even dingier than the nature of the business done in them required, because of the dirt-trodden floors and their unwashed windows. He pushed his way through the bunch of process-servers, messengers, and clerks who littered up the outer office, almost tripping over a torn law-book on the floor, and finally found his way to the waiting-room of Mr. Levy’s private sanctum in the rear. Here he was subjected to a careful scrutiny by the lawyer’s “secretary,” whose personal appearance seemed to indicate greater familiarity with the prize ring than with clerical labors. There may have been method in his selection, as Mr. Levy was a gentleman whose professional life had been spent in undertakings which a conservative insurance company might classify under “hazardous risks.”

Levy had reached a point in his career when he could afford to keep his clients waiting. He and his partner, during the twenty-five years they had been together, had prospered even beyond their early dreams of avarice. It was their boast that during their partnership it had not been necessary to open a law-book three times. There was always a way to beat a case “on the facts,” and they had learned the way. They kept no books, and the pleasantest part of each day’s business was the five-o’clock adjournment to a neighboring saloon, where the partners had punctiliously divided the millions which came to the firm during the years of their successful association.

After a delay which proved more or less aggravating to Covington, he was ushered into the presence of the “great” man. Levy endeavored to be courteous in his reception, but Covington showed scant interest in conventions. He plunged at once into the nature of his business, finding Levy an interested and sympathetic listener. It was some minutes after his caller ceased speaking that the silence was broken.

“Well,” Covington said at length, coldly, “does the matter interest you?”

“I was deliberating,” the lawyer rejoined, almost as if in apology.

“Do you think you can discover anything of interest?”

Levy smiled blandly. “How can I say as yet?” he replied, conservatively. “There are certain elements which might contain interesting and promising details—a famous man married to a divorced woman twenty-five years his junior. We might easily find enough so that if you cared to push it he would prefer to make some concessions rather than suffer any unpleasant notoriety; and she may have a past which she would do much to keep forgotten. Yes, there are possibilities. Do you wish me to investigate?”

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“How long will it take?”

“It may require a fortnight; it may take six months.”

“By that time you would know whether there was anything in it?”

“Assuredly.”

“Then you may proceed. Advise me when you are ready to talk and I’ll come in again.”

“There is one other matter,” added Levy. “In case the affair develops, it may be fairly expensive.”

Covington looked at him curiously. “I presume so,” he said. “Before we get into it too far, I shall insist upon some understanding. I am not your debtor yet, am I?”

“The investigation will entail some expense and time,” Levy continued, thoughtfully. “You might pay me—say, five thousand as a retainer.”

“This is a business proposition, Mr. Levy,” Covington reminded him, sharply. “Thus far I have looked upon myself as a possible plaintiff in the affair—not as a defendant. I am not obliged to proceed in the matter, and will drop it right here if you propose to start in by trying extortion on me.”

Levy was grieved that any one should so misconstrue his motives. “This isn’t a childish play we’re going into, Mr. Covington,” he replied, mildly. “Gorham is big game, and I presume you expect to gain something out of this little affair.”

“You presume too much,” Covington said, shortly. “Comments are neither asked for nor desired. If you wish to do this work for me, I will pay you a fair price—yes, a high price—for your services, but no blood-money. I’ll pay you a thousand dollars now as a retainer; I’ll pay all reasonable expenses and four thousand dollars more in case you find anything of interest to me. Then, if I decide to use the information later, I’ll make a trade with you at that time on the basis of what it is worth. Do you care to accept the case on these terms?”

“The conditions are most unusual,” Levy wavered.

“The case itself is an unusual one,” Covington replied. “The chances are a hundred to one that you find nothing, in which case you will have earned your fee easily. Beyond this the odds are at least as great that I shall make no use of what you find out, anyway, which means that I shall have paid a large price to gratify my whim.”

“There is something in what you say,” admitted Levy.

“Then you will undertake it on my terms?”

“Yes; give me your check for a thousand dollars and I’ll start the ball rolling.”

“My check?” queried Covington. “I have no doubt currency will be equally acceptable.”

“Thank you very much,” Levy replied, genially, placing the bills carefully within a capacious wallet against the happy hour of five o’clock in Mulligan’s conveniently located saloon.

XIV

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The merger of the New York street railways, which occurred three weeks later, was Gorham's first chance to demonstrate to the public what the Consolidated Companies could accomplish in handling a great metropolitan transportation problem. The further he got into it, however, the more serious the problem became, and he had moved slowly to prevent any possible mistake. But now he was ready to proceed without further delay to complete his previous negotiations to secure the traction franchise for which Collins had bribed the Aldermen, and for a part interest in which Brady had intimidated Collins. It had been a nauseating piece of work even to Gorham, who had become only too familiar with the particular grade of business "morality" permeating those possessed of opportunity and fortified by responsibility. Covington was never able to reconcile Gorham's willingness to do business with men of this stamp, and the apparent personal stand which he took against both their practices and their methods.

"It is all perfectly consistent," Gorham assured him on more than one occasion. "It is often necessary to walk through filth and slime in order to reach high ground. It is a serious fault in our business system that these crimes can be committed, but the Consolidated Companies is not responsible for the system. To accomplish its own high ends, the Companies must possess itself of certain properties. These properties are at present in the hands of dishonest stewards, but these same dishonest stewards are legally authorized to sell them. The Companies buys, therefore, from those who have to sell, and its moral responsibility begins only upon its acquisition."

The transaction, large as it was, proved not a lengthy one. The franchise was formally made over to the Consolidated Companies, and the controlling stock in the New York Street Railways Company changed ownership. Properly certified checks for the franchise and for the stock were duly delivered into Brady's hands, and the business of the conference seemed to be completely settled to the satisfaction of all concerned. Still, Mr. Gorham and those who had come with him showed no disposition to depart.

"There ain't anything more, is there?" asked Brady, eager to terminate the conference, "except to congratulate the Consolidated Companies on acquirin' a damned valuable property."

"Only a little more," Gorham replied, quietly. "I have asked my friends, Mr. Littleton and Mr. Graham, to be present this morning, as I found that they, like the other and smaller stockholders, had very little knowledge of how their affairs were being handled for them by their directors. They have received their dividends regularly and promptly and were satisfied."

"What in hell is this a preamble to?" Brady whispered to Harris. "My nerves ain't quiet yet, even with the cash in my jeans."

But Gorham was still talking in the same low, quiet voice.

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“These gentlemen,” he was saying, “have honored the Consolidated Companies by becoming stockholders, so I thought it might be illuminating for them to be present at this conference, which will serve, I believe, as well as any to demonstrate the methods which the Consolidated Companies is obliged to meet and those which it proposes to employ.”

“I don’t know that this interests me much,” interrupted Brady, ill-humoredly. “Our business is done, ain’t it?”

“Not quite,” Gorham continued, scarcely heeding the break. “On behalf of the Consolidated Companies, and exercising the rights vested in me by my Board of Directors, I have just handed to you, Mr. Brady, a certified check for one hundred thousand dollars. Why it should go to you instead of to Mr. Collins you probably know better than I—it is enough that you have his authority to receive it. I happen to be aware that this check represents fifty thousand dollars more than Mr. Collins paid to get the franchise through the Board of Aldermen, so it is fair to assume that the price of twelve city fathers is the same as two private citizens.”

Harris found some difficulty in restraining Brady at this point, but their joint uncertainty regarding Gorham’s ultimate purpose resulted in preserving silence.

“In addition to the check for the franchise,” he continued, “I have also handed to Mr. Brady other certified checks for some twenty million dollars beyond the par value of the stocks of the various companies included in the merger which has just been consummated.”

“What are you kickin’ about?” demanded Brady. “Ain’t that the price you agreed to?”

“It is; and I consider the properties worth the price or I should not have agreed to it.”

“The stockholders ought to be satisfied, hadn’t they? They’re gettin’ good returns.”

“Yes, they ought to be satisfied, and I have no doubt they are.”

“Then what’s the point, friend—what’s all this palaver?”

“I was just coming to that. There are three short lines which are not mentioned in that contract. May I ask if there was any special reason for their omission?”

“That’s our business,” snarled Brady.

“I know it is,” Gorham replied, sharply, “and I’m going to ask you to attend to it right now.”

“We’ll attend to it when we get good and ready.” Brady squared himself for the issue. “If you was as smart as you think you are, you’d have thought of those three lines before you cashed up.”

“I didn’t overlook them,” Gorham replied. “I can buy them cheaper now.”

Brady was amused and showed his appreciation of the speaker’s humor in his sidelong glance at Harris.

“You think so, do you?” he calmed himself enough to reply. “I presume you’ve settled on the price you’re goin’ to pay?”

“I have,” answered Gorham; “but I’m not quite ready to quote it. The stockholders of these small companies understood that you were purchasing their stock to be merged with the New York Street Railways Company, didn’t they?”

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“It don’t make a damned bit of difference what they thought. We paid ’em their price.”

“And the stockholders of the New York Street Railways Company thought you were buying this stock to be merged with theirs, didn’t they?”

“We used our own money to buy that stock. You can’t find a thing about it that ain’t straight.”

“Very good. Now I’ll name my price for the three lines. The Consolidated Companies will pay you fifty thousand dollars for them.”

“Fifty thousand!” gasped Brady. “Why, we paid two hundred thousand.”

“Thank you. I had wondered what you did pay for them, and this information is no doubt authentic. The stockholders made a better thing out of it than you will.”

“But we won’t sell at anything like that figure.”

“Oh, yes, you will if you sell at all,” Gorham rejoined. “One method by which the Consolidated Companies has succeeded is that of taking the public into its confidence whenever there is need of it. To-morrow we shall announce the birth of the Manhattan Traction Company, explaining its inception and its intentions. We shall show that, although we have paid an enormous price for the purchase of the properties, we shall capitalize at one-half the amount originally planned by those who would have carried through the merger if our Companies had not stepped in. We shall announce an increase of transfer privileges and a reduction of fares. We shall guarantee better equipment and better service. We shall also carefully explain that one of the reasons we can do this is that the company will be run in the interests of the public and the stockholders instead of in the interests of a few individuals; and we shall quote, in proof of this, that we purchased the three lines referred to for fifty thousand dollars when it was originally planned to have them cost the Companies something over two millions.”

“They will still cost the Companies ‘something over two millions,’” shouted Brady, “and the public be damned.”

“Our slogan is, ‘The public be pleased,’” smiled Gorham. “The offer of the Consolidated Companies will hold for twenty-four hours only,” he continued, rising. “The franchise, you will perhaps remember, grants full privileges for the construction of further subway connections. Under these circumstances, we do not urge you to accept our offer—we merely invite your consideration. Now, gentlemen”—Gorham placed a peculiar emphasis on the word—“I believe our business is completed. The time limit on our offer will expire at noon to-morrow.”

Covington was an interested spectator throughout the conference, and Gorham’s supreme command of the situation won from him his silent but profound admiration. He

rejoiced that this force was directed against others rather than himself, and he realized more than ever the importance of taking no chances of coming into conflict with this man who swept everything before him. He had enjoyed watching the faces

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of Brady and Harris as the game progressed, but his enjoyment encouraged him to remain too long after the departure of the others. Harris was cowed and frightened and seemed almost ready to break into tears, but Brady assumed an attitude which fitted him singularly well. It was not dismay, it was not chagrin—he was angry to the point of bursting. To Brady the one sin more flagrant than all others in the category of crime was failure, and in order to relieve his own conscience from the pollution of having failed he saw fit to attribute the entire responsibility to Covington.

"You damned skunk!" he cried, "you've sold us out after promisin' not to, that's what you've done! But I'll get back at you if it costs me ten years in Sing Sing!"

Covington for a second time went directly from Brady's office to his own, but the former complacency was replaced by a vague apprehension. A threat from Brady was worthy of consideration. Among the personal mail which he found upon his desk was a plain envelope, which, for some unknown reason, attracted his attention enough to cause him to open it before the one which lay on top. The signature interested him even more, particularly at the present moment, with his thoughts filled with what had recently passed. It is a precaution of the experienced mariner to inspect his lifeboats with especial care as he passes by a dangerous reef. The letter read:

"*The divorce papers prove to be shockingly irregular, and there are developments in the early life. Please call at your convenience.*"

Covington crushed the paper in his hand and turned toward his desk with a changed expression. He smiled as he looked forward into space—the first smile which had lighted up his face for several days. Then he brought his clenched fist down hard on the desk for no apparent reason and muttered something to himself.

XV

As evidenced in the message received by Covington, Levy had not been neglectful of the case which had been intrusted to him by his new client. Without much difficulty Buckner was located in New Orleans, and identified as the proprietor of a low dive which had become the rendezvous for the most vicious outcasts of the city. Drink and debauchery had long since destroyed the physical advantages he had possessed over other men at the time of his marriage. The death of his child, to whom he had given as much affection as his nature possessed, the stern arraignment of the neighbor who helped him to his ranch and later brought him the tragic news, and the consciousness of his own responsibility in the accident, all combined to drive him almost immediately away from the scenes which reminded him of it; and as time passed the bitterness turned to resentment against his wife. If she had not left the ranch that day, he argued

to himself, the accident would never have happened. She had loathed him for months before the final separation, and he had resented the disgust which she made no effort to conceal. There had been enough manhood left in him then to feel it and to resent it.

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When he first heard that she had instituted divorce proceedings his anger returned, and he determined to hold her to the unwelcome bonds if for nothing else than to know that she still suffered; but a consultation with an attorney showed him the futility of any defence, so he simply held this up against her as another affront to be wiped out if the time ever came which gave him the opportunity.

But he had long since given up all hope that this time would ever come. During the years which had elapsed he had drifted from one city to another, each time taking a stand a degree lower than the preceding. In New Orleans he had succeeded in getting a little better living than heretofore, so he had settled down there with the idea of making it a permanency.

It was a welcome break in the monotony for him to receive a call from Levy's agent, and the fact that the visitor felt inclined to provide liquid refreshment of a grade considerably higher than he had been able to indulge himself in for many years did not detract from his welcome. As the evening wore on he was quite willing—almost eager—to tell the story of his life to this agreeable and sympathetic listener, so Levy had been materially assisted in the preliminary investigation of his case. Nor was the welcome any less cordial when the agent appeared for a second time, on this occasion offering Buckner five hundred dollars in exchange for his "time and trouble." He was given no intimation regarding the nature of his errand; he really had little curiosity. It was enough that it paid what was now to him a princely sum, and also guaranteed him an attractive experience at some one else's expense.

On his arrival Levy gave Buckner a welcome which raised his self-esteem almost to the bursting-point. A box of costly cigars and a decanter of fine brandy close at his elbow appeared to him as the height of hospitality, as one gentleman would extend it to another. And when he found that his new host manifested even as deep an interest in his previous life as his earlier friend who had provided the money, he was prepared to reciprocate in every way that lay in his power.

With the preliminary acquaintance thus happily and firmly established, Levy opened up for business.

"In this suit for divorce which your wife brought," he asked, "the summons was never served on you, was it?"

"Why, yes," Buckner replied, slowly refilling his glass from the decanter; "it was served on me by a man named Murray, at Colorado Springs."

"Oh, dear; oh, dear!" groaned Levy, with a mixture of pathos and incredulity, "what an unfortunate memory you have! There was no one else in Colorado Springs who knew about it, I presume?"

“Not there,” Buckner answered; “I sent the paper to a lawyer in Denver named Jennings.”

“But there was no correspondence between you?”

“Yes; there were two or three letters.”

“Where is Jennings now?”

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“Dead, for all I know,” he responded, with a cheerfulness which came from his comfortable environment rather than from any particular pleasure from the possible demise of the gentleman in question. “He moved away from Denver later, and I haven’t heard of him since.”

Levy was absorbed in his own thoughts for several moments, which time was profitably employed by Buckner again to replenish his glass, and to help himself to a fresh cigar.

“Look here, Buckner.” Levy spoke so suddenly that his companion guiltily replaced the unlighted cigar in the box. “How difficult would it be for you to forget that you ever had a summons served on you, provided there was enough in it to make it worth while?”

Buckner boldly placed the cigar between his lips and straightened up.

“What’s the game?” he asked. “Tell me what’s up, and perhaps we can make a trade.”

“I have a client who might like to see that divorce decree set aside,” Levy began.

“Another friend of mine, eh?” Buckner laughed at his own joke. “Never knew before I was so popular.” The brandy was getting in its work. “Every one is interested in my marriage troubles, and here’s one wants to give me back my wife!”

“Never mind that,” Levy stopped him. “This client of mine isn’t interested in you or in your wife, but he evidently has a private spite against Gorham, who married her. He may not care to push it, but, if he does, do you see what the game is?”

“Sure I do, sure I do,” Buckner answered, thickly. “Damned good game—I’ll play it with you. It would hit her hard, too, wouldn’t it?”

“What do you care if it does?”

“I don’t care—glad of it—that’s the special reason why I’m willing to play the game.”

“All right; we’ll get down to business. I’m going to draw up an affidavit that, as far as the divorce proceedings are concerned, you never retained any lawyer, and never were served with a summons, either in Colorado Springs or anywhere else; that you never knew of the pending of the action, nor that this suit was to be brought to trial. And you are to swear to this, do you understand?”

Buckner whistled suggestively. “What’s the financial proposition?”

“Five thousand dollars if I use it; five hundred if I don’t.”

“Suppose Jennings turns up with those letters. There’s a penalty for that, isn’t there?”

“We’ll take good care that Jennings doesn’t turn up,” Levy assured him, “and we would be taking all the risk.”

It was Buckner’s turn to become absorbed, and this time it was Levy who refilled his glass.

“It would be a lot of money,” he muttered to himself, as he nervously gulped the brandy down, “and it would hit her hard. Go ahead, Levy. Draw up your damned paper and I’ll sign it. Never knew I was so popular, anyhow.”

Levy left him for a few moments while he dictated the affidavit, returning to his private office while the stenographer was writing out her notes.

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“I don’t suppose you know anything about the personal affairs of Mrs. Buckner-Gorham which would be of assistance to us in this case, do you?”

Buckner thought hard. Ideas came slowly to him in his present condition, but at last he looked up with an expression which interested the lawyer.

“She thought herself too good for me,” he muttered, “but there is something I should like to have her explain,” he said.

“And what is that?” Levy asked, quickly jumping at a possible clew.

“After she found me in the trail she disappeared for two weeks before she returned to her father’s ranch, and I should like to know where she spent that time.”

“Where do you think she spent it?”

“I don’t know for sure, but there are people who say she was with a prospector in his shack four or five miles from my ranch. I didn’t hear about it until afterward; but, anyhow, there was a man rode back with her to her father’s ranch who got her into the hospital in Denver after she found her father was dead. She thinks she’s better than I am, but, just the same, I’d like to know who that man was.”

Levy quickly made a few notes. “I think I may be able to assist you in gratifying that desire,” he remarked.

* * * * *

The next day after receiving the message, Covington again found himself within Levy’s dingy offices, and this time he experienced no delay in being conducted to the sanctum in the rear, where he found the lawyer ready to receive him with a genial smile and a cordiality which expressed itself in the briskness with which he rubbed his hands together.

“I think you will be well pleased with the rapid progress of our investigations,” Levy began.

“I judged so by your letter.” Covington was noncommittal.

“There will be no difficulty in having the divorce decree granted to Mrs. Buckner—now Mrs. Gorham—set aside whenever you say the word. Here is the affidavit of Buckner himself, and the fellow is not only willing but eager to push the case through.”

Covington took the document in his hand and examined it carefully. Then: “How would you undertake to do it?” he asked.

“It is a principle of our firm not to discuss methods with our clients. Results are what count, and our reputation for securing these is perhaps a sufficient guarantee that my statement is based on facts.”

“Your position is undoubtedly fully justified,” Covington replied, a slight expression of amusement showing in his face. “We hardly need to discuss that phase of it, however, as this is probably as far as I shall ask you to go.”

“Oh, Mr. Covington, you wouldn’t drop a nice case like this, would you?” Levy begged. “There is a lot of money in it for both of us.”

Covington answered him, coldly: “I believe the terms of our business arrangement were clearly understood at the beginning.”

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“Yes, but it is such a nice case,” Levy still pleaded. “You need not appear in it at all if you don’t want to. Mr. Buckner can become the plaintiff, and it need not cost you anything. We can make Mr. Gorham pay all the bills.”

“That’s enough of that,” was the sharp reply. “Now, what was it that you found out about Mrs. Gorham’s early history?”

Levy accepted the inevitable with equanimity, contenting himself with a gesture which expressed more than words.

“I have learned that after her child’s death Mrs. Gorham, then Mrs. Buckner, disappeared for a period of two weeks, during which time she is alleged to have lived in a prospector’s shack alone with him. Do you catch the significance?”

Covington again held out his hand, taking the second affidavit, which he scrutinized with the same care he gave the first.

“This is merely the unconfirmed statement of a prejudiced party,” he remarked; “it is of no value unless you could prove it.”

Levy smiled. “My dear Mr. Covington, we can prove anything—that is our business.”

“Well”—Covington rose—“you seem to have carried out your end of the affair.” He drew a roll of bills from his pocket. “Here is the balance due you. If I decide to make use of these documents, I will see you again and make a trade. Kindly give me an acknowledgment of my payment.”

Levy held up a hand protestingly. “I explained before that we never give receipts—”

“Oh, yes; it had slipped my mind,” Covington acquiesced.

“I hope to see you again soon, Mr. Covington,” Levy said in parting. “It is a nice case, such a nice case.”

The departing client gave no evidence that he heard the words, but after pushing his way to the street he drew a long breath, which might have indicated relief after sitting in the close office, or satisfaction that he held in his possession new weapons which could easily be made useful in case of need.

XVI

The mail-order business came to an abrupt end three months after Alice Gorham became its head. This in no way reflected upon its management, but it was too trifling an enterprise for the Consolidated Companies to retain. Covington was enthusiastic in

his reports to Mr. Gorham regarding Alice's proficiency and natural ability along business lines. This experience had been an interesting and valuable one to her, he explained, but would it not accomplish the same purpose and be better for Miss Gorham—still, of course, under his guidance—to take personal charge of her own property and thus become thoroughly familiar with the various investments?

Gorham heartily approved of Covington's suggestion, and so did Alice. To the former it seemed to offer a natural vent for his daughter's desires; to the girl it appeared as a real promotion. It was not necessary for Covington to explain to his chief that the arrangement actually went into effect several weeks before it was submitted to him for his approval, nor did he take any credit to himself for the handsome profit in certain street railways stock, which netted Alice thirty thousand dollars as a result of her first investment. In fact, he modestly cautioned his pupil to say nothing about it, on the ground that the next investment might show a loss, and her father would be interested only in final results.

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During the weeks which succeeded the merger of the New York street railways, Covington was more assiduous than ever in his attentions to Alice, yet, even with Allen's jealous suggestions, the girl saw in them nothing more than a continuation of their previous relations. His skill in manipulating her securities increased her admiration, and the incredible success filled her with joy. She was bursting with enthusiasm, and longed for an opportunity to share her happiness at least with Eleanor; but since the first confidences with her, she had become convinced that her preceptor's restrictions included Eleanor as well.

In spite of the care with which he selected the moment and the words, when Covington actually declared himself it came to Alice not only as a surprise, but as a distinct shock. At first she could not believe him sincere, but he succeeded in convincing her on this point. He interpreted her long silence and evident surprise as the natural expression of a young girl face to face with the most vital problem which ever comes to her. As a matter of fact, had Alice analyzed her feelings, the compound would have proved to be made up in equal parts of gratification, astonishment, and a broken idol. She was flattered that this man should really wish to marry her, she was amazed that his declaration did not arouse in her all those sentimental emotions which she had associated with a moment such as this; and she instinctively felt that he could not possibly be the great man she had considered him, to desire what he had asked.

"I thought you and I had decided that I was to be a business woman," Alice said at last, questioningly.

"Only for the time being," Covington smiled, well satisfied. "That is all right as a pastime, and you shall indulge in it as much as you like, but Mrs. John Covington will have more of a position to live up to even than Miss Alice Gorham."

"That's just it," she said, slowly. "It doesn't seem to me that I am ready to assume any 'position,' as you call it. Until you and daddy gave me this chance to do something else besides dances and theatre-parties and all those things we girls fill our time with, I was drifting hopelessly. This tiny bit of responsibility has been just the anchor I needed. What I read means so much more to me, what people talk about is of increased interest because I am just that much more conversant with what is going on; and the dances and the theatre-parties are lots more fun too. What you have asked, Mr. Covington, is enough to make any girl feel proud and happy, but—I don't believe I'm ready yet to give up my girlhood now when I am enjoying it most."

"There need be no haste in your decision," he said, graciously.

"Needn't there? Then you will give me a long time to think it over?"

"Not too long, I hope," he answered, significantly.

“But, truly,” Alice’s pout was exceedingly becoming, “I don’t want to be married at all. Why should I when I am so happy?”

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“Isn’t that an unusual position for a young girl to take?”

“Perhaps it’s because I am young,” she admitted, smiling. “But I see so many—what shall I call them?—semi-detached couples, that it makes me wonder.”

“Semi-detached?” Covington queried.

“Why, yes,” she explained; “you know what I mean: the only way they can live happily together is to live apart.”

“You are not very complimentary to me.”

“Oh, please!” Alice interrupted quickly. “But you’ve noticed it, haven’t you?”

“We notice many things which do not require personal application. In the present instance I think we possess so many interests in common that our marriage would be considered an ideal one. It would make me very happy.”

“You have been so kind,” Alice said, looking at him gratefully. “You know that I appreciate it, don’t you? But I had no idea—you quite took my breath away, you are so much older than I am, and—”

“Am I so terribly old?”

“Oh, no; I mean it is I who am so terribly young. I never felt quite so young before. I suppose it is the surprise of it all. But you said I might have a long time. I must talk with daddy and Eleanor, you know. And I shall think it all over most carefully, please believe me.” Alice held out her hand cordially. “Will you excuse me now—I really must see Eleanor.”

Covington watched the girl in amazement as she hastily withdrew her hand and fled from the room. The self-possessed young woman whom he had met day after day had vanished, and in her place he saw the youthful school-girl, frightened into a loss of self-control by the offer of marriage he had just tendered her. Yet the whole episode amused him hugely. He smiled as he thought of his wife-to-be—the future Mrs. John Covington—running like a frightened deer from the first situation which took her by surprise! It was not as he had pictured it, but youth is a malady from which one’s convalescence is ever speedy, and he could enjoy it while it lasted. He found his way to the front door unguided, where he paused for a moment and looked back, as if expecting to see the lithe form of the girl peering over the banister; but no sound came from the floor above, and the staircase was vacant.

“An amusing little minx,” he laughed to himself, as he passed out of the house.

Alice lost no time in seeking Eleanor, eager to pour into her sympathetic ears the new problem which had presented itself. Instead, she found Patricia, curled up in an easy-chair, rereading her *Knights of the Round Table* with renewed interest. She bent over to kiss her, but the child drew away.

“I don’t love you any more,” she announced.

“You don’t!” asked Alice, taken by surprise.

“No; you’re so mean to Allen.”

The girl laughed. “Don’t be silly, Pat. Why, Allen is only a kid, like you. Where’s mamma Eleanor?”

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“Lying down in her room; but he isn’t a kid—he’s my Knight.”

“All right; you may have him,” Alice answered, lightly, turning toward the door.

“Alice!”

The older girl turned. “Well?” she interrogated.

“Is Mr. Covington a cat?”

“What do you mean?”

“Allen said to me the other day, ‘Listen to him purr.’”

“Allen ought to have his ears boxed.”

“No, he oughtn’t”—but the door had slammed, and Patricia was alone with her Knights.

Alice tiptoed into Mrs. Gorham’s room, then started to withdraw as Eleanor appeared to be asleep, but the older woman stopped her.

“Come in, dear,” she said; “I am only resting.”

“Are you ill?” the girl asked, anxiously, all thought of her errand vanishing; “you were looking very tired at breakfast.”

“I did not sleep last night,” she replied, rising wearily from the bed, and pressing her hands against her temples as she sat down. “I am so perplexed that I don’t know which way to turn. I wonder if you could advise me, Alice?”

“If only I could be of help to you!” the girl exclaimed, drawing another chair close to Eleanor’s, and taking both her hands in her own.

Eleanor made no reply for several moments. “I don’t know what to do,” she said simply at last. “I want to have my life an open book to your father, yet in this one instance I can’t see my way clear.”

“Why, Eleanor!” cried the girl, surprised, “how can that be possible?”

“I don’t wonder you ask; that is the question I have set myself to answer. I saw Ralph Buckner yesterday as I was driving up Fifth Avenue, and the sight of him filled me with apprehension.”

“Your first husband—in New York?” Alice asked, surprised.

“Yes—what can he be doing here?”

“You don’t know that it has anything to do with you, do you?”

“No; but I am so apprehensive that I imagine everything.”

“But the past is dead, Eleanor dear. To have it recalled is of course painful, but why should you dread it?”

Mrs. Gorham did not answer at once, and the girl was amazed to witness the conflict of emotion which her face expressed. At last Eleanor raised her eyes.

“The past is not wholly dead,” she said, in a low voice. “That is the unfortunate part. There is one event which happened back there in Colorado, right after Carina was killed, which has never—can never be explained. It is the only detail of that awful tragedy which I have not told your father, and I could not even tell you.”

“Can’t you tell me enough so I can really help you, Eleanor?”

“No, not even as much as that. The appearances were all against me. I know that nothing occurred of which I need feel ashamed, but the circumstantial evidence is so strong that it would be beyond human possibility to expect any one, even one as generous as your father, to accept my unsupported statement.”

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“Has this to do with your first husband?”

“I fear that if he has come in possession of the facts he may intend to use them against me.”

“Then the only thing for you to do is to see father at once, and to tell him everything yourself before that horrid man has the opportunity. There is nothing, Eleanor, which you could tell him which he would not accept exactly as you stated. Why, of course there isn’t.”

“I wish I had your confidence, dear,” Eleanor sighed, “but that would be asking too much.”

“Was Mr. Buckner concerned in it?”

“No; it was another man—the only other man I ever met except your father whom I would include among God’s noblemen.”

“Some one you loved, Eleanor?” the girl asked, hesitatingly.

“No, dear, not that!” she cried, hastily. “I was in no condition at that time to love any one. It was, as I told you, right after Carina’s death. He was the friend who protected me and who helped me at that time—I told you about it—but who would believe that it was simply an act of humanity?”

“Father would believe it, Eleanor,” the girl cried, firmly. “You must tell him, and you must tell him now—now—he is in the library.”

“Oh, I cannot!” cried Eleanor, shrinking; “Robert is so much to me that I cannot run the risk of having even a doubt disturb the perfect understanding that has always existed between us.”

“You must, Eleanor,” insisted Alice, rising and urging Mrs. Gorham to her feet. “You must—shall I go with you?”

“No, dear,” Eleanor replied. “I will go”; and with slow footsteps she left the room.

* * * * *

Gorham was well satisfied with the successful formation of the Manhattan Traction Company, as he was also with the general progress of the Consolidated Companies. Its expansion and success were phenomenal, and it was, of a certainty, coming into its own. The volume of business had quadrupled; its list of stockholders was nearly complete, and already included a sufficient proportion of those who controlled the world’s pulse to make the acquisition of the others certain; its political strength,

exercised under his firm hand for peace always, even now exceeded any similarly exerted power the world had known.

It was natural that Gorham should be filled with a certain sense of satisfaction that his work was bearing such magnificent fruit. One by one the necessities of life were being given to the public at a lower cost; one by one the luxuries, which had previously been denied them, were being brought within their reach. Wars had been prevented and taxation reduced. Everywhere the Consolidated Companies was looked upon as the people's friend, and those connected with it as public benefactors. And yet—the profits were increasing so rapidly that before long they bade fair to defy human computation!

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For the first time since he began his work of forming the corporation Gorham gave himself up to day-dreams. Sitting back in an easy-chair in his library he watched the smoke curl upward from his cigar, and gave his mind free rein. With the momentum now acquired, nothing could stem the triumphal advance. The business scope had extended nearly as far as he would let it go—he would confine it to public utilities and public necessities. In the future, it might break beyond the confines he had set for it, and even become the single employer of all labor, but for his own time he would keep it within his limitations, so that he might devote his thought and energy to the development of its political power. Why should he not eventually succeed even in forcing a disarmament of nations, relieving the people of their most grievous burden, and insuring peace by the absolute control the Companies was certain to acquire of foodstuffs and the munitions of war? Then, indeed, his life would not have been in vain!

His day-dreams and his thoughts were interrupted by finding his wife at his side. She had entered so quietly that he had not heard her footstep, and he gave a gentle start when he felt her hand upon his forehead.

“Yes, dear, I am dreaming,” he said, in answer to her unspoken question. “You don’t often see me this way, do you? The world never looked so bright as it does to-day. The Consolidated Companies, the child of your conception and my creation, has reached the zenith of its power. It may grow larger, but even now nothing can resist it.”

“The world never looked so bright as it does to-day,” Eleanor repeated to herself, sitting on the arm of his chair, thrilled by the message of love which this man sent out to her through the pressure of his hand on hers which he held so closely. Should she be the one to disturb the supreme serenity of his thoughts at this moment by a suggestion of something which perhaps was only the figment of an over-anxious brain? Inside the battle waged, but he could not see her face, so was ignorant of the conflict. If her hand trembled within his own he did not notice it. She looked down at the profile so clearly outlined. What strength, what sweetness, what contentment! To-morrow she would tell him, but not to-day. This moment was hers, and no past memory had the right to take it from her!

XVII

The strain under which Gorham had been working for the past five years was beginning to show itself, and, acting upon his doctor’s advice, he decided to take a brief respite from the cares and responsibilities of the office. He did not think it necessary to leave New York, as the reaction was not as yet strong enough to require any radical treatment. A fortnight spent quietly at his home in the midst of congenial surroundings would be entirely sufficient. During this time he denied himself to business callers, simply keeping in touch with affairs by means of his daily reports, which formed so strong a feature of his business system.

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“They make the yesterdays into a whip of many lashes to urge to-day on to still greater speed,” Gorham once explained. “They change the president of the Consolidated Companies from an absentee employer into an ubiquitous superintendent.”

Because of Mr. Gorham’s desire for retirement, the butler endeavored to explain the impossibility of an interview to a tall, smooth-faced young man who presented his card one afternoon. The caller’s slight figure was clad in a black whip-cord suit, and over his arm was thrown a neatly folded tan overcoat. His silk hat carried a broad mourning band, and his hands were encased in black kid gloves. Gorham’s would-be visitor did not present the most cheerful appearance, but the insistence with which he emphasized the important nature of his business succeeded in effecting his entrance to the hallway, where he was left until the butler could fortify himself behind the faithful Riley’s invaluable advice.

Riley looked at the printed visiting-card, gave a violent start, and then quickly closed his hand over it. A penetrating glance disclosed the fact that the name had conveyed no special information to his companion, so he hastily assumed the responsibility of handling the situation, and hurried to the hall. Giving the visitor no opportunity to speak, Riley placed his hand gently upon his arm, and addressed him beseechingly.

“Jimmie, me la-ad,” the old man said, “is it raly yersel’ come ter see ye’er ol’ fa-ather? I can’t belave it, indade I can’t; but ’tain’t this we must be talkin’ about now. I know it’s th’ great man ye are, but ye wuddent queer ye’er fa-ather by comin’ ter th’ front dure, wud ye? Come now, Misther Robert ain’t heard about it yit, so it’s all right, Jimmie—we’ll go down-stairs an’ have a nice little visit. It’s proud I am ter have ye call on me, but ye mustn’t come ter th’ front dure, Jimmie—ye mustn’t do that.”

Riley’s anxiety to get his son down-stairs and into his own domain blinded him to the straightness of Jimmie’s back and the severe lines in his face. With all the dignity at his command the visitor assumed a position which perhaps he had learned during his career as an orator:

“You are my father, and an old man,” he replied, with rare condescension, “so I will be gentle with you. I didn’t call to sec *you*, Mr. Riley—I have important business with Mr. Gorham.”

Riley drew back, indecision mingled with a father’s pride that a son of his could carry himself with such an air.

“That’s phwat brought ye here, is it?—business wid Misther Robert—ye!” he repeated. “Ah, Jimmie, I can’t belave it, me la-ad. Are ye shure?”

“Is it his father who doubts the word of James Riley?” the younger man replied, and Riley thought he discerned a touch of sorrow in the unnatural tone of voice.

“But Misther Robert ain’t doin’ no business these days, Jimmie. It’s th’ vacation he’s havin’.”

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“This is personal business, Mr. Riley, and it’s to his own interest to see me. I can be of service to Mr. Gorham.”

“Ye can be iv service ter Misther Robert, Jimmie?” The old man’s face beamed with pride. “Ah, Jimmie, it’s proud I am iv ye! Me own la-ad iv service ter Misther Robert! I’ll spake ter him at wance.”

As Riley drew back to admire his son, his eye fell upon the silk hat and the black gloves.

“Who’s dead, Jimmie?” he asked, with real concern “—why do ye wear th’ sorry rag on ye’er hat an’ th’ ravens on ye’er hands?”

“No one you know,” James replied, carelessly flicking a speck from his overcoat sleeve. “The city supplied them for the committee what went to Moriarty’s funeral last month.”

“Oh!” Riley wavered between his relief and his sense of duty to acquaint his son with the proper usage of the articles in question. Discretion finally prevailed, and he went upstairs to impress Mr. Gorham with the importance of Jimmie’s errand.

James Riley had acted upon a sudden impulse in making his call upon Mr. Gorham. He had unexpectedly gained possession of certain information which he felt might be of commercial value to himself, and beyond this it offered him an opportunity to come in close contact with a famous man. With his eye always open to the main chance, James felt that this first meeting with Mr. Gorham, since he himself had come into his own, might lead to something worth while.

Even Gorham was conscious of the satisfaction expressed in the old man’s voice as he opened the library door for his famous offspring and announced “Misther James Riley,” dwelling noticeably upon the prefix.

“I am glad to see you, James,” Gorham greeted him cordially. “Your father has kept me posted from time to time of your successes, and I congratulate you both.”

Praise from the president of the Consolidated Companies was nectar to James Riley, and with an effort to appear indifferent he suffered himself to sit down.

“Your father tells me you have personal business with me,” Gorham continued, noting the difficulty James experienced in getting under way.

The caller would not have admitted it, even to himself, but the effect of being actually in the presence of this man of world-wide fame, and in the midst of such palatial surroundings, was to deprive him of his usual easy flow of words. Gorham’s remark, however, as was intended, served to relieve him, but the oratorical prelude which he had carefully rehearsed coming up on the electric ’bus had vanished from his mind, and he plunged, as had still another “gentleman” before him, *in medias res*.

“There’s a feller in town what means to make trouble for you,” he announced, bluntly, looking up from his study of the pattern in the rug to note the effect of his announcement upon his host.

Gorham laughed. “I have an idea that there is more than one ‘feller’ in town who would be glad to do that if he found the chance.”

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“That may be, sir,” James assented, “but this feller has come a long bit out of his way to do it, and I don’t think it’s on the level, sir.”

“It is very good of you to come and tell me this, James,” Gorham said, lightly; “but I presume our secret service force already have the gentleman on their list.”

“Oh, he ain’t no gentleman,” James corrected him, “and it ain’t got nothin’ to do with business, sir, so I thought I’d call on you as a friend and tell you what I know.”

“What else can it have to do with?” queried Gorham, incredulously, yet humoring James for his father’s sake.

“With Mrs. Gorham, sir—leastwise, that’s what he says.”

Gorham’s apathy disappeared, but his visitor observed no change in the calmness of his expression or in the quiet tone in which he spoke.

“You surprise me, James. What sort of man is he?”

“He’s a blackguard, sir, and a liar. I’d have told him so, only he was drunk, and I thought he might leak something what would be of interest to you. He says he used to be Mrs. Gorham’s husband.”

The lines deepened a little in Gorham’s face. “What is his name?” he asked.

“Buckner, sir—Ralph Buckner.”

“H’m! And why do you think he intends to try to make trouble for me?”

“Well, sir, you see it’s this way. This feller come to the same boardin’-house where I live, but I didn’t pay no attention to him ’til I see him playin’ pool in the saloon opposite. I’m a Tammany man, sir, and I has to mix with all the new ones what come into my ward. I got acquainted with him over there, and he drank awful heavy. He’s quiet enough when he’s sober, but he talks free and easy like when he gets tanked. One night he says to me, ‘I’m goin’ to make a lot o’ money.’

“‘Good!’ says I, more to be agreeable than because I had any ’special interest—’how’re you goin’ to do it?’

“Then he laughed, silly-like, and winked at me. I didn’t say no more, but the next night he talked again.

“‘What do you think,’ he says; ‘I see my wife to-day ridin’ up Fifth Avenue behind the swellest pair o’ horses in New York City. No wonder she shook me for that.’

"'What do you mean?' says I, surprised at his line o' talk.

"'She's Mrs. Robert Gorham now,' says he, 'but perhaps she won't be long.'

"Then I laughed at him, and that made him mad.

"'That's right,' says he. 'There're people here in this town who tell me that her divorce from me warn't reg'lar, and I may be takin' the lady back to New Orleans with me, and a heap o' money besides.'

"0' course, all this don't mean nothin' to me, but I thought it might to you, sir."

Mr. Gorham did not reply for so long a time that James became anxious.

"I hope I done right, sir, to come to you with this."

"Yes, James; quite right. You are evidently influenced by your loyalty to my family," Gorham answered. "It is right that you should be, but it shall not be forgotten. There probably is nothing in all this, but, since Mrs. Gorham's name was mentioned, I should like to get to the bottom of it. I shall depend upon you to keep me posted."

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“I will, sir,” James responded, eagerly. “I’ll do that as long as he stays in New York, but he says they’re trying to get him to go back to New Orleans.”

“Who are ’they’?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“That is the first thing to discover, James. I shall trust you to do it.”

Gorham rose, and James, vastly satisfied with himself, followed the suggestion.

“I’ll do it for you, sir,” he said at the door. “You can depend on me for that.”

“Thank you, James; and in the mean time it will be prudent for you to keep your information to yourself.”

“Yes, sir; I’ll do that, sir. Any one with a Tammany Hall education knows how to do that, sir.”

Riley was anxiously awaiting the close of the interview, and eagerly accompanied his son to the front door. Before he opened it, the old man turned inquiringly.

“Ain’t ye goin’ ter tell me phwat it’s all about, Jimmie?”

“It’s too delicate a situation to discuss with the servants,” James replied, freezingly. “Me and Mr. Gorham understands each other, that’s all.”

Riley gazed with still greater admiration at the straight figure which passed by him, out of the house, and up the gravel walk to the street.

“Jimmie’s th’ great man,” he muttered to himself as he closed the door—“he’s th’ great man, mixin’ wid men like Misther Robert; but he hadn’t oughter wear that sorry rag an’ th’ ravens, wid me, his only livin’ relation, still livin’.”

The bell rang almost immediately, and Riley, certain that James had returned, hastened to throw the door open. As he did so, he discovered Allen Sanford.

“Who’s that undertaker person?” Allen demanded.

Riley straightened perceptibly. “‘Tis me son James, Misther Sanford, an’ it’s th’ great man he is, an’ no undertaker.”

“I beg your pardon, Riley,” Allen laughed, noting the old man’s injured dignity. “Of course I should have known; but I may want to employ an undertaker soon, so I suppose I had it on my mind.”

“Ain’t ye falin’ well, Misther Allen?” Riley asked, anxiously.

“Oh, I don’t want him for myself,” Allen laughed again. “Is Miss Alice in?”

“How do I know ’til she tells me, sor?”

“All right; you’ll have to ask her then, won’t you? If she is in, tell her that I’ve called to have tea with her.”

Alice was in particularly high spirits. She had digested Covington’s proposal, and found that she enjoyed it. She was still waiting for a chance to discuss it with Eleanor and her father, but she experienced an unexpected amount of pleasure in thinking it over by herself. She had already decided that she would take plenty of time before she gave her answer. The sensation was so exhilarating that she was unwilling to shorten its duration. It was all so incredible that she—little she—should have attracted a man of Mr. Covington’s calibre to the extent that he should actually want to marry her! And now Allen had called, giving her an outlet for this unusual buoyancy.

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Her caller was not blind to the excitement which showed in Alice's face, and the formalities were scarcely over before he asked the question which brought a violent color to the girl's cheeks.

"So it's come, has it—just as I said it would?"

"What has come?" Alice busied herself with the teacups which the butler had already placed on the little table in front of her, and appeared to be mystified, though she knew well what he meant.

"That doesn't surprise me any," Allen continued, "but I really didn't think it would set you up so much when it did strike."

"I suppose you are enjoying this monologue," she replied. "Don't mind me if it gives you any pleasure."

"Look here, Alice"—he became desperate—"why can't we talk it over without having to jump all these high hurdles? I know you don't care anything about me, and you know that I can't see anything in life worth while except you, so the situation is clear on both sides. But I can't let that four-flusher pull the wool over your eyes without saying, 'Beware of the dog.' I shouldn't be a man if I did."

"You take advantage of our friendship," she said, severely; "but there are limits beyond which even an old friend cannot go, and you've reached them. Mr. Covington is a friend too; I don't admit that he is more than this, but I shan't let you say unfair things about him any more than I should listen to similar things about you. Come now, let's drop the subject. How many lumps will you have?"

"Two lumps, and—no lemon, please."

"You say you wouldn't be a man if you didn't warn me," the girl went on; "but it is because you are not that you talk as you do. You find me agreeable, and, boy-like, think you want to marry me. Pat thinks she wants to marry you—you are both children, and both behave the same."

Allen put his cup down on the table untasted. "Is there no way I can convince you that I've grown up?" he demanded.

"Yes; drop all this nonsense about me, and make yourself a place in the world as Mr. Covington has done."

"Never!" he almost shouted. "You don't know how he's made his place, or you wouldn't say that. Do you want me to climb up by stepping all over those who have helped me, to play double with every one I meet, to crisscross even on the man who trusts me

most, and finally try to cinch my position by marrying his daughter? If that's your idea of being a man, I'll tell you right now, not for mine."

Alice rose, with flaming face. "I told you that you had reached the limit, Allen—now you have passed it. Oh! why did I let you go on! I like you so much, and I want to see you succeed. I've tried to help you all I could, and this is the result. Now we can't even be friends any more, and this insane jealousy of yours will spoil your chances in the Companies. Oh, Allen, Allen—why can't you grow up and be sensible!"

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“Don’t worry about me,” the boy said, dejectedly. “You’re probably right, just as the pater was probably right. I’m no good anyhow. I didn’t want to go into diplomacy because there seemed to be so much in it which was double-dealing. Now I’m in business, and I see the same things there. It’s all my fault—it must be; but I’m in wrong somehow. I wouldn’t say a word, Alice, if it were some one else, but Covington—well, you’ve told me to cut that out, so I will. But don’t say we can’t be friends—I couldn’t stand that. You’ll need me some time, little girl, and when you do, I want to be Johnny on the spot.”

Alice never found it possible to be angry with him for any extended period. Always after his impulsive outbreaks he became so contrite that the early displeasure was abated by his unspoken but evident desire for forgiveness.

“Will you take back what you said about Mr. Covington?” she asked.

“I can’t do that,” he replied, firmly; “but I’ll do my best to let you find him out from some one else.”

And the girl let him leave it there, remaining in the same position several minutes after he had gone, wondering that she had been willing to permit so gross a slander to stand unchallenged. When at last she turned slowly toward the door, she started violently as something began to untangle itself from the portieres.

“It’s only me,” announced Patricia, ungrammatically, but none the less undauntedly.

“What have you been doing there?” the elder sister demanded, her momentary fright making her indignation even greater.

“Listenin’,” replied the culprit, shamelessly.

“Patricia Gorham!” For Alice to use the child’s full name conveyed the absolute limit of reproach, but Patricia stood her ground fearlessly.

“I’m not ashamed—I’ve simply *got* to know my future. You’ll stick to what you said, won’t you, Alice?”

“You ought to be punished!”

“But you won’t marry Allen, will you?” Pat pleaded, unblushingly. “You can have Mr. Covington and I will have Allen, and we all will be happy ever afterward.”

“Oh, you—kids, that’s what you both are!” Alice cried in sheer desperation. “Between you, I can’t get a moment’s peace.”

“He would make a lovely Knight.” Patricia’s face assumed an enraptured expression. “Oh, I wish I was a damosel, with a vessel of gold between my hands, and Allen was Sir Launcelot, and I would say, ‘Wit ye well,’ and he would kneel and say his prayers to me, and—Alice, what does ’Wit ye well’ mean, anyhow?”

But Alice had fled, leaving Patricia the victrix of her bloodless battle-field.

XVIII

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James Riley's information, while causing Gorham some concern, was not the matter which gave him the greatest anxiety during the days he passed away from his office. The fact that Buckner was in town was not altogether surprising, and his maudlin comments need not necessarily be seriously considered. In addition to the commission he intrusted to young Riley, Gorham also set in motion the wheels of his own secret-service department, feeling confident that he would soon learn all the facts. The conduct of the current business of the Companies, complex as it had now become, appeared to be advancing steadily along the lines which he himself had laid down for it, and he saw no reason to think that his temporary absence was causing the slightest disarrangement of the delicately adjusted machine upon which depended the continued momentum of the business. This interested him particularly, as he considered that the crowning point of his successful formation of the Consolidated Companies would not be attained until his actual contact with the business was not required.

But great enterprises do not expand themselves without the jealous watchfulness of other competing or interested organizations, and Gorham's daily reports contained an increasing number of references to the efforts being made by these to harass the Consolidated Companies with governmental interference. Senator Kenmore had by this time become the chief spokesman of the Companies in Washington. Since his first exhaustive examination into its affairs, his doubts as to the possibility of conducting so mammoth a consolidation along conscientious lines had been dissipated by the absolute straightness of the course which Gorham steered. His influence had been exerted frequently in behalf of the Companies, and each time the success which thus came to the corporation carried in its wake advantages to the people, just as Gorham had promised. The Senator had become one of Gorham's stanchest admirers and supporters, and the president of the Consolidated Companies in turn relied fully upon him. For several weeks Kenmore's correspondence had suggested certain unrest in the Senate concerning trusts and consolidations, so when Gorham received from him an urgent summons to come to Washington at once, it left no room for doubt as to the necessity which prompted its sending, and obliged him for the present to abandon his idea of rest.

Gorham found Kenmore awaiting him in his office, and the Senator, with characteristic directness, came to the point at once.

"Some one is starting up another scare on monopolies and combinations, and is making the Consolidated Companies the target. Do you know anything about it?"

"Does it come from New York State?" Gorham asked.

"Yes; the junior senator is at the head of it."

"He is a Tammany man."

“Yes.”

“Brady made him, and now he is collecting his fee. The Consolidated Companies hit Brady hard in the Manhattan Traction deal, you remember. How much headway has it gained?”

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“Enough to be dangerous; that’s why I wrote as I did.”

“It can’t be dangerous while we have the people so strongly with us, but it might become troublesome. Whom do you want me to see?”

“The President. I have made an appointment with him half an hour from now. The Senator from New York has touched him a bit by demanding why he is haling the other great corporations into court, and leaving the Consolidated Companies to grow larger and stronger without opposition.”

“Have you discussed the matter with the President?”

“No; I thought it best to let you present it as a whole. Come—we shall find him ready for us.”

The President received his callers in his office. He was a great President, and as such realized, as some of his predecessors had not, that the country of which he was the chief executive was constantly outgrowing the legislation which had been wise at the time of its enactment. He realized that as expansion comes conditions change, and these changed conditions necessitate the exercise of a far-seeing and a far-reaching judgment in administering the law in its spirit rather than always in its letter; but the experience he had gained in the White House had taught him the difficulties which beset his path in living up to his convictions. Gorham had been frequently called to his councils for advice upon various subjects, and the President was familiar with the Consolidated Companies in conception and operation.

“We are accused of discrimination, Mr. Gorham,” the President explained, after the first greetings. “You and I have discussed the Consolidated Companies upon various occasions; I have watched its operations carefully, and I am free to say that my early apprehensions have thus far proved groundless. I believe that I have acted conscientiously in pushing the investigations and prosecutions against those combinations which are really a menace to the country; but there are some who disagree with me, and flaunt the Consolidated Companies in my face as an evidence of insincerity on my part. I have asked you and Senator Kenmore to meet me here this afternoon, to talk over the question quite informally with the senator from New York and with the Attorney-General.”

“I appreciate the opportunity, Mr. President,” Gorham replied, quietly.

“Then we are all ready for the discussion,” said the President, touching a button. “They are waiting—I will send for them.”

Upon the arrival of the others, he repeated to them what he had said to Gorham, and then, settling back in his chair, became an interested listener, leaving Gorham and the

senator from New York as the principal disputants, with Kenmore and the Attorney-General joining in the argument from time to time.

“Do I understand that Mr. Gorham speaks for the Administration in this matter?” asked Senator Hunt, with some asperity.

“I speak for the Consolidated Companies, and for that alone,” Gorham replied, promptly.

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“Then you will perhaps explain why your corporation, the largest trust in existence to-day, is immune, while other trusts are being persecuted to the extent of the Government’s power.”

“I am not authorized to answer any question which has to do with the Government,” Gorham continued; “but it may be that it is due to the same reason that some of the ‘other trusts’ you mention are not as yet incorporated as a part of the Consolidated Companies.”

“Then they have been approached?” the Senator asked, quickly.

“Several of them have approached us; but they have thus far been unwilling to accept the principles upon which the Consolidated Companies is founded.”

“You refer to its alleged benevolent aspect?”

“Yes, if you choose to call it that,” Gorham replied, smiling. “We prefer to call it reciprocity. If we receive favors in the form of concessions from the people, we believe it to be not only fair, but also sound business, to use these concessions not to bleed them, but for their benefit.”

“In other words, the Consolidated Companies is a good trust, and the others are bad trusts?”

“Exactly.”

“The Sherman Act, if I read it correctly, makes no distinction.”

“But the Government does.”

“And to that extent unlawfully discriminates,” the Senator said, emphatically.

“What would be the effect upon the country if the Sherman Act were enforced literally?” Gorham asked.

“That is not for me to say.”

“Perhaps the Attorney-General will give us his opinion,” Gorham persisted.

The Attorney-General had been listening to the discussion with much interest.

“There can be but one answer to that question,” he replied; “it would produce an industrial reign of terror, and yet I am frank to say that, from a legal standpoint, I believe Senator Hunt is correct in his statement that the Government unlawfully discriminates in drawing any distinction between good and bad trusts; but let me say further, that it is my

definite opinion that the Sherman Act, as it now stands, is a menace to the country. That Act, literally interpreted, would break up every trust into smaller corporations. It is based on a hasty inference that great consolidations are of necessity monopolies. Even if we disintegrated a great corporation like the Consolidated Companies, for instance, into a large number of smaller corporations, we should not have solved the problem. There would always be methods by which a common understanding could be reached, and, in the disintegration, producing concerns would lose much of the efficiency in serving the public which has already been demonstrated by the Consolidated Companies. I have answered your question frankly, giving you my opinion from a legal and also from a personal standpoint."

"Was there not a time," Kenmore asked, "when the public in England was as much afraid of the formation of business partnerships as our public has been afraid of trusts?"

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“Yes,” the Attorney-General replied; “our own trust legislation is nothing more than a modern repetition of certain laws which centuries ago were in force in England, and were designed to prevent the formation of co-partnerships in business.”

“Yet partnerships were formed in spite of the law, were they not?” insisted Kenmore, “and it was discovered that the prices of goods did not go up.”

“We are digressing,” the senator from New York interrupted. “As I understand it, we are concerned with the present rather than the past.”

“I am glad you realize that,” Gorham responded, “for it has a considerable bearing upon the situation. In the past, the public has been opposed to the organization of industry, and properly so, since it has meant the secret rebates, the limiting of output, the ‘fake’ independent companies, and the stealing of competitors’ secrets; but to-day there is a changed public sentiment, and perhaps I may be pardoned if I say that I believe the Consolidated Companies has played its part in bringing this about. The magazines have turned from muckraking to articles instructing their readers in finance; the anti-trust orator is speaking to empty seats; and intelligent lawmakers, who once considered ‘corporation’ as a synonym for ‘crime,’ now carefully distinguish between the honest and the dishonest organization. The Administration is elected by the people to exercise the will of the people, and it is the will of the people to-day that honest combinations be permitted, in order to reduce the cost of the necessities of life.”

“It is a conflict between a literal interpretation of the law and industrial progress,” added Senator Kenmore, “and the law as it stands does not appeal to justice nor does it express American public sentiment. Bigness, in commerce and industry, has now come to be associated with progress. Production on a large scale is justified by its economy and efficiency when brought about through the free play of economic forces. It would be just as ridiculous to oppose the ever-increasing demand for machinery.”

“To what point is all this leading us?” asked Senator Hunt, impatiently. “These one-sided arguments may be interesting to those who agree with them, but my question still remains unanswered: why does not the Government enforce the law equally against one offender as against another, since by that law both are offenders?”

“Senator Kenmore, the Attorney-General, and I have endeavored to answer your question to the best of our ability,” Gorham replied, “and I, for one, regret to have failed in my endeavor. We all agree, I am sure, that the Government has a plain duty to perform, but we do not understand that duty to be the prevention of honest and beneficial combination. The Consolidated Companies has led the way in seeking publicity and preserving equality, and in insuring public participation in the benefits accruing from the combinations which it effects. If other trusts do likewise, I have no doubt that they will be as ‘immune’ as you have been pleased to call the Consolidated Companies.”

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“Are you prepared to deny that, in spite of this ‘benevolent’ aspect of which you boast, the profits of your corporation are greater than those of any trust in the world?”

“I have never made the comparative analysis which would be required to answer your question,” Gorham replied; “but I do say without fear of contradiction that no organization ever gave back to the people so large a percentage of its earnings. It may interest Senator Hunt if I outline the principles upon which the Consolidated Companies was conceived.”

Gorham’s voice was a strong asset. Its low, clear tones carried without apparent effort, and there was a firmness and sincerity in every spoken word which always secured attentive hearing.

“The public,” he said, “has long since become accustomed to mergers and consolidations, and has naturally associated with them the strangling of competition and the creation and enjoyment, on the part of a few, of the conditions of monopoly. But business exploits such as these are, in a measure, things of the past, and cannot be repeated. Great industries can no longer hem in their rivals, or stifle and cripple them to the extent that fields, which by natural law are free to all, become the field of one. The people have at last risen against this, and consolidations will only be tolerated when confidence is established that the masses will be benefited. When the scheme of the Consolidated Companies first became known, it was bitterly opposed by the public, who saw in it nothing other than a new and more gigantic octopus, to feed upon its very life-blood.

“From the very beginning, both from principle and from what I consider to be sound business sense, I have endeavored by word and act to convince the public that the Consolidated Companies intended to serve its best interests, and our unprecedented success is the best evidence I could offer that I have, at least in part, succeeded. Our stockholders are men in high positions of trust, and they cannot continue to deliver contracts to us unless we make good our promises to execute those concessions to the advantage of the people. To-day, wherever the Consolidated Companies is known, the public looks with approval upon favors shown us by its officials, and this in itself is an asset to our corporation of untold value. Bread, coffee, and other daily necessities are now obtainable cheaper than ever before in the history of the world, because the Consolidated Companies has made them so. Transportation charges, wherever we have obtained the franchises, have been reduced twenty per cent.; lighting costs, both gas and electric, are fifteen per cent. cheaper in those cities which we control; government loans placed through us are from one to two per cent. lower, thus substantially reducing the rate of taxation. We have prevented war in at least two instances, and thus demonstrated the possibilities of our power in preserving universal peace. For the Government to interfere with our work because of a technicality would result in an international calamity.”

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“Are you now speaking for the Administration, Mr. Gorham?”

“Now, I am speaking as a private citizen.”

“If the Attorney-General agrees with me,” added the President, joining in the discussion for the first time, “I think I may say that Mr. Gorham’s views as a private citizen are shared by the Administration; on the other hand, I agree with the Attorney-General in the position which he takes regarding the conflict between the legal and practical bearing of the Sherman Act. There is only one way to solve the problem, and that is to modify that Act so that a distinction can be made between those consolidations which advance the country’s prosperity, and those which are operated solely for personal gain to the detriment of all except the few directly interested. You may report back to your constituents, Senator Hunt, that the Administration will refrain from further action in this matter for the present, and will direct its efforts toward securing amendments to the Sherman Act which shall make it possible to draw a distinction between good and bad trusts, as you call them, without discrimination.”

The President rose, signifying that the conference was ended, and Gorham left the White House in company with Senator Kenmore and the Attorney-General. The latter wore a serious expression upon his face.

“The President took the only logical position,” he remarked to his companions; “but I tell you, gentlemen, that there is not the slightest possibility of passing any bill through either house which can accomplish the results we all desire.”

“In another twelve months,” observed Gorham, “granting that the Companies continues to make history as it has, the people themselves will prevent their representatives from interfering.”

“Provided nothing occurs to raise a doubt as to the integrity of the Companies’ motives,” added the Attorney-General, suggestively.

“How could such a doubt be raised?” Gorham was incredulous.

“By having some official in your corporation act in defiance of the principles which you have upheld.”

“We have a five-years’ record to fall back upon.”

“Yes; but as the Companies grows larger the risk increases.”

“And the careful surveillance increases in like ratio.”

“There are human limitations, Mr. Gorham,” laughed the Attorney-General.

XIX

Allen Sanford, during the next few weeks, found much to think about besides himself. His advance had been more rapid than Gorham had expected. His position with the Companies was still the same, but his value in his position had steadily increased. The impetuosity and intensity which, previously uncontrolled, had made him heedless, were now directed through a smaller vent, and gained in power. Gorham's early belief that the boy possessed in no small degree, though undeveloped, the business genius which had accomplished his father's great success, was being definitely confirmed, and he rejoiced in it.

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Allen had studied the business problem with which he came daily in contact as closely as he could with the little experience which had as yet come to him. What man of affairs does not recall how intangible was that turning-point, in his own early business career, before which he felt hopelessly submerged in that sea of infinite detail, vainly struggling to gauge its currents and to escape its undertow; after which he found himself advancing with steady strides, short at first, but gaining in power as the lesser responsibilities merged into greater ones!

Gorham's business training, previous to the inception of the Consolidated Companies, had been in accord with the universal business code, quite at variance with the idealistic basis which he himself had now established. Allen's training had all been along Gorham's idealistic thread. It was perhaps natural, therefore, that Allen, under these circumstances, should look upon the transactions of the Consolidated Companies from a different viewpoint from that which Mr. Gorham took. At all events, some of these business acts did not seem to the boy to be in full accord with the altruism which he had learned from his preceptor. Allen had come to know most of the directors and some of the stockholders, and he was convinced that the prevailing instinct which controlled their relations to the Consolidated Companies and to its transactions was self-interest pure and simple. There was no question that the Companies had accomplished important reductions in the necessities of life and in the cost of public utilities, as a result of which the people were radically benefited; but to Allen's untrained mind even this seemed to be a clever business policy from the exercise of which the corporation gained more than it gave. Already there had come to him a sense of apprehension as to what might happen if Mr. Gorham's restraining hand should lose its present power, and the control should fall into the hands of men such as he conceived Covington and his sympathizers to be; and lately the boy had regarded this chance as not altogether remote.

Gorham never allowed Allen to discuss with him the personalities of any of the directors or stockholders with whom he came in contact. This was partly due to his feeling that Allen was not as yet competent to form opinions of any value, and partly to his general principle that he must hold his own mind unprejudiced in his duty toward his associates. For this reason, and for another which lay closer to his heart, the boy had never expressed to him his distrust of Covington, though he had been tempted to do so on more than one occasion. Now, however, during the absence of his chief from the offices, Allen felt sure that a crisis was near at hand. He knew that Covington was in constant communication with certain of the directors, and the nature of these conferences could perhaps be divined by the growing discontent which he saw developing among those upon whom he knew Gorham

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depended as his most valued lieutenants. He had been brooding over matters so long that this new and tenser situation, as he saw it, made him feel it to be his duty to talk it over with Gorham. He was none too sure that his doubts would be shared or even accepted, and this uncertainty added to his apprehensiveness in breaking over what he knew to be his chief's implied commands. This was his first experience in a business office, and it might be that what caused him anxiety was only a part of the day's work, to be found in any similar establishment. Still, he determined to free his mind of its ever-present burden, and he selected the time shortly after Gorham's return from Washington.

Gorham listened to Allen's reports well into the night. The boy did most of the talking, and Gorham absorbed with little comment the story which he had to tell. Allen was surprised and relieved to find that he listened to him without criticism, and it strengthened him in his own confidence to find that the elder man treated him with a consideration beyond that which he had previously received.

"You are quite right to come to me with this," Gorham said at length; "but I feel that, as far as the business is concerned, you are unduly apprehensive. I shall satisfy myself on this point on my return to the office. Now, as to Mr. Covington: I have been aware for weeks of your personal dislike for each other, but it is unworthy of you, Allen, to allow this to influence you to the extent of doing him so great an injustice."

Allen colored deeply at the criticism. "I have waited until I am certain that it is no injustice before bringing the matter to you," he said.

"I have also been aware of another fact," Gorham continued, "which is in itself an explanation of your present attitude. When I tell you that it is my fondest hope that Alice shall marry Mr. Covington, you will understand. This in itself is the strongest evidence I could give of my confidence in him."

This was a blow far greater than any Alice had dealt him. Allen had never lost hope that sooner or later he could convince her that he had attained man's estate, and this he considered the only real barrier between them. But if Mr. Gorham had set his heart upon her marriage to Covington, he knew the case was hopeless. The older man watched him as he struggled with himself.

"You should have no thought at present of marrying any one," he said, kindly. "You are not mature enough yet to know your own mind. You have done well, and I have great hopes for your future, but for the present you must be content to solve one day's problems before taking up the next."

“I wouldn’t mind so much about Alice,” the boy finally managed to blurt out, “if it was any one except Mr. Covington.”

“Have you any actual evidence that he is other than an upright, able man, whose character entitles him to the fullest confidence and esteem?”

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“No actual evidence; but I know I’m right. Please don’t let him have Alice without making sure.”

Gorham placed his hand kindly upon the boy’s shoulder. “Your interest in my little girl’s happiness, though prejudiced, makes me overlook this boyish jealousy toward a man whom I respect. But you can’t think that my carefulness in so important a matter as this would be any less than your own. Come, now, let us forget all this. Go back to your duties, my boy, with a confidence that my judgment is better than yours.”

As Allen made no reply and showed no inclination to leave, Gorham wondered if he had still anything further to say. The boy moved uncomfortably in his chair as the question was asked.

“Not regarding the business detail, Mr. Gorham,” he replied at length. “Oh, I am all at sea!” he burst out suddenly, his voice trembling with emotion. “I guess business isn’t in my line anyhow.”

“What do you mean, Allen?” Gorham asked, completely surprised by the boy’s intensity.

“If I tell you what I really mean you will think I am ungrateful for the chance you have given me, and, truly, that isn’t it. I know you feel that the Consolidated Companies is accomplishing a great work, and you’re right; but there’s another side which I don’t like at all. With the single exception of yourself, I don’t believe there is a man connected with it who isn’t in it for what he can get out of it. The public is being benefited by certain reductions which the Companies accomplishes, but before long I’m sure they will have to pay up for all they have saved, with a bitter interest. Of course, my feeling this way is simply an evidence that I don’t understand things at all.”

Allen had touched upon Gorham’s most sensitive point. “It is a deep disappointment to me that you feel as you do,” he replied. “As you say, it is an evidence that you don’t understand things at all. The Consolidated Companies has almost reached a point where individual personality is merely incidental; where, in my opinion, my own services even will not long be essential. I like to believe that my continued connection strengthens and guides it, but no one man can now affect its progress to any serious degree; but, my boy, loyalty to the Companies on the part of its employees is absolutely imperative. That I must demand of you.”

Allen winced under the criticism, but he could not withdraw from his position.

“Could not a man like Mr. Covington change the entire policy of the Companies if he came into control?” he asked, significantly.

“No,” Gorham replied, firmly. “In the first place, if he gained control, he would have no desire to change it; in the second, my Executive Committee is made up of men of too

high principle to permit him or any other man to operate the Companies upon other than a proper basis."

"You may not feel so sure of this after you have investigated," Allen insisted.

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“I shall never alter my opinion.” Gorham was annoyed by the boy’s persistence. “It is too late to-night to discuss this phase of the subject with you as thoroughly as we must if you are to continue with the corporation, but in the mean time remember that the Consolidated Companies is in the hands of men whose self-interest is coupled with a personal gratification in the altruistic basis whose nature you have learned from me. You are not competent to pass upon their motives, and until you are you should not venture to criticise.”

“I admitted that it is all due to my inexperience, Mr. Gorham, and I am sorry that you are angry. I believe in you as I could never believe in any other man, and I know that, as far as you can control it, you will keep the Consolidated Companies within the lines you have laid down; but I can’t make myself believe that the others have the same honorable intentions.”

“Stop!” cried Gorham, seriously aroused by the boy’s words. “I shall listen to you no further. It is only my friendship for your father and my affection for you which, keeps me from speaking harshly to you; but be warned! You are attempting to interfere in a matter which is too heavy for your strength. Leave it to those who understand it.”

After Allen left the house Gorham sat for a long time in his library, smoking and meditating. Yet it was not the possible internal business complications, as suggested by the boy, which occupied his thoughts; it was not some new gigantic transaction about to be launched on behalf of the Companies which filled his mind, nor was it the suggested danger to Eleanor’s peace of mind. He was thinking of Allen, half blaming himself for the forlorn expression the boy’s face had worn as he left the room. It was a courageous thing for this youngster to rush in where older and more experienced men would not have dared, to face Robert Gorham and to tell him that the monument he had erected rested upon a base of shifting sand. His absurd statements regarding Covington were easily explained, but what he had said of the business was an honest expression, even though groundless in fact and resulting from an inexperienced interpretation of matters far beyond his present knowledge.

Gorham contrasted in his mind the changes which these few months had wrought in him. He remembered how lightly the boy had taken his father’s tirade which had thrown him upon his own resources, and compared this with the depressing effect which his own criticism had produced.

“Poor boy, I’m really sorry for him,” he said to himself. “With old Stephen on one side and with me on the other, and with his fancied devotion to Alice on top of it all, he must feel that the world is against him.” Then Gorham’s face became stern again. “But he must take on ballast,” he said, firmly; “he must get over these snap-judgments and learn to recognize that he is playing with tools too heavy for him to handle. It will do him good —but I love the boy for his courage. It will land him somewhere if he keeps his head.”

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XX

The days passed by with nothing to justify Eleanor's apprehensions resulting from Ralph Buckner's presence in New York, so her fears vanished, and with them the necessity of disturbing her husband's tranquillity with this confidence which already had been so long postponed. Gorham's sudden trip to Washington made this even more natural. Alice had told her of Covington's proposal, and was eager to discuss the situation from every possible standpoint. To the older woman the girl's attitude toward Allen seemed heartless, yet, knowing her husband's feeling in the matter, she decided that it was wiser to leave the young people to solve their own problem. Youth is ever heartless in its attitude toward others, and it is only by its own suffering that it learns the lesson of consideration. Eleanor sought to impress Alice with the importance of being sure of her own heart before making her final decision, and encouraged her to take plenty of time. She would have hesitated to do this, on her husband's account, except that with Allen so hopelessly out of the running the delay could do no harm. Alice must make no error, Eleanor kept repeating to herself, recalling with painful vividness the result of her own mistaken act of duty.

Covington became a constant visitor at the Gorham home, assuming more and more the prerogatives of an accepted suitor. His attentions were assiduous and his companionship was so agreeable that Alice considered the arrangement ideal. Each time he urged her to give him a definite reply she begged off in such a playful, girlish fashion that Covington mildly acquiesced, feeling that each day's association made the situation that much more favorable to him. And this courtship, curious as it was, proved not unpleasant to him. Much to his own surprise, he began to find himself really fond of this young girl, who kept him constantly on the *qui vive* to follow her from the absurdity of girlish conceits to the opposite extreme of mature discussion of subjects ordinarily far beyond the grasp of her years. It whetted his interest and possessed a decided fascination for him, he admitted to himself more than once as he left the house to return to his own apartment, wearing a satisfied smile of patronizing indulgence. Had it not been for the business necessities, and the importance of actually becoming her husband before anything occurred to disturb his relations with Gorham, he would have preferred to have things run on indefinitely as they were.

During this time Allen found Covington's attitude toward him completely changed. It would have hurt the older man's self-respect to admit that the boy could in any way be looked upon as a rival; but young girls are uncertain quantities, and it had been necessary for Alice to prove that she was beyond this danger-point before Covington decided that Allen was a promising youngster, after all, and, as Stephen Sanford's son, entitled at least to being noticed.

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Allen, during the same period, and perhaps because of the same conditions, had grown to regard Covington with even more cordial aversion. The only positive grievance he had against him was the success he had gained with Alice; but, in an undefined way, he felt instinctively that this man possessed every Machiavellian attribute in the calendar of dishonor. With an effort to be just, Allen mentally made a generous discount to offset any possible prejudice, but even then Covington measured up shockingly bad. If Alice had insisted on a proof of the statements he made against him to her, he would have found himself lacking ammunition; when Gorham had asked him point-blank what evidence he had to substantiate his accusations, he had been unable to give any, and this, he realized, had hurt him in the eyes of his chief.

So now the boy proposed to collect evidence, with the self-acknowledged purpose of helping Gorham and of saving Alice, entirely overlooking any personal interest in the undertaking. Covington's first overtures came just at this time and were coldly received; but as Allen considered the matter, he concluded that he would learn to "purr" too, taking lessons in this gentle art from the one man whom he acknowledged to be its past master.

Gorham was surprised by the change in their relations as he saw it, and the boy at once rose in his estimation. Allen had evidently taken to heart the advice given him during their last interview, and had proved himself big enough to rise above his jealousies and his disappointment. Gorham, guided by Eleanor's judgment, had refrained even from expressing to Alice his strong desire that she should marry Covington, but with Allen already self-effaced and with Alice accepting Covington's attentions, even though as yet uncommitted, all was progressing to his satisfaction.

Allen's duties still took him frequently to the Gorham house, but he saw Alice only casually, as he made no effort to force himself upon her. She was too much engrossed with the new element which had entered her life to concern herself particularly, but she was negatively grateful to him for not making the present condition unpleasant. She wanted to keep him as a friend, and told him so frankly, but that could only be so long as he accepted things as he found them.

But any lack of enthusiasm on the part of Alice was more than made up for by Patricia. She was living on the seventh floor of her seventh heaven. As she saw it, Alice had acted in the friendliest way possible in giving her a clear field with her Sir Launcelot. Allen humored her, finding a real relief in this childish game which his little friend took so seriously. The one drawback was the amount of intimate information which she conveyed through the medium of her innocent prattle. Allen could not know what was coming next, and so was powerless to head off conversation upon subjects into which he knew he had no right to enter, for Patricia possessed the faculty of keeping herself well informed as to family matters. It was through this that he secured the first clew upon which to start a real investigation, so he considered the information Heaven-sent, and blessed the child accordingly.

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The staircase, as usual, formed the trysting-place. Here Patricia waylaid her Knight on his way down from the library, taking her position on an upper step, which made their difference in height less apparent. The same ceremony was enacted each time in accord with the ritual she had taught him. After he passed her, she suddenly sprang up to her full stature, holding her arm high above her with the palm of her hand extended.

“Wit ye well, Sir Knight!” she cried, impressively.

Then Allen turned—he was forbidden, under pain of death, to recognize her until he heard these mystic words—knelt on the step below her and kissed her other hand, while the one upraised descended upon his head in benediction.

“The Lord be with thee, Fair Lady,” he replied, following his lesson.

“And with thee—I accept thy troth. Now we can have a visit.”

The Arthurian lady had vanished, and Patricia was herself again, curled up close beside him.

“Look here, Lady Pat,” he said, shaking his finger at her warningly, “I think we ought to put a stop to this—you’re taking it all too seriously.”

“Of course,” she admitted, smiling up at him. “Why don’t we get married right away—-then it needn’t be serious any longer.”

“Well”—Allen would not have wounded the devoted little heart for worlds—“one reason is that I haven’t money enough.”

“Did Knights have to have money?” Patricia inquired. “I never saw a suit of armor with a money-pocket in it.”

“Neither did I,” he admitted. “There wasn’t any money then, like ours, and when they wanted anything they didn’t have, they fought for it.”

“Well, then, why don’t you fight for it?”

“I’m going to—I am fighting now. I mean, Lady Pat, they don’t let you fight the way they used to.”

“Is it only because you haven’t money enough that we don’t marry, Sir Launcelot?”

“That is—one of the principal reasons.”

“Swear that you don’t love any other fair lady.”

“Except Alice,” Allen insisted.

“Shall you always love her?” Patricia asked, wistfully.

Allen sighed. “I’m afraid so, Lady Pat.”

“Well, I don’t care—I’ll love you enough for both of us, so that’s all settled. Now promise that you’ll sit on this very step and not move ’til I come back.”

“What for? I must run along.”

“You promised,” she cried, and disappeared up-stairs as fast as her little white legs could carry her. There was nothing to do but wait, yet Allen was not long kept in suspense. Patricia returned with equal speed, carrying her bank in both hands.

“There!” she exclaimed, jingling the contents. “You take that and make a lot more with it, and we shall have all the money we want.”

“But I can’t do that,” he protested.

“Aren’t you as smart as Mr. Covington?”

“What has he to do with it, Lady Pat?”

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“He took Alice’s money and made a whole lot more with it, and I’m going to tell you how to do it, too.”

Patricia danced before him on the hall rug, clapping her hands together with joy and excitement. Suddenly she paused in her gyrations, and, placing her mouth close to his ear, she whispered:

“Buy some storks from the New York Railroad.”

Allen jumped to his feet as if he had been struck. “What did you say?” he demanded, seizing the child almost roughly by the wrist; but Patricia attributed his action to excitement and joy equal to her own, so accepted it cheerfully.

“That is it,” she repeated, firmly. “I’m sure, for I wrote it down just as soon as I heard it. I knew I should need it some time. Storks must be very valuable birds, because Mr. Covington told Alice not to tell; and he made thirty—thousand—dollars for her. Now, you’re smarter than Mr. Covington, and you can make a hundred thousand. Will you?”

“I’ll start right out and see what I can do.” Allen tried to keep the child from seeing his excitement. “I haven’t time to stop to tell you how naughty it is to listen. If I don’t go right now the storks may all be gone, and then of course we couldn’t make any money. Good-bye, Lady Pat—I’ll try hard, but don’t be disappointed if there aren’t any left—-good-bye.”

Allen rushed from the house and, hailing a passing taxi, ordered the chauffeur to drive to the office, although it was now nearly six o’clock.

XXI

With characteristic energy Gorham made good the promise given to Allen to investigate matters at the office, and not many days after his return to his desk he issued a call for a special meeting of the Executive Committee. He looked upon it almost as a weakness to have permitted this boy’s unsupported statements to influence him even to this extent, but he justified himself by the knowledge that a confirmation of the loyalty of his associates would give him renewed strength.

The day of the meeting found every member of the committee present—a fact which interested Gorham as an evidence of the devotion of these men to the responsibilities which rested upon them. But the routine business had no sooner been completed than the president became aware that the harmony which had existed from the beginning was in danger of being disturbed. Inquiries were made which were too significant to be overlooked, and veiled criticism came from quarters where previously he had believed existed absolute confidence in himself and full approval of his methods.

“It is well to have this come to a head,” Gorham remarked after several had expressed their views. “This corporation is so gigantic that it must fall of its own weight unless every part of its structure be sound and effective in bearing its share of the load. There is no stability where there is lack of harmony, and what you gentlemen have said to-day shows beyond question that radical and immediate action is imperative to preserve to our stockholders what we have already gained for them, and to secure the future benefits which are assured, provided the Companies itself can act as a unit. Now, in order that we may clearly understand the situation, will not Mr. Litchfield state specifically the criticism implied in his remarks?”

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Litchfield rose deliberately from his seat. He was the head of certain large gas-works which the corporation had acquired in connection with its consolidation of the lighting interests in Philadelphia.

“Before complying with Mr. Gorham’s request,” he began, “I wish to say that nothing is further from my intentions than to cast aspersions either upon our president or his motives. During the time I have served on this committee I have been amazed by the increasing realization which has come to me of the marvellous success he has achieved in developing the Consolidated Companies to the point it has reached to-day. Many of us have contributed in a smaller or greater degree to its success, but it has been his master mind which has anticipated the conditions and provided the means to make the most of them. But it is also true that in doing this Mr. Gorham has, in my opinion, deliberately neglected to secure for the Companies as large returns as might have been gained. In the Philadelphia Lighting Company, for example, with which I am naturally more familiar than with any of the other ramifications of the Consolidated Companies, Mr. Gorham has voluntarily reduced the rates when the consumers had expressed no general discontent with the former prices. It is true that the consolidation effected great economies in the production, but it is entirely obvious that the profits to the company would be greater if we were receiving the full advantage of the economies by still selling our product at the old rates. And this case which I have cited is, I understand, a fair sample of Mr. Gorham’s policy in all other directions. I can appreciate the desirability in the past of giving the people the advantage in a few transactions in order to create public confidence; but to continue to make a practice of so doing appears to me to be unnecessary and, I may say, unbusinesslike.”

After Litchfield sat down Gorham called upon several others, some of whom expressed themselves, with more or less frankness, along the same line.

“Then it all sums itself up in this,” he said at length, after having invited remarks from those who cared to take part in the discussion: “Your president has been guilty of not making the most of the opportunities which he himself has created.”

This seemed to be the sense of the meeting.

“Then let me ask a few questions,” continued Gorham. “Mr. Litchfield has told us of the reduced cost of production in his plants as a result of our consolidation. Will he not further state how great that economy is?”

“Thirty-three and one-third per cent.,” was the prompt reply.

“And we have reduced the rate how much?”

“Fifteen per cent.”

“How much has the business increased during the past year?”

“About twenty per cent.”

“And the balance-sheet shows what as to profits?”

“About twenty-five per cent. larger than any previous year.”

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“In spite of the reduced rates,” Gorham added, significantly.

“But they would have been larger still if the old rates had prevailed,” Litchfield insisted.

“I cannot agree with you,” Gorham said, firmly. “Your concern had been standing still for six years when we took hold of it—the business had even gone backward the last year—yet in two years’ time, under our administration, it shows a gross gain of thirty-three and one-third per cent. and a net gain of twenty-five. I am enlarging on Mr. Litchfield’s case because, in a measure, it is an answer to you all, and a full justification of the basis upon which I have rested and shall continue to rest the operations of the Companies. It has been my pride that it was possible to administer the affairs of this corporation in such a way that not only could we boast that during the five years of our business existence we had lived up to the principles on which we originally built, but also that we have proved it a sound financial proposition. Never before in the history of the world has any body of men associated themselves in business with the avowed purpose of making their organization an advantage to the people, without either failing signally in their undertaking or proving themselves false to their responsibilities. We have reached a point where failure is impossible; we find ourselves receiving greater returns upon our investment than is yielded by any other organization in existence. Can it be possible that there is one man among us who wishes to take away from the Companies the unique position which it has now gained?”

It was evident that Litchfield had been appointed the spokesman for the committee, as he immediately assumed the responsibility of replying to Gorham’s remarks.

“May I not ask our president if he does not overestimate the importance of standing up so straight that there is danger of falling over backward? There is no difference of opinion as to the commercial value of the great asset which he has established for the Companies, in so completely winning the confidence of the people at large as well as those who hold high positions of trust. We should stultify ourselves were we to take any such stand, for the profits of the Companies are an irrefutable argument. The question before us, then, is not one of fact, but rather of degree. Why should we spend these further millions to gain that which we have already secured? We should still so administer the affairs of the Companies as to hold this great advantage, but I maintain that we should pay no more to hold it than is absolutely necessary.”

Gorham glanced around to see if any one else was disposed to add to what Litchfield had said, but the silence which prevailed indicated more clearly than words that the speaker had expressed the consensus of opinion.

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“I am waiting for some one to remind Mr. Litchfield that he has overlooked, in his statement, a fact which possesses vital significance,” Gorham said at length. “The Consolidated Companies has received from the people concessions which it has succeeded in making immensely valuable. It has accepted these concessions in trust upon the distinct understanding that those who gave them should receive equal benefit. So far, this trust has been religiously observed. Every dollar of profit which the stockholders have divided represents a like amount paid back to those to whom it belongs. To pay them less would be not only a breach of faith, but would be to retain that which does not belong to us. It is not for Mr. Litchfield or for me to determine the amount—the proportion has already been settled by our original covenant.”

Litchfield moved uneasily in his chair as Gorham ceased speaking.

“You put it in rather a disagreeable form, Mr. Gorham. Perhaps the fact that you have been talking this side of the enterprise for so long has made you assimilate more of your own theories than is ordinarily the case. Of course, in the beginning, it was necessary to make the statements strong in order to be convincing, but there was no ‘covenant,’ as you call it, and the people are not in a position to exact an equal division unless we choose to give it to them.”

“Can it be that I understand you correctly?” Gorham demanded, with mingled indignation and amazement. “Do you mean to imply that I have not been sincere in stating to the public the original basis upon which we incorporated? Do you suggest that when one party to the agreement has lived fairly up to his end of it we, the other party, should neglect to do the same, simply because he has no access to our books and no power to demand an accounting?”

“You are far too literal in your interpretation of my remarks,” Litchfield protested, with some warmth. “This parallel you have drawn is absurd on the face of it. There has been no legal agreement that we should treat the dear public as if it were in actual partnership with us. You have held out certain inducements which have secured for us the concessions, and we have made good the promise you gave that our success meant advantage to the people. But all this was a means to an end. For five years the public has shared equally with those of us who have put money and brains into the Consolidated Companies. No one suggests that the people should not still continue to receive benefits, but those of us here present are unanimous in our conviction that the time has now come to conduct the Companies upon a strictly business basis. This is not the age for quixotic sentimentality, and the Consolidated Companies not only possesses the right, but the power to maintain its position upon the same basis as other smaller and less powerful organizations. Speaking for myself alone, I am amazed that Robert Gorham, with his exceptional and acknowledged business acumen, should take a position with his Executive Committee which is as disadvantageous to his own interests as it is to the stockholders’.”

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No one but Gorham himself saw the mist which momentarily rose before his eyes, yet, when it passed, his vision was clearer than it had ever been. The men sitting around him represented the flower of the business world, each one of whom stood before his fellow-men as a tangible expression of honor and integrity. Yet not one was able to comprehend Gorham's viewpoint, not one could be anything but incredulous that he stood sincere in the position he had taken. This was what hurt him most. The applause which his associates had awarded him had been as that won by a clever actor rather than, as he had believed, the responsive echo forced from their souls by the battle notes of a new cause. Their acceptance of his doctrines had been because his arguments had persuaded them of the material side of the enterprise. The very magnetism which they had felt exercised by him upon themselves they had capitalized as an asset to be assayed when once the ore was stopped. All the high-sounding claims were turned at this moment into empty platitudes. All his promises were valueless beyond his personal strength to make them good. To this extent Allen had been right, but it was not too late to recognize the danger and to meet it. His associates saw the Robert Gorham they thought they had known for five years sitting in repose before them while this realization of the situation surged through his brain—they saw the real Robert Gorham when he rose to his feet, and faced them with a force they felt before a word was spoken.

"I could not have believed it possible," he said, "for a moment such as this ever to arrive. I have lived in this business Utopia for five years, blind to the fact that those who labored with me failed utterly to comprehend or to appreciate the sincerity of my motives or the integrity of my purpose. I admit that I question my ability to make clear to you by words what my acts have not conveyed. During these years, and until to-day, you have accepted my judgment as supreme, and for the first time I realize that this was not because you believed in it, but because you saw in it advantage to yourselves. The gratification which I have enjoyed from this supposed tribute has vanished, like the empty bubble that it was. It has been said that the Consolidated Companies was a one-man corporation, which I have denied, believing that my labors were rather those of the pioneer, showing the way to those associated with me who would naturally follow my footsteps. Again, I was wrong: this has been a one-man corporation, and it is so to-day. Not only has the creation of it been mine and mine alone, but also the successful putting into execution of those principles which I alone devised. The credit for this, which I have until now proudly conceded to you, I assume wholly for myself, and I also give myself the further credit of having, unknown to myself, been the single force which has compelled you to live up to the high standard I established.

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“Now, as the parent of this child which I have seen develop to this point under my guidance and protection, I stand here prepared to fight for its honor against you who threaten its destruction—and I warn you that the parent love dares much. As the Roman Virginius stood with his sword pricking the flesh over the heart of his beloved daughter, so do I stand ready to destroy my offspring rather than suffer its dishonor at the hands of any Appius Claudius. Gentlemen, the Consolidated Companies has been a one-man corporation in the past through your sufferance; from to-day, if it exist at all, it shall be a one-man corporation because of my will. You know that these are no idle words. You know what would be the result of a single statement from me that the Companies repudiates its assumed responsibilities. I do not ask—I demand that you gentlemen, as the Executive Committee of the corporation, pass such resolutions as will place the authority absolutely in my hands. I ask Mr. Litchfield to take the chair, while I retire to give you ample opportunity for discussion. However hard it may be for your personal pride, you will have to do this—you have too much at stake to gratify your resentment of my autocracy. But if you can gain any consolation in the knowledge that you have dealt your president a blow from which it will take long for him to recover, I beg of you to make the most of it. I believed that power was the supreme lever with which to move the world, and that money was but the fulcrum upon which that lever should rest. You gentlemen have shattered this belief, and have shown me that sordid gold is the controlling object of man’s life. Still, I prefer to remain in my Utopia, alone if need be, but with your unwilling company so long as my present strength shall last.”

Gorham closed his eyes involuntarily as he ceased speaking, still standing before his associates. A single tremor passed over his face, and then it was as impassive as before. With a bow as courteous as it was impressive, he left the room.

XXII

When Covington entered Gorham’s office an hour later he found his chief bowed forward on his desk, his head resting upon his hands. As the door closed the older man raised his eyes, and the change in his face caused Covington to stop in surprise. The usual color was replaced by a dull, ashen gray, the lines had deepened, and the general aspect was that of a man ten years older.

“Everything is all right, Mr. Gorham,” Covington remarked, encouragingly. “They passed the resolutions you demanded.”

“John.”

It was the first time Gorham had ever addressed him by his Christian name, and this fact, together with the tone in which it was spoken, aroused a novel sensation in the younger man. He took the outstretched hand, and accepted the friendly pressure, conscious of a feeling not altogether pleasant.

“John,” Gorham repeated, “you and I are the only ones who can save the Companies to its stockholders. We have a tremendous responsibility thrust upon us.”

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“But you won out,” Covington exclaimed, amazed that Gorham seemed not to have comprehended his words. “Everything is all right.”

“Everything is all wrong,” the older man corrected, his eyes flashing with a fire at variance with his general bearing. “Of course I won out, but that is the least of my concern. My life-work bids fair to be a failure, unless you and I together can build this structure over, using material which this time will prove strong enough to withstand the unholy strain of money, money, money. Of course I won out, because they dare not risk my antagonism; but I have failed—miserably failed—in my efforts to instil into those associated with me the basic principles of a successful altruistic business. Oh, the pity of it! The greater the returns the greater the greed, and their blindness in killing the goose which lays the golden egg! But in you, John, at least, I have a tower of strength.”

Covington found himself being rapidly forced into an equivocal position. No one knew so well as he that the present conditions were the direct result of his skilful and persistent manipulation, yet the result of this first issue had not been what he had foreseen. In fact, it had turned out better than he had expected, in that Gorham now leaned on him as his sole support. Yet it was dangerous, Covington realized, to be placed where he could be accused of carrying water on both shoulders, so he hastened to put himself on record, midway between the two factions.

“They had no idea that you laid so much stress on the moral side, in your own mind—” he began.

“How could they have known me at all and thought otherwise?”

“The whole scheme of the Consolidated Companies is so unusual that perhaps it isn’t to be wondered at. What you consider to be unwarranted is a recognized business method in other corporations.”

“Why do you tell me this?” Gorham demanded, suddenly.

“Because I feared that you had overlooked it, in the heat of the argument, and some sort of a compromise is of course necessary.”

“Compromise?” repeated Gorham, questioningly. “I don’t follow you.”

“Why, you’ve carried your point, and proved your strength, but you have divided the Companies into two camps. Of course something must be done to conciliate. By Jove! that was an arraignment you gave them!”

“There can be no conciliation, Covington,” was the firm response; “there can be no compromise. The Consolidated Companies either is what it is, or it is nothing. The pledges which I have made from the beginning shall be lived up to in spirit and in letter, or the final exercise of the strength which they all are forced to admit shall be again to

separate it into its integral parts, and prevent it from undoing that which I have already accomplished through its agency."

"That is a large contract for any one man to undertake," Covington remarked. "No individual has yet been able to disintegrate a successful going corporation when the stockholders and the directors were opposed to it."

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“We are talking of unusual things,” Gorham replied. “No individual before has been able to found so mammoth or so successful a corporation as the Consolidated Companies. No individual before this has found himself strong enough to force the immediate capitulation, against their wills, of so powerful an Executive Committee. With these precedents before me, I state my determination not as a threat, or as a boast, but as a fact.”

“Are you counting on the stockholders for support?”

“Absolutely.”

“You will find them as unanimously against you as you have just found the committee.”

“Do you know this?”

“They all know it; they would not have taken their position otherwise. Next time, the stockholders will be put in evidence.”

Gorham again became silent. This second shock, following so soon after the first, for a moment paralyzed his power to think, but he quickly recovered his optimism.

“I do not believe it—I will not believe it. But why do you tell me this?” he again asked. “There must be some purpose behind it all.”

“There is. It is necessary for you to realize the exact position we are in. Your work has been with those about to become stockholders, or with the consolidations; I have been brought in personal contact with the stockholders and the directors. You have met the ideals, while I have come face to face with the actualities. For this reason I tell you that you are undertaking a more serious campaign than you realize, and I also tell you that, strong as you are, compromise and conciliation will eventually be required.”

“Do I, then, stand alone?”

Covington resented the suggestion.

“There should be no question in your mind as to where I stand,” he said. “My personal relations with you, and my hope of an even closer relationship, make any discussion unnecessary. But I see the situation from a viewpoint which you cannot, and my duty clearly demands that I express myself to you with complete frankness. I do not suggest that you give up your ideals—I simply urge you to compromise with them in order to win greater victories in the future.”

“Covington,” replied Gorham, with decision, “you know how much I value your judgment, how firmly I rely upon your loyalty. Because of this, I shall move with even greater care than so serious a crisis as this inevitably demands. Yet it is only fair to say to you now

that I can see but one outcome. There are many conflicts which arise in life which admit of compromise—but you cannot compromise with truth, with virtue, or with honor. These attributes either exist, or they do not—there are no half-ways. Suppose you do a little thinking, too, along my line. Then we'll join together, taking advantage of this new knowledge which has come to us, and force the issue where we see the necessity. We are both trying to accomplish the same results, but are considering different routes. Think it over, my friend, and I feel sure that you will see that I am right."

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His interview with Gorham left Covington with certain well-defined conclusions: Gorham would never yield one iota from his position, and his associates would not rest until they had wiped out this affront they had received. It would be necessary for him to take sides openly with Gorham or else make definite sacrifices. Yet he must hold the position he now had with the directors so as to be Gorham's successor in case the affair turned in that direction; and, most important of all, he must fortify himself still further against the breaking of the storm, which he knew would sooner or later come upon him.

In military conflicts there are various methods of winning a victory. When the adversary appears too strong for a direct battle, a skilful tactician will sometimes weaken the enemy's strength by a rear attack. Covington was a skilful tactician, and in the present crisis the affidavits he had stored away in his safe-deposit drawer tempted him sorely. He had never expected to use them, he told himself. He had never expected to be placed in opposition to Mr. Gorham. With the family alliance he contemplated, there would seem to be no occasion for conflicting interests to exist between them. But if Gorham insisted on making a fool of himself, there was really no good reason why Covington should allow himself to be dragged down with him. It was infinitely wiser to be in the position of "heads I win, tails you lose." Surely he could not be accused of selfishness in the matter, when, if Mr. Gorham were eventually dethroned by the directors, and he, Covington, crowned in his place, it would simply result in keeping the Consolidated Companies still in the family. And as for Gorham's silly threat to disintegrate the corporation—that was too absurd to be considered seriously.

So Covington again inspected the papers which Levy had secured for him. The one which related to Mrs. Buckner and the prospector he laid aside at once as too contemptible to be considered, but the other interested him. Gorham was setting himself above other men who held enviable positions in the business and social world. If this affidavit was true—and Covington saw no reason to doubt its authenticity—this demigod might hesitate to emphasize his superiority. With the legality of his marriage questioned, his Czarship might be weakened; and this, as Covington saw it, meant advantage to himself in the Consolidated Companies, and an insurance against any attitude Gorham might take against him. With Brady vowing vengeance, his part in unloading the railways stock on Alice might at any time be uncovered. With the present strained relations between Gorham and the Executive Committee, his confidential relations with both sides might prove disagreeable. But with Gorham himself entangled in a domestic complication, serious consequences to himself from such a catastrophe might be averted, or, at least, mitigated. And, best of all, Levy was quite ready to proceed in the matter with Buckner as his client. Surely Opportunity never offered herself with more brazen coquetry to any one than she did to John Covington.

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All this resulted in a busy afternoon for Lawyer Levy. Covington returned the affidavit to him and left him free to proceed or not, as he saw fit. Levy's delight was unbounded—-"it was such a nice case." Buckner was quickly summoned to the lawyer's office and a new agreement drawn between them, which gave special joy to Buckner, as it meant an increased supply of money and a renewed lease of life in New York City, which he had learned to "love." Besides the agreement, he was asked to sign a letter to Mrs. Gorham, which had been carefully worded by Levy and was filled with lurid descriptions of his affection and loneliness. He had accidentally become aware of the fact that their separation was not legal, and the unexpected knowledge had served to revive in him all the fondness of the early days. He had mastered the curse of drink which had brought about their estrangement, and needed her companionship and care. He regretted the inconvenience which it might occasion, but Mr. Gorham had everything while he had nothing but the affection which he felt for her—and that as she was now, and always had been his wife, he demanded his rights.

Levy had known men to change their minds, and in order to prevent any such misfortune he despatched the letter by special messenger early in the evening. Gorham had returned late and betook himself to the library immediately after dinner to consider the new business complications with great care before grappling with the situation on the following day. He was still meditating when he was surprised to see Eleanor enter the room, with an expression on her face which at once made him forget his own perplexities.

"Why, Eleanor!" he cried, "what has gone wrong with you?"

Mrs. Gorham took her favorite seat on the arm of her husband's chair, and he drew her to him.

"I saw Ralph Buckner while out driving a few weeks ago," she said in response to his question. "It unnerved me at the time, and I have been apprehensive ever since. I did not tell you about it, as there seemed nothing on which to base my fears, and you were so occupied. I hesitate even now to add to your burdens, but this letter has just come, and you should see it."

As she spoke she placed the open letter in his hand, and he read it carefully.

"There can be nothing to this—can there?" she asked, her lip trembling and her whole expression showing how eagerly she awaited his answer.

"Eleanor," he said, softly, drawing her onto his lap, and soothing her with the tenderness a mother would have shown an anxious child. He held her pressed closely to him for so long a time in silence that at last she became frightened She sat upright and, placing a hand on either shoulder, regarded him searchingly.

“Robert,” she cried, aghast, “you don’t believe—”

Then he told her the news which James Riley had brought him, and of his efforts to learn more.

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“No, dear, I don’t believe it,” Gorham finally answered her unfinished question. “No power on earth could make me believe it until they proved it; and even then no power could take you from me.”

“But it must be proved one way or the other.”

“There will be no need,” Gorham replied, with a lightness he did not feel; “I will find this man and will settle it for all time.”

“How will you settle it, Robert?”

“He is doing this for money. Now that he has come out into the open, I can take care of him.”

“But that won’t do, dear. If there is any question about the divorce, your buying him off won’t settle it, will it?”

“It must,” was Gorham’s decisive answer.

“It can’t.” Eleanor rose and regarded him with an infinite tenderness. “It can’t, Robert; you know it can’t, dear. If the divorce is not legal, then there was no marriage between us, and what Ralph Buckner says or does cannot affect that. We must know the facts now, dear.”

“In all probability the divorce was perfectly regular. It is questioned now purely for blackmailing purposes; but I will submit to that, if necessary, rather than have the matter go any further. Don’t be quixotic and play into the hands of these scoundrels who have gotten hold of Buckner, and are trying to reach me through you, knowing well that this is my vulnerable point.”

Mrs. Gorham was so long silent that her husband felt his argument had won.

“Eleanor,” he said more calmly, “can you ever fully realize what you are to me? All these gigantic transactions which have fallen to my lot mean only so many contests with the world that I may bring my victories back to you. The struggle is inspiring, the strife is intoxicating while it is on, but how hollow the successes except for you! My life and all its activities are centred about this one inmost shrine in which I mean to keep you, unsullied by even the implied contamination which these blackmailers would bring upon you. I will fight them with their own weapons, and, thank God, I can ward off the blow.”

“Robert—my Robert!” Mrs. Gorham’s voice was low but masterful in the force which lay behind the words. “Nothing can ever come to me so bitter as to make me forget that this has caused you to say what you have just said. You mean every word, and to have won such devotion from such a man is enough to make any woman’s life complete. But it is your heart which speaks, and our sober judgment must acknowledge without a

question the necessity of settling beyond the reach of doubt the validity of the legal tie which binds us. We need no court to settle the question of our love, my Robert—that is the real marriage which I know God only recognizes; but there can be no happiness for us if we disregard even for a moment those conventions which are necessary to our every-day life. You know it, dear, just as I do."

"It is unnecessary, Eleanor—it is unwise. We are so certain that there is no real basis for doubt."

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“Would you feel the same if Alice were involved?” she asked, quietly.

“Alice?” he repeated.

“Yes; suppose this same question came up with her, would you not be the first to insist that the facts be proven?”

“What can I say?” he asked, brokenly. “This means a public trial and all the scandal that goes with it. It means a rehearsing of all that past which I have tried to help you to forget. It means pain and sorrow and suffering to you, dear—to you whom I would shield with my life from just what now threatens you.”

“A trial, Robert?” Mrs. Gorham asked, looking at him with a startled expression. “Do you mean that there has to be a trial?”

“Of course,” Gorham replied, wondering at the unexpected change in her attitude.

Suddenly she buried her face against his shoulder and burst into tears. “Oh, I couldn’t stand that!” she cried.

Gorham gently held her face from him and looked into it kindly but questioningly. “Why not?” he asked.

“It would kill me,” she replied, not meeting his look.

“Is there anything which the trial could bring out which you have not already told me, Eleanor?” he asked, quietly.

“Don’t you know enough already to understand why I could never live through it?”

Gorham urged no further and caressed her gently, yet there was an expression of distinct disappointment in his face.

“There must be no trial,” he said, firmly. “You shall be shielded from that and from everything else which threatens to bring you sorrow. You must leave it all in my hands.”

XXIII

Allen went over the list of names lying on the desk before him for a third time, carefully running down the column with his finger. Then he leaned back in his chair and reflected. The single light flooded the desk and cast its shadows out into the great office, but the boy’s eyes never left the papers before him.

“That’s mighty strange,” he said aloud. “I’ll bet Lady Pat got it straight, but if she did that list ought to show it.”

He leaned forward again and turned to the early pages. “Courtney, Cousens, Covell, Coveney—Covington ought to come in right there.” Then he turned the pages over rapidly—“Goodrich, Goodspeed, Goodwin, Gordon, Gore—there isn’t any Gorham there, either.”

For several moments he sat there deep in thought. Suddenly he rose and struck the top of the desk a resounding blow with his fist.

“Chump!” he cried. “Of course he didn’t. Oh, I’m a great business man, I am, thinking he’d buy those shares in his own name or in Alice’s. It’s back to the dear old farm for me. Chump!”

He restored the papers to their proper places, picked up Patricia’s bank, which he still had with him, turned out the light, and then tramped down the long flights of stairs to work off his excitement. He was disappointed not to have succeeded in this first attempt to prove his suspicions, but he found some consolation in the certainty which came to him, even in the face of this defeat, that he was on the right track.

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For the next few days more immediate matters kept him completely occupied. Gorham told him enough of what had happened at the meeting to make him feel at once elated and concerned.

“You were right to a degree, my boy, and I give you credit for it; but don’t think for a moment that there is going to be any change in the administration of the Consolidated Companies.”

“You’ll have a hard fight on your hands, Mr. Gorham. They aren’t the kind of men to let you force them any longer than they have to.”

“That will be as long as we remain associated in the corporation,” Gorham said, with conviction. “It does mean a greater burden for me and for Covington and for you, as for all those who remain loyal, but the game is worth the struggle. This is what makes life worth living, boy. Struggles are nothing—I’ve had them always; it’s only the lost faith which slips in under one’s guard and stings.”

Allen longed to ask just where Covington claimed to stand, but he dreaded further imputations as to the motives underlying his question. Then, later, it occurred to him that he might take advantage of the new relations created by Covington himself. Watching his opportunity, he opened up the subject with a proper air of mystery.

“I wish you would advise me, Mr. Covington.”

The words may have caused surprise, but Covington turned to the boy as though his remark were perfectly natural.

“I shall be glad to if I can,” he said.

“You see, I don’t quite know where I stand just now. There’s evidently going to be a struggle between the chief and the committee, and I’d like to be put in right. How do you think it’s going to turn out?”

Covington did not doubt the sincerity which Allen’s words and tone apparently expressed.

“There is only one possible outcome,” he replied, frankly. “Mr. Gorham will have to compromise or they will find a way to take his power away from him.”

“But you don’t think he will, do you?”

“He’s bound to. No man except a fool is going to let his ideals rob him of his power, and Robert Gorham is no fool.”

“No, but those ideals are pretty well developed.”

“Of course they are, and he will hold to them as long as he can; but when Litchfield and the others begin to take real action, as they will soon, he will see things differently.”

“Then you advise me to stick to him?”

Covington looked at him critically. “If I were you,” he said, carefully, “I would stick to the Companies. I am with him, of course, but the clerks have no special obligation to any one. You have been closer to him than the others, but I don’t suppose that is any reason why you shouldn’t look out for yourself if a break comes. But personally, I’m not expecting any break.”

“I never saw any one cotton so to anything as Mr. Gorham does to those ideals of his,” Allen continued. “I believe he talks them all day and dreams them all night. It would break his heart to be obliged to take back water.”

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Covington laughed at the boy's simplicity. "Mr. Gorham was in business long before the Consolidated Companies was born, and from what they tell me he was a clever one even back there. His ideals didn't trouble him any then, yet he succeeded. He figures that it is necessary for him to test his strength against the committee at this point, and he has accomplished all he wants. He will play with them for a time, and eventually make a compromise which will fool them into thinking that they have carried their point, but which in reality will give him a still stronger grip on the Companies. Mr. Gorham has taught me a good many lessons, not the least of which is how to turn ideals into business assets. I would suggest that you don't give yourself a great deal of anxiety over his 'broken heart.'"

Covington's conversation with Allen was as frank and cordial as the boy could have asked, yet between the two there was a barrier beyond which Allen could not venture to pass. But the ice was broken, and this first conversation which approached even a semblance of friendliness might open the way for more important conferences in the future.

Gorham, during these days, was working hard to discover the real crux in Buckner's affairs. His secret-service men supplied him with a detailed record of the man's history, and reported frequent interviews between him and Levy or Levy's agents. Gorham had even seen the lawyer himself, but gained only a deeper conviction that it was a case of blackmail for revenue only. Levy laid before him all the papers in the case with praiseworthy frankness. He would even have extended his sympathy, except that his first efforts in this direction had not been received in the spirit he thought they should have been. If Buckner's statement was correct, there had been a cruel blunder on the part of Eleanor's counsel; yet unless he was certain of his ground, Gorham could not comprehend his daring to place himself in so dangerous a position. Already the machinery was in motion to settle this point, but so far the telegrams from the Colorado lawyers threw no light on the situation. James Riley made frequent reports, drawing liberal expense accounts each time he called, but as yet no single fact had been unearthed which gave any promise of relief. Gorham relished an open fight, but this guerilla warfare, threatening Eleanor's happiness and peace of mind, caused him real anxiety.

Eleanor's attitude throughout this period puzzled him not a little. The more he thought the matter over, the more convinced he was that she was right in her position that the question of the legality of the divorce must be settled once and for all and at whatever cost. There must be some way to arrive at this point without the necessity of a public trial, but even if it came to that the facts must be established. Yet as Gorham gradually came squarely over to his wife's viewpoint, Eleanor seemed to be coming nearer to accepting the one which he had originally

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advanced. This was what mystified him. He recognized that what she had told him, when they first talked the matter over, was the natural expression of the woman's self which he knew so well; her later attitude showed the influence of some factor in her life unknown to him. She had repeatedly been on the point of confiding to him, yet the confidence had never been given, and Gorham was not a man who could urge beyond what it was her voluntary desire to speak.

It never had occurred to him to take offence or to criticise Eleanor's attitude. He wished that she would come to him with the burden which lay so heavily upon her heart, but he wished it only because he felt that he could lighten it. Ever since the cloud had become apparent, his tenderness toward her had increased to such an extent that she felt herself weakened by his sympathy and swept along relentlessly by the flood of events which crowded one on top of another. He had told her that there should be no trial, and she showed him by every word and act that she depended blindly upon his ability to make good his promise.

The calm which existed at the offices of the Consolidated Companies during the fortnight succeeding the stormy session of the committee, while unexpected, did not lull Gorham into any false sense of security. Now that his vision had been cleared, he knew that it was their strength pitted against his own. He had his own plans for meeting this, but with supreme confidence in himself he preferred to let them make the first move. Covington had not retreated from his position that a compromise of some sort was desirable, but he succeeded in convincing Gorham that this was simply a difference in viewpoint, and that his chief's judgment would, of course, be final. Acting upon the definite authority which Gorham had forced from the committee to replace the tacit understanding which had existed from the first, he plunged ahead with renewed energy to perfect the organizations which the Companies had in hand. But while conscious that his associates were undoubtedly concentrating their energies upon some plan which might be used effectively against him, he was grateful for the postponement of the issue, in that it gave him time to work upon his present domestic problem.

Covington congratulated himself upon the happy solution of the most dangerous horn of his dilemma. He did not wish Gorham to yield, and he found that the more he urged him to compromise, the more firmly set he was against doing it. Thus he could accomplish his purpose, and at the same time put himself on record without risk of being called disloyal, while advising him for his own best good. The others were working hard, and Covington could have posted his chief upon many interesting points had he chosen to do so. Instead, he preferred to bring added pressure upon Alice to name an early date for their wedding. He seemed to have overlooked the fact that as yet she had not given him her formal consent, but as the event was apparently accepted by her father and Eleanor and Covington himself as a foregone conclusion, the girl took no definite exceptions to his attitude. He was, of course, aware of the family

complications, and, in expressing his sympathy, explained that he could be of much greater assistance in helping to straighten matters out if he were actually included in the family circle.

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But Covington, with all his astuteness, was frankly surprised by a piece of information which one of the committee confided to him; and this was nothing less than that unquestionable evidence had been secured that Gorham himself had, at least in one instance, taken advantage of his position for personal gain. What this instance was his informant could not at that moment say—the facts were being carefully compiled, but the evidence was beyond dispute. This autocrat, who talked of principle and honor, had been caught red-handed in the very act against which he pretended to stand; and, of course, this instance was but one of many. Doctor Jekyll could take it upon himself to deliver platitudes upon moral rectitude, while Mr. Hyde gathered in the shekels on the side!

The members of the Executive Committee were hugely pleased, and Covington no less so. All was playing into his hands with surprising directness, and he even began to feel that his approaching marriage into Mr. Gorham's family was an act of supreme sacrifice on his part. Still, it were better to safeguard both exits to the house, and Alice was an amusing little minx, after all.

XXIV

The elder Riley felt the tenseness in the atmosphere of the Gorham family, and his inability to discover the occasion for it proved trying to his soul. The mysterious visits of his son James, and the apparent confidences between him and his employer, made the old man feel strongly that, if James were not a part of the new condition, at least he was acquainted with the cause. Patience with Riley had ceased to be a virtue, and he so contrived it that he passed an evening with his son at the latter's lodgings.

Much to his relief, he found James in an unusually agreeable mood; and, although the younger man made no effort to move from the comfortable position he had assumed with the assistance of an extra chair for his feet, the welcome extended was far more cordial than that to which the elder Riley was accustomed.

"Well, well, well," the old man ejaculated, as he closed the door and stood for a moment contemplating the scene before him. James smiled complacently at the look of mingled surprise and admiration his father so plainly showed, as his eye roved from the new pieces of gaudy furniture to the box of cigars upon the table, particularly noting the attitude which the son assumed as the nearest he could imagine to that of a gentleman in repose.

"Well, well, well," Riley repeated, coming down to earth again, and seating himself upon a near-by chair not required for James's feet, which the host had been too preoccupied to think of offering. "Things is comin' good f'r ye, ain't they, Jimmie?"

The old man had discovered a fact which James had no desire to dispute, so he admitted it graciously, at the same time blowing clouds of smoke from his over-fragrant cigar.

“They is,” he replied, sententiously; “and soon they’ll be comin’ better still.”

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“Ah, Jimmie”—the old man lowered his voice—“are ye goin’ ter run f’r mayor?”

“Not—yet,” James replied, dwelling upon his words in such a way as to convince his hearer that the delay was wholly a matter of his own convenience. “Politics is movin’ some, father, but ’tis in my private capacity that I’m makin’ my present strides.”

“So,” murmured Riley; “an’ phwat may ye’er private capacity be, Jimmie?”

“’Tis of a confidential nature,” he replied, loftily.

“Has it ter do wid Misther Robert?”

“Him—and others.”

“Who is th’ others?” the old man persisted.

“That’s my affair. ’Tis confidential, I tell you.”

“Not wid me, Jimmie,” Riley begged; “not when I’ve watched over Misther Robert iver sence he was a little la-ad, not wid me when I’ve brought ye up fr’m a howlin’ little brat. There can’t be nothin’ confidential, I tell ye, when it’s affectin’ thim I loves best in all th’ whole wide world. Shure ye’ll tell me about it, Jimmie, shure ye will.”

In James’s present mood, it was easier to talk than to keep silent. If his father really knew the importance of the part he felt himself to he playing in Mr. Gorham’s family complication, the old man’s appreciation of his son’s true position in the community could not fail to be enhanced. James Riley’s most vulnerable point was his vanity, and the present opportunity to gratify it was more than he could well resist. The elder Riley, without having analyzed his son’s characteristics to this extent, was intuitively conscious of a yielding to his appeal, and he was not slow to follow it up.

“That’s th’ good la-ad, Jimmie,” he said, coaxingly. “Ye knows how tight I keeps me mouth shut; an’ phwat hits ye or Misther Robert hits me.”

“Well,” James replied, indulgently, blowing another cloud of smoke—“’tis his wife that it’s all about.”

“His wife!” the old man repeated, surprised and excited—“about Mrs. Gorham, d’ye say?”

“That is—provided she is his wife. There is them that says she ain’t.”

“Who says she ain’t?” Riley almost shouted the words as he rose excitedly to his feet. “Who says she ain’t? By God, I’ll kill th’ man phwat says that!”

“Slowly, slowly,” James answered, soothingly, thoroughly enjoying his father’s amazement and excitement. “That’s for them to settle as knows how, but it’s to me Mr. Gorham must look to help him out. Now, do you understand where I come in?”

“Ah, Jimmie, ye’re killin’ me wid yer slowness. Out wid it, la-ad! What do they say, an’ who done phwat? Out wid it!”

“The divorce was crooked, so they say; and now her first husband is here in New York and wants her back.”

“But it ain’t true, Jimmie—it ain’t true; tell me that.”

“I don’t know yet myself,” James admitted; “but there’s a few things I do know what ought to be worth the coin to Mr. Gorham.”

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“An’ ye’re goin’ ter give ’em ter him?”

“Perhaps,” James replied, indifferently—“if he thinks they’re worth what I do.”

“But Misther Robert has paid ye already, hasn’t he? Hasn’t these new prosperity things come out iv Misther Robert’s pay?”

“He’s got what he’s paid for,” James asserted. “These new tips come to me while I was workin’ on my own account. They’re worth the coin to either side.”

“That’s phwat ye meant when ye said there was more prosperity comin’?”

“Sure.”

“An’ if Misther Robert don’t pay ye ye’er price, ye’ll sell ’em ter th’ other feller who says his wife ain’t his wife?”

“Business is business,” James replied, sagely.

The elder Riley’s lips came close together as he rose quietly yet quickly from his chair. In a moment more he had seized James by the collar, and with a sudden, violent action, made easier by the recumbent attitude, deposited the younger man in a heap on the floor. Too surprised by the unexpectedness of the attack, James made no defence, and before he could even attempt to rise from his humiliating position the old man stood over him, shaking his fist in his face.

“Ye damn dirty spalpeen, lie there f’r a time, will ye? I’ll break ivery bone in ye’er body if ye even make a move ter git up. Do ye think I’ve spint me life f’r nothin’ better than ter rear up a blackmailer an’ th’ like iv ye? Do ye think me an’ th’ ol’ woman, God rist her soul, slaved th’ flesh off our bones f’r nothin’ better than ter raise a brat who’d sell th’ man whose hand was always out f’r me an’ mine? It’s ye’er fa-ather talkin’ ter ye now, James Riley, an’ it’s ye’er fa-ather who’s goin’ ter scrape off some iv thim fine airs thim Tammany thieves an’ blacklegs has learned ye. It’s manny th’ time I’ve licked ye good, Jimmie, when ye was a la-ad, an’ it’s agin I’ll do it if I has ter, ter learn ye honesty. Now git up an’ set in that chair an’ do phwat I tell ye, if ye know phwat’s best f’r ye.”

James Riley rose from the floor and sat obediently in the chair his father indicated. Had he chosen to assert his strength, the elder man would have been but a child in opposition; but the fire which flashed from those angry eyes, and the tone in which his father’s scathing castigation was administered, took him back twenty years when the same angry flash and the same convincing tones were backed up by a physical force which made them worthy of respect. James Riley was again the offending boy, and his father—stern, severe, unrelenting in his own ideas of right and wrong—held him in a grip he could not break.

“Set there, damn ye,” the elder Riley repeated, breathing hard from excitement and from the unusual exertion. “Now tell me phwat ye found out when ye was workin’ on ye’er own account.”

James tried desperately to summon courage enough to oppose his father’s will, but to no avail.

“I’ve mixed a bit with Buckner—the first husband—that’s all.”

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“An’ phwat did ye find out?” Riley demanded, sternly.

James hesitated.

“Out wid it!” the old man shouted.

“He’s been married again since.”

“Ah, ha! th’ feller phwat says me Misther Robert’s wife ain’t his wife, ‘cause th’ divorce warn’t reg’lar, has been married agin, has he?” Riley’s good-humor began to return with this cheerful bit of information. “Then that makes him a liar or a Mormon—take ye’er choice. Which do ye think it is, Jimmie?”

“Liar,” James replied, sententiously.

“Right ye are, Jimmie! Right ye are! Liar it is, tho’ ’twud serve him right ter be th’ other. An’ where’s his second wife?”

“That’s what’s a-worryin’ him; he don’t know.”

“Ah, ha!” Riley chuckled, “why shouldn’t it? It’s bad enough when th’ wife don’t know where ye are, but when ye don’t know where th’ wife is an’ her apt ter turn up anny minnit! Ah, let him worry; it’s good f’r him. What else did ye find out by ye’er mixin’s?”

“That’s all, so far, but I can get more. Buckner likes me.”

The old man’s passing amusement was gone, and his indignation returned with full force.

“P’r’aps ye can git th’ likin’s iv a man who says me Misther Robert’s wife ain’t his wife, but ‘twill be healthier f’r ye if ye gits th’ likin’s iv Misther Robert himself. Now, ye’ll go ter him to-morrer mornin’—d’ye mind—an’ ye’ll tell him all ye’ve tol’ me, an’ there won’t be no price asked, an’ ye’ll keep on findin’ out all ye can f’r Misther Robert, an’ ye’ll play fair, an’ ye’ll take phwat pay he chooses ter give ye, an’ if ye thry anny more thricks like th’ dirty wan I’ve just catched ye wid I’ll be back ter see ye, James Riley, an’ I’ll break ivery damn bone in ye’er body, James Riley. Now, good-night ter ye an’ ye’er prosperities. I’ll tell Misther Robert ye’ll be up ter see him at nine o’clock to-morrer mornin’.”

The old man drew himself up majestically, cast one more withering glance on the completely humiliated James, and took his departure.

The next morning nine had not ceased striking on the clock standing on the mantelpiece in Mr. Gorham’s study when James Riley was formally and seriously ushered by his father into these, the sacred precincts, where none entered except by its owner’s

invitation; but it was a far different James from the man who had called upon Mr. Gorham some weeks earlier. The younger Riley's self-assurance was missing, his jaunty air was replaced by a bearing almost timid in its gentleness, his voice had become halty; and when Mr. Gorham first spoke to him he started suddenly, turning his face toward his questioner, and showing apprehension in every feature.

Gorham noticed the change, and, being ignorant of the tragic events of the evening before, was frankly surprised.

"Have you been ill, James?" he inquired, quietly.

"Oh, no, sir—I'm feeling very well, I thank you, sir," James answered in a quick, frightened voice.

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“I am glad to hear it,” Gorham answered, but his tone suggested incredulity.

“I have been some worrited lately,” James added, by way of explanation. “I s’pose you knows how that tells on a feller, sir.”

“Yes, James,” Gorham agreed. “It comes to all of us sooner or later. Now tell me what is the important information which your father promised me you would bring with you ?”

“Hasn’t he told you, sir?”

“Not a word, James. Has it to do with the matter you have been working on for me, or is it some trouble of your own which has caused the worry you speak of?”

James was seated on the edge of his chair with his thin hands folded and resting on his knees. His eyes roved about the room, looking anywhere except into Mr. Gorham’s face. As a matter of fact, he had in reality passed through some “worrited” times since his father’s call, and his humiliation was complete. It was a relief to him to know that his father had not discussed the matter with Mr. Gorham, but even that consolation was not equal to the task of restoring him to his former equinimity.

“Well,” interrogated Mr. Gorham, helpfully, striving to assist him in what was evidently a serious undertaking.

“You see, sir,” James began, “there’s another Mrs. Buckner.”

“What!” cried Gorham, genuinely surprised and rising from his chair. “Buckner has been married again, you say?”

“That’s what I understand, sir; leastwise that’s what he told me. He was drunk when he said it, and perhaps that’s why he did say it; but I believe it’s true.”

James had the satisfaction of witnessing a sight which few men had seen during Mr. Gorham’s lifetime—he was visibly excited, and, what was stranger still, he made no effort to conceal his emotion.

“If there is anything in what you say, James, this information is the most cheering piece of news which I have heard for many a day. Now tell me all you know about it.”

In another half-hour James Riley was painfully making his way to the nearest subway station, giving no indication, either in his face or in his movements, as to whether the result of his mission had turned out more or less favorably, in its financial probabilities, than would have been the case had he followed his original intentions. He had found his father waiting for him in the front hall after he came down-stairs from Mr. Gorham’s library, but the only remark the old man vouchsafed was, “Have ye done phwat I told ye,

Jimmie?" Then the door swung upon its hinges while the younger man went out, leaving his father chuckling softly.

"Jimmie's th' fine la-ad, afther all," Riley muttered quietly to himself. "He has th' temptations same as we all has, but he seen his duty when his fa-ather shown it ter him." Then the old man became reflective. "It's sorry I'd 'a' been ter have had ter mess Jimmie all up," he continued—"but I'd 'a' done it. It's lucky f'r him he didn't show fight; it's lucky f'r him, I'm tellin' ye."

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In the mean time Gorham had sought Eleanor and Alice, and told them the news which had come to him so unexpectedly. The problem now was to find the second Mrs. Buckner, and as quickly as possible. James had explained to Mr. Gorham that even Buckner himself did not know where the woman was. He had lived in several cities during the last few years. His wife might have died or moved away; but as Gorham pointed out in answer to the doubts Eleanor and his daughter expressed, if it was a fact, there must be a way to find conclusive evidence.

“I cannot delay a moment,” Gorham at length declared. “It will take some time at best to run this matter down, and with the certainty so near at hand to prove our fears groundless, I am all impatience to take steps toward securing the actual evidence itself. It is imperative that I leave for Chicago to-morrow, and I must get this investigation under way before then.”

Eleanor and Alice sat for some moments in silence after Gorham left the house. The girl watched the older woman, waiting for her to speak. The anxious lines were still in Eleanor’s face; her pallor remained, and Alice wondered that she gave no evidence of relief from the nerve-racking strain which she had endured, in the face of so hopeful a turn in the whole situation. Still more, to the girl’s surprise, Eleanor rose abruptly from beside her, and walked irresolutely to the window.

“I cannot, I cannot,” she cried at last, all the pent-up feeling of the last few moments finding expression in these brief words. Alice was quickly beside her.

“You cannot do what, dear?” she asked, sympathetically.

“I cannot tell him.”

“Haven’t you told him yet?” Alice asked, a shade of reproach showing in her voice.

Eleanor turned from the window and passed her arm around Alice’s waist.

“I have tried a hundred times. The few opportunities when I might have done so naturally found me too weak; at other times it has been impossible. Robert is so sweet and tender with me these days that the mere possibility of having him blame me is the most terrifying thought which I can have.”

“It ought not to be so hard now, dear. Everything is going to be straightened out. Already the burden is a good deal lighter than before because now we have something tangible to work upon. This leaves you simply the one thing to think about, and of course father will believe everything you tell him.”

Eleanor looked at Alice irresolutely. “It isn’t in the nature of man to be so credulous—I doubt if I would believe the story myself if I heard any one else tell it. Under these circumstances, how can I expect more from your father?”

“Because it is—father,” the girl replied, feelingly “—because he’s the grandest, noblest, truest man who ever lived; because he loves you, Eleanor; and because he believes in you as he believes in himself.”

“If I did not know of this belief in me, Alice dear, and was not so jealous of it, perhaps I should not fear to bring the matter to the test. But, of course, you are right. He must know the whole story, and he must know it from me. I only hope that the opportunity may offer itself naturally for me to tell him, under such conditions as will make it appear less incredible than it does just now.”

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“It doesn’t seem to me that that ought to enter into it at all,” Alice continued, quietly. “Even if you knew that it would destroy this belief, you could do nothing else than tell him, could you, Eleanor? There could be nothing good come from anything kept from father.”

Eleanor felt reproached by the faith which the girl exhibited. “I have done it to spare him,” she urged. “If there had been anything in the experience of which I need feel ashamed, I should have felt it necessary to let him know it before we were married. I thought it all over then, and decided it was wiser not to bring the matter up. It was weak and cowardly not to do it, I can see that now, but at the time I thought I was acting for the best.”

“If father were to tell you something about his life which seemed incredible, and which might be misinterpreted into something dishonorable to him, would you believe his version of it?”

“Implicitly,” Eleanor replied, with much feeling.

“Then do you think he is less loving or less tender or has less faith than you, Eleanor?”

“Not that, dear,” Eleanor replied; “but he is a man, and a man’s standpoint is essentially different from a woman’s.”

“I never think of him as a man,” the girl replied, simply. “He is so far above and beyond any man I have ever known that I have never thought of him as only that.”

XXV

A week later the Gorhams’ dinner-table received two unexpected additions. Gorham had returned from Chicago earlier in the day, and found a telegram awaiting him which announced that Senator Kenmore would call at his house at five o’clock that afternoon. As he was unable to complete his work upon the accumulated matters which demanded immediate attention, he put the papers into his bag, and took Allen with him to the house in time to keep his appointment with the Senator, intending to continue his day’s labors after his caller had departed.

During the weeks which had elapsed since Gorham’s conversation with Allen, the boy’s attitude toward him manifested a respect so marked that the older man saw in it an effort to atone for his momentary disloyalty; in his work he was devoted and exact to a degree beyond anything he had previously demonstrated; inwardly he was the investigator. Never had he put himself through so merciless a self-examination. He felt keenly Alice’s misunderstanding of his dislike of business; he blamed himself for having spoken so freely to Mr. Gorham before he had fully satisfied himself that the doubts he expressed at that time were based on anything beyond inexperience and a lack of

knowledge. He knew that he had committed an error in accusing Covington before he could substantiate his statements. He was glad, therefore, to be able to work this all out in his own mind during the absence of his chief, yet when Mr. Gorham returned, the boy was still further embarrassed by his special kindliness toward him.

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Kenmore's face wore a worried expression as he entered the hall soon after Gorham and Allen arrived. He was shown at once to the library, where he and Gorham passed the next two hours in close conference. Indeed, the discussion was sufficiently important to hold Kenmore longer than he expected, and to cause Gorham to break over a rule which he had never before violated, in discussing business matters at the dinner-table and in the presence of his family.

The thought had come to Gorham, as he was rushing along toward New York on the limited express, of the rapidity with which events had shaped themselves since that moment, only a few weeks earlier, when he had sat in his library indulging in day-dreams. James Riley had come first, with his news of Buckner's presence in New York; then Allen called, bringing his suspicions concerning the attitude of those trusted in the affairs of the corporation, adding his own unexpected and unwarranted doubts as to the integrity of Covington and the morality of this company, which to its creator had seemed to embody every idealistic and altruistic principle; then Litchfield, at the meeting of the committee, substantiated to a considerable extent Allen's deep-seated conviction that the men who made up the fibre of the corporation were actuated by selfish motives in their relations to it and to its transactions, thus making the situation even more acute. James Riley later had brought him the first definite ray of hope in what promised a solution of his domestic tangle; but as the burden lightened on the one hand, it seemed to bear him down with added weight on the other. Senator Hunt, urged on by Brady and other powerful interests, was working against the Consolidated Companies with an energy which would have done him credit had it owed its origin to his appreciation of the responsibilities of his public duties. Now, Kenmore's description of the situation at Washington left no room for doubt that for the first time Gorham must admit the assailability of the Companies. After the two hours' interview, Gorham could not fail to recognize that the one thing which showed above all else in Kenmore's attitude, was his anxiety lest the threatened adverse position on the part of the Government toward the Companies should result in a loss of his own future profits. Could it be possible, Gorham asked, inwardly, that Allen was right in saying that he himself was the only man in the corporation who lived up to the ideals he expressed!

"Next Tuesday is the critical day," the Senator repeated at the table, all other conversation giving way to the matter which he had so strongly upon his mind. "The Attorney-General was not far wrong when he told us in Washington that there was not the slightest possibility of passing any bill through either House which could accomplish the results which the President desires, and yet I cannot believe that the position which the Administration has taken will be overridden."

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“If we can get the bill through the Senate, do you think there will be the same difficulty in the House?” asked Gorham.

“No,” Kenmore responded; “the Congressmen are more eager to serve their constituents. The people are still with us, and Congress knows it. In the Senate, however, they are playing for bigger game. The great interests there hope to divert attention from themselves to the Consolidated Companies, and if they can secure legislation which will operate against us they think that the people will so resent it that it will probably put a stop, for the present at least, to all agitation against consolidations, good or bad. It is a clever game, and they are playing it well.”

“We must not let them play it better than ourselves,” Gorham replied, decisively.

“We are working hard, Gorham,” the Senator replied. “That was a great move of yours, having each stockholder invest in the Consolidated Companies to such an extent that it made the welfare of the corporation a matter of personal concern. Those of us who are stockholders are fighting for our lives, and the Companies is getting the benefit of it.”

“So is the public,” Gorham replied, quickly, regretting particularly the turn the conversation had taken owing to Allen’s presence, and noting the expression on the boy’s face. “You and our other colleagues in the Senate are fighting for the people, and the right is bound to win.”

Kenmore laughed nervously. “I don’t know that it makes much difference what you call it,” he replied. “We are fighting all right, and the result is bound to be the same whether it is for the people or for ourselves. You won’t fail us next Tuesday, Gorham? If you can turn the tide in our favor, you will accomplish the greatest stroke in your career.”

“I shall be there,” Gorham replied, and with deliberate intent turned the conversation into general channels.

Kenmore took his departure shortly after dinner, and Eleanor and Alice remained with Mr. Gorham and Allen, who lingered a few moments over their cigars before taking up their evening’s labors. Eleanor, in an effort to relieve her own mind from its oppressing thoughts, quite unconsciously called attention to Allen’s quiet bearing, which Mr. Gorham had hoped would pass by without attracting attention, knowing as he did what lay beneath.

“How sober you are to-night, Allen,” she said.

The boy looked up quickly. “Forgive me for being such poor company,” he replied, simply. “I was thinking over what the Senator has been telling us.”

“You must leave all that worry to me,” Gorham said, kindly. “Great burdens are not meant for young shoulders. The Consolidated Companies is too strong a force to be

vanquished without a hard struggle, even when attacked by so mighty an organization as the United States Senate."

"I was not worrying about that, Mr. Gorham," Allen replied, and he regretted the words as soon as they had left his lips.

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“What is it, then?” asked Alice.

The boy passed his hand across his forehead and rose to his feet. “I don’t know what it is,” he answered, irresolutely. “I am all upset to-night—do you mind if I go up to the library now, Mr. Gorham, and wait for you there?”

Gorham held out his hand and Allen grasped it firmly, yet turned his face away.

“Have you lost faith in me, too, my boy? Has it really come to that?”

“I beg of you, let me go now,” Allen replied, controlling himself with difficulty. “You know I shall never lose faith in you.”

“You are in no condition for work to-night,” Gorham remarked, quietly. “Draw your chair up here beside me, and let us talk it all out right now.”

Allen looked hesitatingly at Eleanor and Alice and then at Gorham. “Not now?” he said.

“Why not now, Allen?” Alice asked, curious to know what so affected him. “You told me once that you were my business creation, and that I must accept the responsibility whether I wished it or not. Surely I am entitled to be present.”

“Affairs have changed since then. If I don’t hold my tongue now, I shall say things for which you and your father will never forgive me.”

“I want to hear them, Allen,” she insisted; “I have a right to hear them.”

Gorham was impressed by the girl’s attitude. “She is right,” he added. “Now, out with it, boy, and let us get to the bottom of things.”

Then the pent-up thoughts which had been collecting during the past few months burst forth.

“You have made me do it, Mr. Gorham,” the boy cried, passionately. “You would never have heard it from my lips except for that, but I can’t stand it any longer. I have tried hard since we talked that last time to convince myself that I was wrong, but I can’t do it. I know it’s because I can’t see things the right way, but, whatever the cause, the trouble is there. To me the Companies seems based on interests which are wholly selfish, and to be accomplishing good only because doing business on this basis brings extra dividends to its stockholders. It is growing bigger and more powerful and more irresistible, but with this increasing power there is also increasing danger; and I feel sure, Mr. Gorham, as I told you before, that some day the public will have to pay the price. When the dike breaks the flood is going to wipe out all the advantages which the people have received, and more too.”

The boy paused for breath and waited, expecting to hear Gorham's stern reproaches, but none came. The amazed expression both on Eleanor's and Alice's faces, however, evidenced the heresy of his words.

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“I suppose I am forfeiting all which this family means to me by my seeming disloyalty to you, Mr. Gorham; but I honestly feel that I am more loyal than if I played the hypocrite. I see you carrying on the business of this corporation surrounded by men whose only thought is of themselves, who accept your judgment simply because it puts dollars into their pockets, who permit you to exercise your ideals only because they know that it means profit to them. Yet you have been consistent, you have been straightforward, you have lived up to the standards which you have taught me to expect. But can’t you see, Mr. Gorham”—the boy held out both arms supplicatingly—“can’t you see that there isn’t a single man in that great organization who feels as you do? Can’t you see that even Senator Kenmore is thinking only of himself?”

“You forget Mr. Covington and—yourself,” Gorham answered.

“I don’t cut any ice, one way or the other,” Allen protested, “but I haven’t forgotten Mr. Covington. I tell you, Mr. Gorham—forgive me, Alice—Mr. Covington is the worst of all. He’s the one who has influenced the committee to take their stand against you; he’s helping them plan things out now so as to throw you down, hoping to become president himself; he’s trying to marry Alice so that you can’t expose him when you begin to unravel his double cross. I tell you, he’s the slickest Johnnie outside of State’s Prison.”

“Of course you have unquestionable proof to support all this, Allen?” Gorham demanded, sternly.

“No, I haven’t, and I shouldn’t speak; but I know I’m right,” was the dogged reply.

“Do you realize what it means to make such unsubstantiated statements?”

“But I have everything except the actual proofs,” he pleaded.

“What else can you have?”

“I know how he’s been investing Alice’s money for her, for instance.”

“What of that; it was done with my consent.”

“With your consent?” Allen repeated, bewildered. “Then you knew—with your principles—”

Gorham was thoroughly angry now, but he delayed replying until he could choose his words in the presence of his wife and daughter.

“I have borne with this long enough,” he interrupted. “I have been patient with you because I sympathized with your disappointment regarding Alice—but my patience is at an end. Your jealousy has so warped your sense of right and wrong that you are willing to attack the reputation of a man of honor and integrity, trying to injure him in the eyes of

those who respect him. I warned you against this, and you have failed to heed my warning. Much as I regret it, on many accounts, there is no alternative—your usefulness to the Companies is at an end."

Allen rose and looked searchingly into Gorham's face. He could read in the lines which he saw there a real suffering which touched him deeply. No man, not even his father, had come so closely into his life as Mr. Gorham, and the boy's heart was wrung with pain that he should be the cause of adding to his burdens. But his gaze into those expressive eyes seemed to bewilder him still further, for he passed his hand in a dazed manner across his forehead.

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“You must be right,” he said at length. “I should have known that I’d be no good in business. Why, I haven’t even brains enough to comprehend. I know that you, sir, are the soul of honor, and yet you tell me that you knew of that investment. I’m a failure—-I’m just no good, that’s all. I’ll go back to Pittsburgh and tell the pater what a chance you gave me, and what a mess I made of it. Then I’ll ask him to let me strip down as his other workmen do, and go into the furnaces where I belong. Good-night and—good-bye.”

As the conversation developed into so serious a situation, Alice and Eleanor watched the two men, astonished at the nature of the disagreement, and filled with apprehension. Mrs. Gorham had grown more fond of the boy than she realized until this moment, and she actually suffered for him. Alice was running the gamut of her emotions, her sensations changing every moment, affected by each sentence which she heard torn from the very soul of each speaker. As Allen rose after his final acceptance of his dismissal, she rose with him, a curious mixture of uncertainty and lack of understanding combining in her expression.

“I don’t believe you do know about that stock, daddy,” she said, quietly. “Before Allen goes perhaps—”

“I know all about it, Alice,” her father replied, impatiently. “Allen has no right to meddle in my personal affairs, and I resent it. Don’t interfere, little girl—leave this to me.”

The color left her face, and she seemed to grow to mature years in the instant. Allen started to leave, but was held spellbound by the force exercised by the quiet, firm dignity which became at once the dominating factor.

“You are wrong, daddy,” she said, with a new note in her voice which all recognized instinctively. “For the first time in my life, I tell you, you are wrong.”

“Leave this to me, Alice,” Gorham repeated, sternly, but the girl did not heed him.

“Since I have been sitting here I have learned a lot, and I know that Allen is right. There are things which I have kept from you, and now I know that I should have told you all about them. Now I know that the advice I received was wrong—and it is all reacting upon Allen and upon you.”

“Is there no way—” Gorham began, thoroughly exasperated.

“Be patient, Robert,” begged Eleanor.

“Don’t, Alice,” Allen protested; “it’s mighty white of you, but it only makes matters worse. I’m going now—”

“Not until I tell you that I’ve been unfair to you too,” she cried. “I’ve made fun of you and been horrid to you, but I believe I’ve loved you all the time.”

“Alice!” the boy exclaimed.

“You are forgetting your duty to Mr. Covington, as you have already forgotten your duty to me,” her father expostulated, severely.

“She doesn’t mean it, Mr. Gorham—please don’t blame her; it’s all my fault.”

“I do mean it, Allen. I haven’t known my own heart till now.”

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“It’s pity for me—it isn’t love,” the boy replied, bitterly. “I’m a failure and you’re sorry for me. I wanted you when I thought I could make good. Now that I know I can’t, it’s different. But I’ll never forget it, Alice, never. Don’t blame her, Mr. Gorham. Good-bye.”

He rushed out, not trusting himself to speak further, and a moment later those left behind heard the door close quietly as he went out into the darkness.

XXVI

The Executive Committee were ready to make their first move; and at a meeting at which Gorham was not present, they had voted to ask the president to call a special meeting of the Board of Directors. The call for the meeting was supplemented by a letter to the Directors, signed by each member of the committee, setting forth that the business to be considered included the rescinding of a resolution passed at a previous meeting, placing plenipotentiary powers in the hands of the president, and also to consider the desirability of so dividing his present duties that the responsibilities might rest on several shoulders instead of upon his alone. It further recited that various criticisms of the president would be considered at that time,—specifically, that Mr. Gorham was using the Consolidated Companies for his own private ends; that he prevented his associates from being recognized in their full relation to the work, the credit for which he himself monopolized; that he was devoting a large part of his time at the expense of the Companies in straightening out certain domestic complications, as a result of which the corporation was losing ground, and was even being threatened by adverse legislation in Washington, against which it was his duty to protect it. And finally, it was claimed that the president had at least on one occasion taken advantage of his official position to make certain investments for his own personal advantage.

A copy of this letter accidentally fell into Gorham’s hands, and his indignation at its needlessly antagonistic wording was tempered by several elements of surprise. The frankness with which the grievances were stated was an evidence that his associates were prepared to force the break with him, and to dispense with whatever value his connection with the corporation might have. The reference to his domestic complications surprised him not a little, showing as it did a familiarity with this subject which he had not supposed to have become common property. The suggestion that he had been false to the ideals which he himself had imposed could only be construed as a gratuitous affront; yet these men who constituted the Executive Committee were not those who would lightly do this. He could quite understand their resentment of both his attitude and his words at the last meeting—he had expected them to make an effort to wrest from him, but in such a way as not to jeopardize their own interests, the supreme authority which he had forced from them; yet they all knew him too well even to suggest any transaction on his part so at variance with the standards which he had established.

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After thinking it all over, he sent for Covington, and as the younger man entered he handed him the communication.

“Have you seen this before?” Gorham asked.

“Yes; Litchfield just showed it to me.”

“What does it mean?”

“Compromise, I hope,” Covington replied. “Nothing else can prevent a great calamity to the Companies. I am even more certain of this now than before.”

“How do they know anything about my personal affairs?”

“I can’t imagine, unless through some one of the secret-service men.”

“You, of course, have made no reference to it?”

“Certainly not.” Covington resented the suggestion.

“Now, about this last statement—what does that mean?”

“It is a complete mystery to me. Of course, there’s nothing in it?”

Gorham looked at him with a flash in his eye which he had learned to respect. “Do I need to answer that question?”

Covington’s watchful mind noted the evasion. Gorham had not actually denied it.

“Of course not,” he responded; “but they claim to have indisputable evidence. I tried to find out what it was, but knowing how close I am to you, they are holding that back until the meeting.”

“Indisputable evidence, have they? I should like to see it! Please have a call signed by the secretary and sent out at once for a special meeting of the Board to be held to-morrow afternoon at four o’clock. Send with it a waiver of the usual five days’ notice. More than a majority of the Board are in the city, and they will be as eager as I am to dispose of this matter.”

The formalities in opening the meeting were brief, and the business in hand was taken up with a promptness which showed the strong desire dominating both sides to have the issue met squarely and settled once for all. It was an interesting study to watch the expressions on the various faces. Men who seldom allowed their bearing to reflect the emotions influencing them, gave every evidence of their full appreciation that a crisis was upon them. With the possible exception of Covington, Gorham showed less than

any of them the effect of the tense strain which the situation developed. At the last meeting, the committee had witnessed an exhibition of the latent reserve force which lay beneath the impassive exterior, so they needed no further warning that the quiet yet flashing eyes, the firm setting of the mouth, the head bent forward, the general bearing —alert and decisive—all attested a foeman worthy of their steel. It was his business life now against theirs, but they believed themselves strong enough to force the struggle.

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Litchfield was again spokesman. “Nothing can be more painful,” he said, “to me personally or to the other members of the Board of Directors than to have circumstances arise such as these which have made this meeting necessary. It was a surprise to us, on the occasion of the last session, to have our president take such exceptions to the suggestions which we advanced in good faith. We tried to make it clear to him that we all recognized and appreciated the extraordinary services which he has rendered to the Consolidated Companies, yet we cannot admit that he possesses all the wisdom, or that his policies are the only ones which can be considered. He made it quite evident to us at that time that our judgment was desired only to the extent that it coincided with his own. He has seemed to overlook the fact that the Consolidated Companies is not a private corporation, but rather one in which several of the Directors are even more heavily interested, in a financial way, than he is himself.

“There is no question in the minds of any of us that the services of our president are still absolutely essential to the success of the corporation, and we have no wish or intention of having him separate himself from it; but we have become aware, through the unprecedented position which has been taken, that if those interests which we represent are to be safeguarded, immediate action must be taken to convince him that the Consolidated Companies is not his personal property, that the Executive Committee are not mere puppets, and that even the president of a great and successful corporation is, after all, an employee of that corporation, and subject to its control. The gentlemen who have the honor to serve on the Executive Committee resent the imputation made by him that this code of business morals, which he has originated, is necessarily the only moral code, or that he himself possesses the right or the power to establish the standard by which to measure them as individuals or as officials.

“My colleagues have asked me to state the situation at this length in order that our president may understand that our present attitude is inspired not by any personal antagonism, but rather by what appears to us to be a necessary and simple business precaution. What the Board of Directors propose now is to rescind the resolution, passed upon our president’s insistence at the last meeting, which gave him unlimited power in the conduct of the corporation, to divide the responsibilities in such a way that the fortunes of the Consolidated Companies will no longer remain dependent upon the life or services of any one officer, and to insist that the employees of the corporation be used only in the execution of the corporation’s business. Our president will still be given a free scope in the conduct of the important matters which will be intrusted to him, but from now on the Board of Directors insist that the corporation shall be dominated by their joint policies, in the establishment of which our president will still have great weight.”

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Gorham listened to Litchfield's remarks with marked patience. He was relieved that they were free from the personalities and vituperations which the wording of the call had led him to fear, for to his nature it was impossible to work in such close relationship with such a body of able men without acquiring a regard beyond that inspired by mere commercial intercourse. They were wrong in their whole understanding of his position, but he could convince them of that now that there had been nothing said to cause an open rupture.

"My friends," he said, "I can take no exception to the position which you assume, knowing as I do the viewpoint from which you speak. The arbitrary attitude which I have assumed has been one which you yourselves have forced upon me rather than one taken of my own volition—but I shall later refer to this more at length. I agree with you that the employees of this or any other corporation should be used only in the exercise of the corporation's business; but would not the success of any blackmailing attempt, such as the one I am fighting, react upon the Companies fully as much as upon me? As to the gentlemen who form our Executive Committee, even though I have differed from them on a point which I conceive to be absolutely vital to the success of the Consolidated Companies, I consider them the ablest body of business men ever gathered together upon any committee. I am proud of them for the reputation they have given to the Companies, I respect them personally for their own sterling worth. I can conceive no personal calamity greater than to have any necessity arise to make it necessary for us to sever our relations—and I cannot, even now, see that any such occasion exists.

"As to the matter of dividing the responsibilities, I again agree with you. It is not the act of wisdom to have the destinies of any corporation so large as this rest as heavily upon any one man's shoulders as your attitude has convinced me that this rests upon mine. I not only assent to this proposition also, but I will do all which lies in my power to accomplish it. I will even reserve my 'code of morals,' as you are pleased to call it, wholly for myself, considering that it is a point upon which we fail to agree.

"All that remains, then, is for you gentlemen to give me your assurances upon one point: namely, that the present basis of profit-sharing with the public shall not be disturbed. I will no longer put it upon a moral basis—I insist upon it solely as a business policy. With this one point established, I will work with you to the extent of such strength and ability as I have within me, to further the interests of the great Consolidated Companies as it advances triumphantly along its appointed path."

"But this is the main contention upon which our split has come," protested Litchfield.

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“You objected to the stand I took that the public is morally entitled to an equal division. Personally, I still maintain that this obligation exists, but now I am endeavoring to convince you that to continue this is an act of supreme business wisdom. Mr. Litchfield made reference, in the course of his remarks, to the adverse legislation with which the Companies is threatened. I am, and have always been, in the closest touch with the situation, and I tell you, gentlemen, this danger is a real one. I have seen Senator Kenmore within a few days, and his information is most alarming. Next week I expect to be in Washington again to fight the battle not only for the future of the Consolidated Companies, but for its very life. We have powerful allies, and I believe that we can win, but, in the words of the Attorney-General himself, only provided that we can show our hands to be clean in our future intentions as well as in our present practices.”

“Suppose we postpone any action whatever until after the present crisis in Washington has passed,” suggested one of the Directors.

“The action must be taken at once,” insisted Gorham. “I told you, gentlemen, that I had awakened from my Utopian dream. I shall make no more promises until I am absolutely certain that they will be made good to the letter.”

“How far do you carry this ‘Utopian’ policy of yours, Mr. Gorham?” asked Litchfield. “Would you even go so far as to deny the right of any officer of the corporation to make profit for himself as a result of inside information gained in his official capacity?”

“Most assuredly.”

Covington watched his chief critically as the blow began to fall. What a crash this idol would make when it fell from its self-created pedestal!

“Would you criticise an officer of this corporation who invested in stock about to be acquired by the Companies, thus taking advantage of the certain rise in value which he knew would come to it?”

“I should consider such an official as absolutely false to his trust. Is there one of us present who would feel otherwise?”

Litchfield smiled. “There is no one present who does not regret the lack of friendliness which prevented our president from giving him an equal chance with himself in the purchase of stock in the New York Street Railways Company.”

Gorham seemed not to comprehend the charge against him. “You will have to enlighten me further,” he said, coldly.

Litchfield drew some papers from his pocket and handed them to Gorham. “We don’t undertake to criticise you for making the most of this opportunity,” he said, “but out of respect to your ridiculous ‘code,’ we have ourselves refrained. Next time we shall

expect you to give us a chance too; and, incidentally, don't you think we can now come to a mutual understanding regarding the morality basis of the Consolidated Companies?"

"Where did you get these papers?" Gorham demanded.

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“From Mr. Brady, who was interested enough to supply us with the sworn statements which you see here.”

“Do you really believe that I invested a penny of my money in that stock?”

“Come, Gorham, admit that the joke’s on you,” Litchfield laughed. “Of course, it was your daughter who did it, and, of course, you knew nothing about it!—Don’t try to hide behind her skirts.”

Gorham looked across to where Covington was sitting, pale and unnerved by the unexpected development. He might have suspected this, but the remoteness of the chance had as a matter of fact precluded any thought of the possibility. Gorham started to speak, but checked himself. He could not bring his daughter’s name into this discussion without more time to consider the situation. Then he turned again to his associates.

“Gentlemen,” he said, quietly, “it seems hardly necessary for me to make this statement, but I wish to put myself on record: I have never invested one cent of my own money, or any one else’s, in any stock whose value was likely to be affected by the action of the Consolidated Companies. No one else has ever done so with my knowledge or consent. I shall have more to say upon this matter when I have had sufficient time to acquaint myself with all the facts. Until then, I ask that this meeting be adjourned, subject to an early call.”

Litchfield, puzzled, as were the others, by Gorham’s flat denial in the face of the overwhelming evidence, put the motion for adjournment which the president requested.

XXVII

The bachelor apartment-house which Allen Sanford called his home in New York, though constantly referred to by him as his “two by twice hall bedroom,” was considerably more pretentious and expensive than a young man receiving his modest income would ordinarily have selected; yet when he decided upon it, the chief point in question was whether or not it suited his tastes. The fact that the rent alone exceeded the salary assured him by his position in the Consolidated Companies did not strike him as of any particular significance. He had sold his motor before leaving Washington, and with this nest-egg and what remained of his last allowance to draw upon, the necessity of economy had not occurred to him. “I’ve eaten up the tires, and now I’m beginning on the chassis,” he had once remarked in conversation; but with characteristic confidence in the future, he made no provision for the time when he should have thoroughly fletcherized the entire machine.

Now that he had joined the army of the unemployed, and had decided to return to Pittsburgh, it was incumbent upon him to pack up his belongings. This was a project which failed to appeal to him. He had formally terminated his connection with the Consolidated Companies on the day before, and this Sunday morning had been set apart by him for his tremendous undertaking. His trunks were in the middle of the floor, and his clothes deposited in various stages of disorder upon every chair in the room, preparatory to making the start toward packing which appalled him. The empty drawers of the dresser and the chiffonnier, and the bare hooks of the closet bore silent tribute to the thoroughness of his work thus far.

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He was sitting upon the edge of a trunk, regarding in dismay the confusion around him and wondering where to make a start, when the bell rang vigorously. He opened the door in surprise, and was relieved to find no more formidable a visitor than the elevator boy.

“A young lady down-stairs to see you, sir.”

“A—what?” demanded Allen.

“She wouldn’t give her name, sir.”

“I’ll be right down,” he cried, slamming the door unceremoniously in the boy’s face, and rushing into his coat and waistcoat. Could it be that Alice had really meant what she said that night, and had come to convince him of it! There was a girl for you! He would never accept the sacrifice, he told himself resolutely, still he fairly danced as he straightened his necktie, tripped over his evening clothes, which he had knocked onto the floor, and almost stumbled over a little figure in the hallway, as he threw open the door and started to rush to the elevator.

“They wouldn’t let me come up in the elevator, so I walked,” announced Patricia, looking up at him with a beaming smile.

“What are you doing here? Is Alice down-stairs?” Allen demanded, completely bewildered by the unexpected apparition.

“I’ve come to go away with you, and Alice is at home,” the child answered, simply. “Papa said you were going back to Pittsburgh. Aren’t you glad to see me? I’ve got all my things packed up in this bag, except my *Knights of the Round Table*, which wouldn’t go in, so I carried it under my arm.”

He looked at her, speechless with astonishment as she proudly held up the diminutive satchel and displayed her precious volume.

“Of course I’m glad to see you, Lady Pat,” he said at length; “but you ought not to come here alone, you know.”

“I’m not alone,” she insisted. “Riley is down-stairs in my pony cart. Phillips didn’t know where you lived, but he’s only a groom, so I brought Riley. Now, how shall we get rid of him, and have you made a hundred thousand dollars with my money?”

“I’m ashamed to say I haven’t—I was too late. The storks had all gone South for the winter, but I must give you back your bank.”

Allen turned into his room, closely followed by Patricia.

“Then you haven’t money enough to get married?” she asked in a pathetic little voice. Suddenly her face brightened. “But I don’t mind; I’ll keep house for you without any money; and storks always come to newly married people, I’ve heard them say so.”

“We couldn’t do that, Lady Pat; we’d starve to death unless we ate the storks. Come, let’s go and find Riley.”

But Riley’s anxiety had resulted in his anticipating them, and the familiar face at that moment showed above the stairway, as the old man approached them, out of breath.

“Ah, there ye are, praise be ter th’ Virgin Mary,” he panted. “Ah, sich a mess as ye’re gettin’ poor old Riley in. I cudn’t hilp it, Misther Allen, I cudn’t nohow,” heading off any criticism from that quarter—“she wud have it, and that’s th’ ind iv it. I’m thinkin’ that’s why they named her Miss Pat—’tis th’ Irish persistency iv her name that crops out, an’ th’ cajolery. I cudn’t hilp it, nohow.”

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“Of course he couldn’t help it.” Patricia assented. “I had to see you, and some one had to show me where you lived. But you may go now if you want to, Riley.”

“We had better come inside and talk it over—if we can get in,” Allen suggested, opening the door again, and pushing the things one side.

“Ah, Misther Allen—all ye’er clothes will be spiled, kickin’ ’round like this. Shall I fold ’em up an’ put ’em in th’ thrunks fer ye, sor?”

Riley was in his element again, and Allen grasped at the old man’s offer with an eagerness not assumed.

“That’s just the thing,” he said. “You pack the trunk, Riley, while Lady Pat and I sit on the window-seat and have a little visit.”

“Here are my things, too, Riley.” Patricia handed the old man her satchel and book. “Perhaps you’d better pack those on top.”

“Why should I pack thim in Misther Allen’s thrunk?” he demanded.

“Because we’re going away to be married,” she announced, grandly. “You are the first one in the family to know it, and you mustn’t tell.”

Riley started to speak, but a signal from Allen silenced him; so he continued his work, bringing order out of chaos so quickly that he won instant admiration.

“Now, look here, Lady Pat,” said Allen, kindly, as the child sat on her heels in front of him on the window-seat, “we must talk this matter over very carefully.”

“Yes, Sir Launcelot,” Patricia assented, expectantly.

“In the first place, I have made your father very angry with me.”

“Were you a naughty boy?”

“He thinks so, and he must be right; but it wouldn’t do to make him any more angry by taking you away without his permission. You see that, don’t you?”

“But they wouldn’t blame you—they’d blame me,” the child persisted. “Alice would frown at me and say ‘Pa-tri-ci-a.’ Papa would be severe and say, ‘I shall have to ask mamma Eleanor to punish you,’ and mamma Eleanor would look sad and say, ‘Oh, my darling,’ But she’d forget all about it as soon as I kissed her.”

“No; they would blame me, because I’m older—and, besides, a true knight could never stand by and see his Lady Fair blamed, could he? The only thing is for me to go away,

and for you to go back home with Riley, and then, later, for me to storm the castle and carry you off."

"But if you did that, you might carry off Alice instead of me," she objected.

"That's so," Allen assented, laughing, "unless she hurries up and gets married. That was our agreement, Lady Pat—as long as Alice is free, we can't make any plans for ourselves."

"Wouldn't it be grand to have you storm the castle and carry me off!" Patricia was quite taken by the idea. "Anyhow, next to Alice, you love me best, don't you, Sir Launcelot?"

"I certainly do," Allen said, truthfully. "Now, you'll go home with Riley and wait to see what happens, won't you?"

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“All right,” the child said, entirely satisfied. “Gee, but I wish Mr. Covington would hurry up!”

Patricia rose obediently and took Riley’s hand, as they left the room.

“Wit ye well,” she said as she bade Allen good-bye at the elevator. “I shall wait at the window with a silken ladder every night until you come.”

Allen turned slowly back into his room, closed the door, and sat down alone on the window-seat which had so recently also sustained his animated little companion. Not until now had the full force of the wrench come upon him, and he was conscious of a lump in his throat as he thought of Alice, first always, then of Mr. Gorham, and last of the city itself. During the months since he had accidentally met Alice in Washington, there had never been a wavering of his purpose. She was the one girl to him among the many he met during the social rounds into which he had plunged while living in New York. He had been undaunted by her attitude, undismayed by the seeming hopelessness of it all—but now her very sympathy proved to him the necessity of at last giving up the one great hope upon which he had set his heart. The pain at separating from his chief, while of a different nature, was no less keen. Mr. Gorham still stood to Allen as the epitome of the best that a man could express. The shock which had come to him when Gorham admitted a knowledge of Covington’s investment of Alice’s money, did not weaken his respect for the man, but rather was the final event to convince him that his own conception of business must be entirely wrong. If Mr. Gorham sanctioned it, then it was right, it could be nothing else; but all his efforts, conscientious as he knew them to have been, to master the intricacies of the code his preceptor had tried to teach him, had accomplished nothing.

And the great city, which contained so many of his classmates and friends, who had made him welcome in their homes, must in the future receive him only as a stranger. He loved the individuality of the great towering buildings, the wonderful harbor with its kaleidoscopic shipping, the surging masses of the striving people in the streets, the blinding glare of Broadway at night, and the tense, eager business competition keeping each man, irrespective of position, constantly on his taps to hold his own or to forge ahead against the incoming tide of growing prosperity. Everything he craved seemed centred here, yet he had been a part of it all, and had failed to keep his grip. His opportunity had been given him, and he had not taken advantage of it. The city contained no room for failures—only those who could force success from its grinding turmoil belonged within its ever-grasping arms. He must turn his back upon it all, and go to some place less critical, less overpowering, taking with him as memories, in place of triumphs, the thoughts of what might have been.

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Amid the gloom which surrounded him, a childish face forced its sweet features upon him, and it relieved the tension of the moment. Dear little Patricia, at least, had faith in him. Alice's attitude was that of sympathy and pity, but little Pat saw in him, the failure, those attributes which belong to the Knight Courageous, undaunted by the hostile flings of Fortune. As she grew older, she too would discover that the gold was paint and the silver, tinsel; but until then, he knew her faith was in him. He pressed his hands against his aching temples—"God bless her for that," he said, softly, "God bless her for that."

XXVIII

The first train which left Pittsburgh after the arrival of Mr. Gorham's letter bore Stephen Sanford to New York. Gorham had found time, even with the pressure of the conflicting details, to write his old friend at length regarding the situation which made it necessary for Allen to terminate his connection with the Consolidated Companies. There was no word of censure against the boy—he even took pains to express in full his admiration for certain sterling qualities which this, Allen's first business experience, had brought out.

"*The time has come*," he wrote, "*when Allen needs the sympathy and assistance of his father more than he ever has, or ever will need it again. I believe I know you well enough, Stephen, to feel certain that you won't refuse it to him simply because he has not asked for it. What I have tried to do for him has been more for your sake than for his own, though you have misunderstood my motive. The boy has developed rapidly, and possesses an ability for business naturally inherited from you; but when his mind is once made up it seems impossible to change him. I hope you will set him a good example by showing him your own strength of character in going to him now. As for our relations, Stephen, in spite of the last stormy interview, and your attitude since, I know that I have no firmer friend than you, and you know well that my affection for you has not lessened because of anything so trivial as what has passed. Old friends are like old wine in more than one respect—the explosion made by the blowing out of the cork does not affect the quality. Come to me first, and let me tell you the whole story*."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," Sanford fumed as he finished the letter; yet the first train leaving Pittsburgh which he could catch carried him to New York.

The months which had intervened had left their impress upon him, and his friends had noticed it, though ignorant of the cause. Allen had been away from home so much during the past few years, that his failure to appear beneath the parental roof after his return from Europe was no occasion for comment. Yet it was not the fact that he was separated from the boy that wore on Stephen Sanford, but rather the knowledge that a barrier had arisen between them. He had honestly

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expected that Allen would refuse to take him seriously when he cast him adrift. They had quarrelled before and nothing had come of it, so he had no reason to think that this would be any exception. He knew the boy's tastes, and while blaming him for his extravagances, he was proud to have him "live like a gentleman." Even with the income assured from the position given him by Mr. Gorham, Sanford knew how small it must be compared with the allowance which Allen had previously received; and he suffered over again the privations of his own youth while thinking of the self-denials which his son must be obliged to practise. Picturing him living in a hall bedroom of meagre proportions, taking his meals at cheap restaurants and generally resorting to those economies common to ambitious youth fighting its battle against the world, the father would many times have sent him a substantial check if he could have made sure that the source would remain unknown.

Yet he insisted to himself that Allen must come to him. He would respond to Gorham's letter to the extent of going to New York and discussing the matter, but he refused to admit any possibility of a reconciliation unless the overtures came from the boy himself. As he hastened to arrange matters for his departure, he muttered imprecations against him with the same breath that drew an unquestioned joy from the thought that a sight of him was near at hand; and no idea entered his mind other than to reach New York at the earliest possible moment.

Covington was surprised that the blow did not fall upon him immediately after the meeting of the committee adjourned. He was ignorant of the exact contents of the papers handed to Gorham by Litchfield, but they could scarcely fail to give his chief all the information necessary to show his connection with the transaction, and he knew well how great would be Gorham's resentment. Yet no mention was made of the matter during the few minutes which remained of the business day after the others had taken their departure. There were two or three routine matters which Gorham turned over to him, with a few words of comment, then he said good-night and left the office. Could it be that something still intervened to keep the real facts covered up?

All doubts were removed the following morning. Gorham sent for him to come to his office, and when he appeared he found that Brady was also present. Covington seemed not to recognize him, but Brady's face assumed a significant and satisfied expression.

"Mr. Brady has been good enough to respond to my request," Gorham began, "and is here to supply me with fuller details concerning the matter which was brought up at the meeting of the committee yesterday. As it interests you even more than it does me, I have asked you to be present during our interview."

Covington seated himself in silence.

“Now, Mr. Brady,” Gorham continued, “I understand that you made a statement to Mr. Litchfield to the effect that I had personally secured some of the stock in the New York Street Railways Company, with a view to profiting by the advance in price made inevitable by its proposed merger into the Manhattan Traction Company, of which I was cognizant at the time.”

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“No, I didn’t say all that,” Brady protested; “I simply said that a big block of the stock was bought for you. It wasn’t necessary to say why.”

“But you don’t really believe that this stock was purchased for me, or with my knowledge, do you?”

Few men could resist the frank appeal of Gorham’s eyes when he chose to exert it, and Brady was not one of these. He moved uncomfortably in his chair, and laughed consciously.

“Why, no, guv’nor, since you put it that way, man to man, I don’t.”

“Then why did you say what you did? I can’t blame you for harboring some resentment against me because I interfered with your plans in that railway deal, but this statement is so easily refuted that I wonder why you made it. It was to discover this that I asked you to come here this morning.”

Brady looked over at Covington meaningly. “That was just why I did do it,” he said. “I knew it would bring out certain facts that I wanted to have known. I ain’t harborin’ any resentment against you. You licked me, an’ I took my medicine. P’raps I’ve worried you a bit in Washington since,—that’s another matter. I’m a sport all right, an’ I know when to take my hat off to any man. But there is other slick Alecks, who think they’re so all-fired smart, that I like to get even with when they try to be funny with me,—an’ there’s one of ’em sittin’ in that chair over there now.”

“Well—go on.” Gorham encouraged him as he paused, at the same time studying the unexpressive face of Covington as the man progressed.

“Just before that railway deal was put through, an’ Harris an’ me was feelin’ nervous about you gettin’ so close to the big stockholders, I found out that this Covington here was saltin’ away some good blocks of stock of the New York Street Railways Company. He wasn’t buyin’ them direct, you understand, an’ the stool-pigeon he was usin’ happened to be one of my own men. Then I sent Harris to see Covington, to get his influence with you to let our personal scheme go through, usin’ the little information we had gained to act as an argument to help him make up his mind. He see the game was up, of course, an’ then he tried to be smart. He had it all figured out that if he could unload that stock on your daughter, it would make things run easier for him when the facts come out. I wouldn’t have held this up against him, for it was nothin’ but a cheap trick, but then he come to us of his own accord, an’ told us that you an’ him had gone all over the matter, an’ you was goin’ to let the thing go through all right. Well, you remember what happened. He evidently went right back to you an’ told you what we had up our sleeve. I swore then I’d get even with him, an’ this is the way I chose to do it.”

“That’s the whole story, is it?” Gorham asked.

“Yes; unless friend Covington here can add a few details.”

“I don’t think he can,—but you do him an injustice in thinking that he spoke to me of your plans. His failure to do so is noteworthy, but it affects others rather than yourself. I am exceedingly obliged to you for your time and frankness. I will not detain you further unless Mr. Covington would like to make any comments.”

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“I have nothing to say,” Covington replied.

Gorham waited until Brady had made his departure before he turned to the man sitting in silence before him.

“This is all that is needed to make the blow complete, is it not?” he asked, in a voice which betrayed the feeling beneath by its quiet restraint. “Even the awakening which came to me when the committee showed their real selves was not enough. I still believed that I could carry through my purpose, and I relied on you to help make this possible. I, who felt myself strong enough to undertake the revolutionizing of the business world because of my magnificent support, find myself, like Samson, shorn of my strength, and face to face with a realization that man is by nature the cringing slave of the almighty dollar. He may, for a time, or for a purpose, disguise it even from himself, but when the real test comes, he dare not disregard the compelling voice of his master. This is enough of an awakening, but think of the pain which accompanies it when one finds that the friend in whom he trusted, that the one man whom he was most proud to honor, fails even to measure up to the simple test of honesty! Oh, Covington, I find it hard to bring myself to believe it!”

“What do you propose to do?” Covington asked.

“First of all, I shall place the facts before the Directors. They at least shall know that I have not been false to them or to myself.”

“When will you do this?”

“As soon as possible,—this afternoon if I can get them together.”

“Would you mind postponing it until to-morrow?”

“What is to be gained by that?”

“May I have an interview with you at your house to-night? It is for this that I ask the postponement.”

“Certainly,” Gorham replied, wonderingly. “I will see you at nine o’clock.”

“I thank you,” said Covington, rising and leaving the office without further comment.

XXIX

Gorham received two callers on that Saturday night. Sanford came first, and the heartiness of the welcome extended him thawed out the blustering exterior which made it so difficult for the warm heart underneath to assert itself.

“I never was so proud of any one,” cried Gorham, with more enthusiasm than he often manifested. “Now it is the old Stephen I used to know and love, acting his own self once more! But you are going to have your chance to crow over me. Stephen, I’ve been a more obstinate old fool than you ever thought of being, and I’m going to make you my father-confessor.”

Then he told him of Allen’s development, from the first day he entered the offices of the Consolidated Companies down to the time when he had himself sent the boy away from him in anger. He even told him of the crisis in the corporation, knowing that their conversation was sacred to his old friend. Then he dwelt on Allen’s courage in the face of his own blindness, and his admiration for the boy’s attitude throughout.

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“He is planning to go back to you, Stephen, but I shan’t let him if I can help it. I have made him think that his work has been a failure, when in reality his vision has been clearer than mine. But don’t tell him this. Let your talk be of yourselves. Then bring him to me to-morrow for dinner, and let me show him what he really is.”

“I told you he’d make a fine business man,” Stephen could not resist saying. “You remember that.”

“I do,” laughed Gorham. “That is why I gave him the chance. You remember asking me to do it, don’t you?”

“There’s another thing I told you, Robert,—that you never could do business on the basis you planned unless you had angels all the way up from the office boy to the Board of Directors.”

“It has been my fault in not being able to distinguish between angels and mortals,” Gorham replied seriously, his mind reverting to the great problem which still lay unsolved before him. “I am not willing yet to admit that the basis is wrong,—the error must rest in the building. Good-night, Stephen. Be sure to bring Allen with you to-morrow.”

* * * * *

Covington entered the library, walking with short, quick steps quite unlike his usual deliberate gait, and sat down in the chair just vacated by Mr. Sanford. Gorham noted at once the change which had come over his features, even during the few hours which had elapsed since morning. For the first time his eyes showed a nervous unrest, the lines about his mouth had settled into a hard, disagreeable expression, and his whole manner evidenced the strain he was enduring. Gorham noted all this, and in a measure it surprised him. If Covington was so constituted that he could play the hypocrite, he would not have supposed his sensibilities acute enough to overwhelm him in the unmasking.

“You are wondering why I desired this interview,” Covington began. “You cannot understand what there is left for me to say to you in view of what has happened. I could have bluffed this out for a time, but it was no use. There are other developments which will follow on the heels of this which make it useless to temporize. I have played the game my way, letting you make the rules, believing that when it came to the showdown my cards would be strong enough to win. They would be under normal circumstances, but you’ve called my hand too soon. You see before you a desperate man, Mr. Gorham, upon whom you have forced the necessity of taking a gambler’s chance. That is why I am here to-night.”

“You must be implicated in matters far deeper than I have knowledge to talk like this, Covington. You have been false to me and false to the Companies, but after all there is nothing criminal in what you have done. To me, the greatest crime a man can commit is so to forget the manhood with which his Maker endowed him, as to prostitute it for temporary personal advantage, but the law looks upon other lesser

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crimes as deserving of greater punishment. I cannot tell how much of a lesson this may be to you. It will, of course, be necessary for you to leave New York, as the committee, however much they may criticise my code, have one of their own which you have transgressed. As far as I am concerned, you may have no anxiety. I have too many important matters in hand to wish to divert myself from them simply to make you pay the penalty you owe me."

"I am implicated deeper than you know, but I am here to make terms rather than accept them," Covington replied. "I do not choose to begin life over again, and I require your definite assurances that whatever you know or may learn against me be kept from the knowledge of the committee. At present I hold their confidence, and I am not willing to relinquish it. What I have done in this stock transaction will not strike them as so serious a matter as you make of it. I venture to say that I am not the only one of them to do it."

Gorham looked at him keenly. "This is the talk of a man bereft of his senses."

"I told you I was desperate, and so I am. I have been working all my life to gain the position of wealth and power which is now within my grasp, and you shall not keep me from it."

"You yourself have made its attainment impossible."

"Next to you, I am the one man most competent to conduct the affairs of the Consolidated Companies. You yourself have trained me to be your successor. The committee know this, and they also know that with me at the head, the Companies will be run as they wish it. They are eager to have the change, and only fear your influence against the corporation if they force you out."

"All that may have been true, Covington, in the past. Not one of them would trust you now."

"They know nothing which reflects upon my character, and they must not know. You and they can never continue together,—it is hopeless to expect a compromise. I am the only man who can hold these forces together, and you must give me this chance."

Gorham could only believe that the excitement which controlled Covington had affected him to the extent of irresponsibility, and his unusual manner heightened the impression.

"I see no reason to continue this interview," he said shortly. "You speak of what must and shall happen when the shaping of events has already passed from your control."

“You think it has, Mr. Gorham; but that is where the gambler’s chance comes in. It is a desperate chance, and it is one which I could never have believed myself capable of taking. It simply shows how far a man will go when forced against the wall.”

“I am tiring of this play-acting,” protested Gorham. “If you have anything to say, say it, or else leave me to devote my time to matters which require it.”

Covington hesitated even then. The weapon was an ugly one to handle, and there were elements in him which rebelled. Slowly he drew the bulky paper from his pocket, not meeting Gorham’s steady gaze.

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“More affidavits?” asked Gorham. “What is the nature of them this time?”

“I am more keenly aware of how despicable this is than you will give me credit,” he said. “I have lived among gentlemen long enough to recognize that to those who know of this, my act separates me from the society of which I have been a part. But I have chosen. With the wealth and power which this will bring me, I can buy back what now I seem to forfeit.”

He placed the papers in Mr. Gorham’s hands, turning his pale face away, and drumming nervously on the arm of his chair with his fingers. The minutes seemed hours, and when he turned, he found Gorham’s penetrating eye fixed firmly upon him. He had counted on the strength of the statements contained in the affidavits to protect him from personal violence, yet he half suspected Gorham’s purpose when he rose. His host, however, walked quietly to the wall and pressed the button, then noiselessly resumed his seat. The awful silence was in itself a strain on Covington. He wished Gorham would speak, even though he thought he knew the nature of what those first words would be. Presently Riley opened the door.

“Ask Mrs. Gorham and Miss Alice to come here, Riley.”

“Not Alice!” Covington cried.

Again silence pervaded the room, Gorham rereading the papers, and Covington still drumming on the arm of his chair. As Eleanor and Alice entered they greeted Covington cordially, but he drew back without accepting the outstretched hands.

“We have a matter to discuss which affects us all,” Gorham said, handing Eleanor one of the papers. “Please read this, but make no comment until later.”

The first few words conveyed its nature to her, and she swayed for a moment as if she might fall. Alice sprang to her side.

“What is it, Eleanor,—let me read it with you. Shall I, daddy?”

Gorham nodded. When they had finished, Eleanor started to speak, but her husband checked her. The momentary faintness had passed, and she stood erect, eager for the word from Gorham which would permit her to break the silence.

“Where did this come from?” Alice demanded.

“Mr. Covington just brought it to me.”

“What did you do to the man who dared to draw it up?” she asked indignantly of Covington.

“Mr. Covington is the man who had it drawn up,” her father answered. “Now we will listen to what he has to say about it.”

The man squared himself for the issue.

“You have read it,” he said huskily, “and you value your wife’s reputation?”

“Yes, beyond anything and everything else.”

“Beyond the Consolidated Companies and the gratification of injuring me with the committee?”

“Yes.”

Covington gained confidence from the ease with which all was moving. A few minutes more of this as against a lifetime of wealth and power! It was worth the degradation. “It is sometimes necessary to walk through filth and slime to attain high places,” he remembered Gorham had once told him.

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“Would you agree to stand one side and give me this chance, rather than have a blemish on your wife’s name made public?”

“Yes,” was the firm reply.

Eleanor had lived a century during the conversation. Sitting now in the shadow of the room, she turned her eyes first toward one speaker and then the other, wondering all the while how it was to end. If only she had told Robert herself before this moment! She could not understand her husband’s passive attitude. She knew him to be slow to anger, yet she also knew well the strength of the passion which lay controlled beneath his calm exterior. What Covington had said and the manner in which he had said it would, under ordinary circumstances, have aroused Gorham to stern indignation. She could only attribute his present patience to an uncertainty which lay in his own mind as to the truth of the story which he had read; but when he answered Covington’s questions, indicating which choice he would make, she could endure it no longer. Rising quickly, she stood between the two men, her face turned toward Gorham.

“Robert,” she said, “what do you mean? This man is asking you to give up the Consolidated Companies.”

“I understand it, Eleanor,” Gorham replied. “I would prefer to do so rather than have a single breath of scandal or even suspicion attach itself to you.”

Eleanor drew herself up very straight, and, paying no attention to Covington, she addressed herself passionately to her husband.

“Look at me, Robert, look into my eyes, and tell me if you see there anything of which I need to feel ashamed. You have read this story, now you shall hear mine. It is one which you should have heard long ago, Robert, but I hesitated to speak, not because I was ashamed of anything which happened, but because I feared just the interpretation which has now been put upon it. You know all about my marriage to Ralph Buckner; you know all about Carina’s death, and you shall know all which I am able to tell any one, or which I myself know, of what happened during the awful days which followed.”

Eleanor’s voice trembled, but the excitement of the moment kept her from breaking down.

“When I lifted that little form from the trail and pressed it to my heart I knew that she was dead. My one thought in the face of the awful blow which had come to me was to get away from the man who had inflicted it. Somehow, with Carina in my arms, I got upon the mare, and again I strained the little body to my heart and forgot all else except my overpowering grief. The mare walked on unguided, uncontrolled,—I knew not where,—I cared not where. I believe I never should have stopped her myself, but suddenly a man appeared by the side of the trail who saw that something was wrong, and he asked if he

could be of help. At these first words of sympathy I lost control of myself, and made some incoherent reply. From that time on I was a child myself,

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and he a kind, loving, guiding father. Walking beside me and helping to support me, we soon reached the shack in which he lived. He took the dead child from my arms, and carried it tenderly into the house; then he came back and helped me to dismount. He asked no further questions, but led me inside, too, soothing my outburst of grief as the reaction came in full force. Of what happened afterward I have no memory. For the time, I lost my reason, and he, day by day, night by night, watched over me, bathing my hot forehead, moistening my parched lips, trying to give me courage to pass through the awful ordeal.

"It was all of two weeks that I was there, so he told me afterward. As my reason returned, his first thought was to get me back to my father's ranch, having learned who I was and enough of what had happened to understand the situation. Before we left, he took me to the little mound back of the shack, where I said 'good-bye' to the one ray of sunshine which had entered my life during those awful years. Then he helped me on my mare and mounted his own horse. Together we rode silently back over the seven or eight miles, only to learn that my father had suddenly died, partly from the shock and partly from my unexplained absence. The old man's strength could not endure the double blow.

"In dismay I turned to my protector, and he at once answered the query which he read in my eyes. He made arrangements, and accompanied me to Denver, leaving me in a hospital there, where for two months I hovered between life and death, owing to a relapse. I saw him only once again, when he came to the hospital and told me that he had placed my affairs in the hands of a certain lawyer, who would look after what property my father left, and would advise me after I was able to leave the hospital. Then he passed out of my life, though I was told later that he stayed in Denver until I was out of danger, before he returned East. In my condition and because of the excitement, his name was a blank to me from the moment I left the hospital, and I have striven ever since to recall it. The lawyer to whom he referred me professed not to know it, and simply said that the man had described himself as a prospector from the East."

As Eleanor paused from weakness, Covington glanced across to Gorham.

"Her story doesn't differ much from that contained in the affidavit," he remarked.

"No," Gorham answered, shortly; "it is the same story with a different interpretation."

"What do you think of it now?"

"Just as I have from the beginning."

“You don’t believe me!” Eleanor cried, half-beseechingly, half-reproachfully. “I don’t wonder,—it is past belief.”

“You must believe her, daddy,” Alice insisted, ready to burst into tears; “she has tried so many times to tell you.”

“I do believe you, Eleanor,” Gorham replied. “And what is more, I know that you speak the truth.”

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“The public may not be so generous,” suggested Covington.

“You forget that I have great faith in that same public,” Gorham answered, strangely calm in the face of such great provocation.

“You know it, Robert?” Eleanor asked, scarcely believing what she heard. “How can you know it? You mean that your faith in me is strong enough to make you believe it.”

“You may tell them that story, Covington,” Gorham said, rising; “but it will make it even more interesting if you add the finale which you are going to witness now.”

Then he turned to his wife and took her hand in his.

“Would you know that prospector if you saw him again?” he asked.

“I am sure I should,” she replied, wonderingly.

“Must he still wear his full beard and his old corduroy clothes, with a blue handkerchief knotted around his throat, to recall himself to you? Must I tell you that he called himself ’Roberts’?”

“Roberts!” she gasped, gazing at him spellbound, “—how could you know?”

“Look at me again, Eleanor,” he urged with infinite tenderness, but with an eager expectancy manifest in every feature,—“look hard.”

She drew back speechless as the truth came to her.

“Oh, my Robert,” she cried at last, with a joy in her voice which thrilled her hearers, “you —you were that man!”

It seemed a sacrilege to the two spectators of the unexpected climax of this intimate personal drama to remain, so instinctively they both withdrew silently to the drawing-room, leaving Eleanor closely enfolded in her husband’s arms. For the first time since Covington had disclosed himself, Alice was alone with him. Wrought up as the girl had been by the conflicting emotions which had consumed her strength during the past moments, and relieved beyond measure by the final outcome of what had promised only a tragedy, yet her eyes filled with tears as she looked at him.

“Why did you do this?” she asked. “Why did you come into my life to teach me that this beautiful world of ours can contain so much that is bad?—you, whom I respected and admired, and whom I was beginning to believe I loved? How could you do it?”

Covington made no answer to the impelling voice which spoke. The girl, with her varying moods and changing conceits, who had so amused him, had vanished, and in

her place he saw the woman, supreme in the strength of asserting that which is ever woman's creed,—justice and right. He could sense, in her attitude, as in her words, that her resentment was not because of the indignity which he had forced upon herself, but rather because of the wrong he had done to those she loved. What a woman to have called his wife,—what a woman to have lived up to as a husband!

"I must see your father again," he said when he spoke at last. "Let us go back to them."

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Covington stood in the doorway of the library as Alice slipped quietly into the room and took her place beside Eleanor and her father. As he looked upon the three, forming a group into which he had almost entered, he realized the infinite distance which now separated them. Their total disregard of his presence, Gorham's lack of open resentment, Alice's indifference,—all told him that in their eyes he was only the pariah, beneath their contempt, suffered to remain there until he saw fit to rid them of his presence. Yet he could not leave them thus. Somewhere within him a something, until now quiescent, demanded recognition and insisted upon expression. Why had it waited until now! It was a changed John Covington who spoke from that doorway, when at last silence became unendurable. The hard lines in the face had softened, and the previously insistent voice now betrayed realization of the present, and hopelessness for the future. The fires of truth and love and faith and honor, which burned so brightly before him, at least touched him with their heat. God pity him!

"It is all over, Mr. Gorham," he forced himself to say. "It is not you who have defeated me, it is I who have defeated myself. I offer no defence. I despised myself before I did this, I despise myself still further for having done it. I could not believe you sincere,—I could not believe any man capable of living the creed you preached. I accept the penalty which you or other men may impose upon me."

"You have imposed your own penalty, Covington," Gorham replied. "You, who have destroyed the way-marks to misguide others, now find yourself adrift because of your own act. You are a young man. If you are honest in what you now say, there is still hope for you. Fight those overpowering ambitions which have brought you to the brink until you have them properly controlled, then guide your undoubted abilities along lines which men recognize as true."

Covington bowed his head, and without a word disappeared. As the outer door closed Alice turned to her father, but her thought was not of the man who had passed from their lives.

"You were that prospector, daddy? Why did you never tell Eleanor?"

"I have tried to make her recognize me ever since we were married, dear. I have tried to make her tell me the story, hoping that the repetition might recall in her heart some association which would link me with that past, sad as it was to her. You never knew, Alice, of that experience when I went West in search of health, but now you know why I hurried back to Denver; why I kept myself constantly informed regarding the recovery and later life of this little woman who came into my heart during those days when she was passing through her agony. I loved her then, but she was another man's wife. I knew when the court gave her back her freedom, and I lost no time in winning her at the first opportunity which offered."

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“How could I have recognized you, ill as I was then,—and without your old prospector’s clothes and your full beard? You should have told me.”

“I wanted your love, dear heart, not your gratitude.”

She tenderly pushed back the gray hair from the high forehead, and pressed her lips against it reverently.

“You have both, Robert,—you have always had them.”

XXX

Sanford located Allen’s apartment from the address Gorham had given him. He stood before the entrance for several moments, regarding its pretentious appearance and the aristocratic neighborhood.

“Gorham must have made a mistake,” he muttered; “this can’t be the place.”

But the handsome Gothic figures over the doorway corresponded with those written upon the slip of paper, so he approached the elevator boy, resplendent in his brass buttons.

“Does Mr. Allen Sanford live here?” he demanded.

“Yes, sir; eighth floor. What name shall I say, sir?”

“You needn’t say any name,—I’ll say it myself. I’m his father. Rents must be cheaper than they used to be,” he remarked to himself in the elevator. “I guess the boy hasn’t suffered much.”

Allen had just risen from the window-seat after the painful revelry he had indulged in since Patricia and Riley left him. The ringing of the bell annoyed him. He was in no mood to see any one, and he resented the intrusion. Then he threw the door open and saw his father standing there. For a long moment he stood speechless with amazement, when his face broke into a smile of welcome which touched the old man’s heart.

“The pater!” he cried, and in another moment he had him grasped in his arms with a grip which almost crushed him.

“What do you mean, you young reprobate,” Sanford gasped, struggling to escape. “I’m not a football dummy. Let me get my breath.”

Allen dragged him into the room, unwilling to release him.

“The dear old pater,” he cried again, depositing him in the great Morris chair, and drawing back to regard him joyfully. “You’ve come just in time. There are my trunks packed all ready to go to you. You said I’d come back, and you were right. Oh, pater, I’ve made an awful mess of things. You knew that I was no good, but I’ve had to find it out for myself.”

“Nothing of the sort,” blubbered the old man, striving earnestly to conceal the emotion which almost overcame him as a result of the boy’s welcome. “Any one who says you’re no good will have to settle with me. You’re my son, that’s what you are, and no Sanford was ever a failure yet.”

“Then you must keep me from being the first.”

“Nothing of the sort;—why do you try to make me lose my temper? Gorham says—”

“You’ve seen Mr. Gorham?” Allen interrupted, his heart leaping at the sound of the name. “What did he say?”

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“Never mind what he said,” Sanford replied, remembering the injunction laid upon him. Then he looked about him. “Gorham must have paid you a good deal more than you were worth,” he remarked significantly.

“He did,” admitted Allen, and then divining what was in his father’s mind; “but not enough for this.”

“You’ve run in debt, have you?” Allen noticed that the question did not contain the usual sting. The old man would have rejoiced at this opportunity to express his sympathy in the only way he knew how.

“Not yet. I sold my motor and some other things.”

“Had to live like a gentleman, whatever your salary, didn’t you?”

“I ought not to have done it,” the boy admitted.

“Nothing of the sort,” Sanford sputtered, again resorting to his favorite phrase. “My son has to live like a gentleman,—that’s what I educated him for. Now help me off with my coat, and tell me all the damn fool things you’ve been doing.”

Their conference lasted well into the afternoon,—an afternoon filled with surprises for them both. For the first time Allen found his father an interested, sympathetic listener; for the first time Stephen Sanford came to know his son. The boy made no effort to spare himself, though eager for his father to realize that he had been earnest and industrious, albeit the net results of this had been but failure. Mr. Gorham had done so much for him, and he had tried to assimilate the lessons both from his deeds and from his words; but instead he had seen chimeras breathing fire at every turn, and had charged them quixote-like to find them but windmills, harmful only to himself. He enlarged upon the personal characteristics of the directors and the other business men with whom he came in contact,—many of them well known to his listener,—and Sanford marvelled at the accuracy of the boy’s insight, and the integrity of the portraits. Gorham was right,—Allen had developed, and far beyond what he himself realized. He was now a man to be reckoned with rather than a boy to be disciplined.

The old man’s keen business sense also for the first time grasped the tremendous scope of Gorham’s gigantic project. There was no room left to doubt the strength of the appeal of the absolute honesty of purpose after listening to Allen’s unconsciously irresistible testimony. In words made pregnant by the simplicity of their utterance, he described Gorham the man and Gorham the Colossus of the business world; he pictured the waves of avarice and intrigue and discontent which he thought he saw beating against the feet of this towering figure, unheeded and unrecognized because so far beneath it; he told of his own puny efforts to warn this giant of the storm which he

thought he saw approaching, but in doing this he had betrayed his own ignorance, and had prepared the pit into which he himself had fallen.

“And the worst of it all is,” Allen concluded, “that I can’t see even now where I was wrong; but if Mr. Gorham told me that Napoleon Bonaparte discovered America I would know that, all previous statements to the contrary, he was right.”

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“H’m!” ejaculated Sanford, eager to break over the injunction Gorham had placed upon him. “I don’t believe there’s anything in what you’ve said yet that you can’t live down. Now I suppose if Gorham had told you that we’d had our lunch, the fact that your father was starving to death wouldn’t be accepted as evidence worthy of consideration.”

Allen laughed as he pulled out his watch, his mind easier and his heart lighter than it had been for months.

“I had forgotten all about that, and it’s after four o’clock. Come on out with me, and I’ll give you a revised version of the ‘fatted calf’ story.”

“You think it is the return of the prodigal father, do you?”

“I hope we are both prodigals, you dear old pater,” Allen replied, seriously; “I hope we both need each other so much that we never can exist alone again.”

“All right; but we’d better go easy with the calf, for I’ve accepted a dinner invitation for us both to-night.”

“You have?” Allen asked, disappointed that their visit was to be interrupted. “Where?”

“At Gorham’s.”

“I couldn’t go there again, pater,” he protested quickly. “He’s just asking me because he wants you.”

“No; he wants to talk with you, especially.”

“With me?” Allen’s face sobered. “He thinks he was harsh the other night. I would rather not open up the whole subject again. There are special reasons. Please go without me.”

“You don’t want to do anything which will make him think worse of you than he does now, do you?”

“No,” was the frank reply, into which a genuine note of sorrow entered.

“Then we’ll dine with him, as he asks us to. Now lead on to that calf, but make it a little one.”

* * * * *

Allen found himself the only one at the dinner-table who seemed to be laboring under any restraint. Eleanor and Alice were in better spirits than he had seen them for months, Gorham was an ideal host, conversing with Sanford and with Allen upon lighter

topics in a way which seemed to show entire forgetfulness of what had gone before. It seemed almost heartless to the boy to find these friends, so dear to him, able to conduct themselves in so matter-of-fact a manner while he was in the grip of his own life tragedy. But he could not blame them. He had assumed much which they had never granted. This last dinner together, made possible by his father's presence in New York, was intended as a lesson to him, and as Mr. Gorham had planned it, then it must be for his good. He would play his part, and, concealing the pain it cost him, he entered into the conversation with an abandon which surprised them all.

It was not until they had gathered in the library, whither Gorham had especially invited them after the dinner was over, that the atmosphere changed. Allen saw the expression on Gorham's face deepen into that serious aspect which always signified matters of important moment.

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“I find myself face to face with certain duties and responsibilities,” Gorham began, “which appall me with their far-reaching significance, and I have asked you, who are the nearest and dearest to me, to be witnesses of my faithful performance of them, to the extent of my understanding.”

Gorham paused, and seemed to deliberate before making his next statement, unconscious of the tenseness of the silence which his words had produced.

“First of all, it is my immediate intention to take such steps as are necessary to bring about the disintegration of the Consolidated Companies.”

“But you can’t do it,” Sanford declared. “The corporation is solvent, the directors and the stockholders will of course be against it, and you will be powerless.” “I have considered all that,” Gorham replied, quietly.

“What you say might be true six months from now, if the Executive Committee succeed in wrenching my control from me; but to-day I have the strength. The stockholders have invested because of their faith in me; because of this same faith they will accept my statement that the Companies’ future is imperilled,—and the Government itself will help me to accomplish my purpose.”

“You are convinced, then, that the principles you built on are wrong?” asked Sanford, unable to keep from showing some satisfaction in his voice.

“No,” Gorham replied, firmly. “The principles are right,—the wrong lies in that human instinct which finds itself incapable of living up to its best standard. I believed that my success had been due to a recognition of my principle, when in reality it came from the simplest possible expression of self-interest. If we go on, the Companies’ continued success means a growth beyond my control,—recent events show that it has almost reached that point already,—and when once in the hands of others, it can be nothing but a menace to the people.

“And now for the most humiliating confession of all: I myself have been guilty of an exercise of my own self-interest as flagrant as any of my associates, though in a different way. Their lust has been for gold, while mine has been for a justification of an idea. My self-interest has been less malignant in its possible effects, but it has been my controlling influence none the less. With due humility, I confess that I have attempted to assume a role which belongs to Providence, and that no man has a right to do. I have been guilty of violating certain laws of life, just as my associates have violated other laws which to me demand observance; but I have recognized the tendency of things to gravitate back to their natural positions before it is too late for me not to make certain that they do so. In order to prevent this corporation from becoming a great power for evil, and as a final evidence of the strength which I still possess, I propose to force its dissolution.”

“You have a big contract on your hands, Gorham,” Sanford replied; “I don’t believe even you can do it.”

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“On Tuesday next,” Gorham continued, “the Senate Committee will consider a bill which is in reality an amendment to the Sherman Act, and is intended to give the Government the power to discriminate between good and bad trusts. The Consolidated Companies is to be cited as a case in point, and they are depending upon me to advance the principal arguments for the passage of the bill. All the other big interests are naturally against it, and they are forcing the issue, hoping to compel the Government to act against the Consolidated Companies, and thus call down the wrath of the people upon trust legislation as a whole. If the masses find that the one agency which has reduced their cost of living is prevented from continuing its co-operative work, they will effectually put a stop to further interference, and the other interests will be the gainers.”

“A clever game,” Sanford exclaimed.

“But now I am convinced there are no ‘good’ trusts, as I have been pleased to call them. Those combinations, like the Consolidated Companies, which are really a benefit to the people to-day, may, as again in the case of the Consolidated Companies, become their greatest enemy to-morrow. I am prepared to say that all this talk—much of which I have made myself—to the effect that combination effects economies of which the public receives the benefit, is true only for a time. Just so soon as the combinations become monopolies, amounts saved by the economies simply go to swell the profits for the stockholders. Competition must not be eliminated—it is the vital spark which keeps alive the welfare of the country.”

“You are going to say all this before the Senate Committee?”

“Yes, and more. I am going to use the Consolidated Companies as an example, and urge immediate active enforcement of the Sherman Act against all consolidations which aim at monopolies or the restraint of trade. The Attorney-General said that this would mean an industrial reign of terror. So be it. Even that is better than this gradual strangling of the people’s rights, which is now being carried on with legislative approval. I shall at least have the satisfaction of performing this one act in the interests of the people, even though I must forego the continued administration of a corporation honestly devoted to their welfare. This statement from me, and the position I take regarding my own corporation, will go far toward defeating those other malign interests which hope to gain by their attack upon me.”

Allen’s face had been a study while Mr. Gorham was speaking, and Alice had particularly noted the varying emotions it expressed. She saw there first the astonished incredulity at her father’s determination to dissolve the Companies; then the wonder as he heard Gorham state conclusions which coincided with those he had arrived at earlier; and finally the radiant joy as the realization came, not fully but in part, that his own understanding of the situation had not been all at fault. It needed only the words which Gorham added to make the world look bright again. But it was to his father rather than to Allen that Gorham addressed himself.

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“And now, Stephen, as to this boy. You and I have done our best to make him think the world is wrong side up; but I am more to blame because I had the better opportunity to study his development, beneath my own eyes. I taught him that imagination was an essential ingredient of a successful business man, to enable him to grasp each situation as a whole, and to conceive its dangers and its possibilities. Yet, when he exercised that very quality, and came to me frankly with the results of his efforts, I refused to recognize my own handiwork. I taught him my altruistic creed, and then blamed him when he used it as his standard, and was unhappy that those around him failed to measure up to it. Never has a man been more blind than I. Never has a man settled back, so self-satisfied, with so determined a conviction that because he willed things to be so, then they were so. I have merged the white thread of my new creed with the black one of the old business morals I first learned; his pattern has been wholly woven from the white.

“My boy,” he added, turning to Allen, “for the first time in my life I ask a man’s forgiveness. In the face of the greatest discouragements, you have shown yourself true, and I congratulate you and your father upon the future which you have before you. I want you to stay with me until the Consolidated Companies has been placed in a position of safety to itself and to its stockholders, then you may choose your own career.”

“No Sanford ever made a failure yet,” Stephen proudly repeated.

“But, Mr. Gorham—” Allen began, surprised into confusion by the unstinted praise; but Alice interrupted him.

“So this is my business creation!” she exclaimed, with satisfaction. Allen looked first at her and then at Mr. Gorham. Then he smiled consciously.

“While you are about it, Mr. Gorham,” he said, impulsively, “I wish you would disintegrate Alice and Mr. Covington.”

A momentary shadow passed over the faces of all who knew what had occurred.

“That dissolution took place last night,” Mr. Gorham replied, quietly.

Alice’s cheeks were flaming, but her smile was irresistible as she spoke.

“I’ll tell you all about it, Allen, if you’ll come into the conservatory.”

XXXI

A great event requires retrospective consideration. Unlike the laws of perspective, distance gives it greater size. So it was with Gorham’s supreme and final

demonstration of his strength. To Covington, who, true to his promise of the night before, was present at this crucial meeting of the Board of Directors, and marvelled that his chief demanded of him only a statement regarding the real purchaser of the stock, this dissolution of the Consolidated Companies appeared as an act of sacrilege; to his associates, aghast at the knowledge that they were powerless to prevent him, it seemed the epitome of treachery; to his family it meant a sublime exhibit of self-sacrifice;—to himself it was the crowning point of his career, and a justification of his life-work.

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“You know what this means?” Litchfield had demanded of him. “You realize that your action to-morrow will deprive us of millions, and will plunge the country into a panic which will cost that dear public which you profess to love, more than we should have kept from them in a decade?”

“Yes,” replied Gorham, resolutely; “I realize it all. It is a simple case of surgery—it may be necessary to sacrifice the limb to save the life. You, gentlemen, have had it in your power to place the standard of the business world so high that no longer would other nations gaze at our marvellous machine, appalled by its pace—politically, socially, financially—wondering whether they or we read correctly the danger-signals ahead. You have had it in your power, and you refused to embrace the opportunity; and if men of your intelligence and high standing in the world are not ready for it, then the world itself is not ready. The people have trusted themselves to me, and have placed in my hands power beyond that which has ever yet been given; now that I have learned how that power may be misused against them, I will prevent their betrayal.”

From his office, Gorham returned to his home before leaving for Washington. It was from Riley’s hand, as he entered, that he received the telegram from his Denver attorneys, announcing that the lawyer, Jennings, was already on his way East, bringing with him absolute evidence that the divorce papers had been properly served on Buckner. Strengthened for the ordeal before him by the removal of this burden, he sought Eleanor; but she met him in the hallway before he reached her room.

“Robert,” she said, impulsively, after looking for a moment searchingly into his face—-“something has happened, and the light in your eyes tells me that all is well. You have decided not to take that awful step.”

“All is well, dear heart,” he repeated, handing her the telegram; “but it would not be so except that the ‘awful step’ has already been taken.”

“Then there is no doubt regarding the divorce?” she cried, joyfully, after reading the telegram.

“There never has been,” he replied, as he pressed her to him.

“May I tell the children?” she asked, happily, a moment later, and Alice and Allen responded quickly.

The Consolidated Companies was forgotten in the joy of the new knowledge, and it was Allen who first made reference to it.

“Are you really going to put things through as you said, Mr. Gorham?”

“The die is cast, my boy; I leave for Washington to-night.”

“Then monopolies are doomed?”

“Monopolies can never be prevented,” Gorham answered, seriously, “but I hope that my action to-morrow will go far toward forcing their control. You and I have seen the impossibility of trying to make them change their spots. I thought I had solved the problem, but I was wrong. Far ahead in the future, beyond the point which our present vision reaches, perhaps the solution lies. Until it is found, the Government must protect itself and the people it represents.”

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“Please fix it so as to make one exception,” the boy pleaded. As Gorham looked at him for explanation, he drew Alice closely to him. “Please let this monopoly be exempt from governmental interference.”

A stifled sob, entirely out of place in the presence of such general rejoicing, came from a little human ball rolled up on the steps below them. Eleanor and Allen quickly sprang toward her, but the boy better understood Patricia’s tears. He sat beside her, and wrapped his great arms around her.

“Don’t cry, Lady Pat,” he entreated.

“I can’t help it,” she moaned. “I haven’t any Sir Launcelot, and you haven’t stormed the castle, and I’ve lost my silken ladder, and I want to die so that I can go up to heaven and be mean to the angels.”

“Oh, no, no!” he begged. “I’ve tried to think it all out, and the only thing I can do is to cut myself in two pieces the way King Solomon decided to do with the baby. Do you remember?”

“But he didn’t do it,” replied Patricia, showing surprising knowledge of the Scriptures.

“Well, I haven’t done it yet—but I will if you say so.”

“Will you really?” The child’s mind was already diverted from its tragedy. “But then you couldn’t wear armor or ride a horse, or storm a castle, or do any of those things.”

“Not without messing everything all up,” Allen admitted, sorrowfully; “but that’s the best thing I can think of.”

Patricia was seized with an inspiration. “Will you swear to be my Knight every time Alice is mean and horrid to you?”

“I swear,” Allen responded in a sepulchral voice, his eyes laughing at the older girl above him.

“Then I’ll get you most of the time,” Patricia announced, joyfully; and she suffered herself to join the group in the hallway.

“So you have decided to abandon your business career?” Gorham asked, turning to Alice.

“No, daddy,” she replied, slyly. “I’m just changing my company from a private corporation into a partnership.”

Gorham drew her to him and kissed her tenderly. Then he held out his disengaged hand to Allen.

“The world is before you. From the time it was created, man has striven to force from it the secret of unlimited power. Events have sometimes seemed to give encouragement, but ever at the end of each seeming success has come the unmistakable warning of a wisely jealous God. Omnipotence is not for mortals. The only lever which really moves the world is love, and it rests on a fulcrum of honor.”

THE END